2015 BGSA Recommendations Check-Up

In this document we have compiled feedback from the MIT Black Graduate Student Association (BGSA) community on the seven BGSA recommendations presented to MIT leadership in 2015. We have summarized the thoughts of the community and the executive team and included a selection of individual comments received at our April 2020 general body meeting. We believe that MIT leadership should take serious note of these comments and continue to integrate feedback from communities of color at MIT as they work toward the goal of achieving *and superseding* the 2015 BGSA recommendations.

1. Develop and implement a ten-year plan to increase the number of underrepresented minority graduate students, in particular Black graduate students.

Summary

We would like to see concrete plans that are centralized because there is the feeling that many existing efforts are fragmented and only addressed at the departmental level in many cases. There needs to be some structure for accountability with admissions *across* MIT.

Individual Community Comments

- *"Department admissions should be a percentage, not a number. OGE initiative should be owned by the institute, and utilize OGE and other departments to support."*
- *"slowly making progress towards a Diversity Representative in each dept"*
- *"still no diversity plans in each department"*
- *"every school will now have a diversity officer, but not every department; need a mechanism for holding senior admin accountable; suggest a process for making URM numbers 'material' (e.g. how do URM stats tie to rankings, endowment, faculty recruitment, student outcomes, etc.?"*
- *"Not satisfied with progress; more could be done. Progress has been departmental; not a lot of centralized effort. Siloed right now. Because of the decentralized structure, we would get departmental steps in diversity. Each dept has unique admissions; they would go about things in different ways. Not a lot of accountability to uphold things."*

2. Introduce greater accountability for departmental performance related to the matriculation and graduation of URM graduate students.

Summary

There should be an annual, MIT administration-led update of the progress on the recommendations. This update should be held in a town hall manner or another manner that provides a platform for feedback. Additionally, this update should include clear data on the current and past status of admission, matriculation, and graduation of URM students. The BGSA and BSU membership should be actively integrated into this discussion.

Individual Community Comments

- *"Institute an annual meeting/community address to discuss performance. More discussion of metrics. Available data is terrible."*
- *"semesterly touch-points with Advisory Council and BGSA/BSU to discuss progress [comparing] against recommendations"*
- *"We've been trying to get this data for years. We need to see it to believe it. Official response: URM numbers are so low that disclosing the info would be a security risk. Also, URM combines Black, LatinX numbers. Obscures the issues unique to our (Black) community."*

3. Require diversity training for incoming graduate students.

Summary

We should not settle for a single online training taken before or during the first year. In-person methods should be considered and implemented where possible. Furthermore, MIT should implement ways to improve awareness of diversity issues over the course of a student's tenure, as also stressed in Recommendation 6.

Individual Community Comments

- *"Does exist. Critique: online. People can click through without learning anything. Recommendation: change the criteria for completion, so that it is more fruitful. Make it in-person. Can we be proactive? Tie-in to community building. Anytime you can induce an emotional response, you've done your job."*

4. Offer a special, university-wide orientation session for incoming graduate students of under-represented minority racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Summary

There has been some progress on this front with the Graduate Students of Color welcome event. For this event, there should be an adequate invitation of and advertising to current URM students so that incoming students have a chance to meet current students early on. MIT's current welcome event is a banquet-style of event; however, MIT should develop additional programming that engages students more intimately with the Bias Response office, mental health resources, data on the current state of Black students, *et cetera* (see the [UCLA "Equity Inclusion and Diversity Welcome Day" schedule](#); a selection of the panel discussion topics from the welcome day are included below).

- International Students at UCLA
- Black Lives in the University
- Health and Wellness
- Women in STEM
- Navigating the Academy
- First-Generation Graduate Students
- Getting Connected: Social Action
- Queer in LA
- Critical Resources at UCLA

Individual Community Comments

- *"THIS should be prioritized. I know UCLA does this"*
- *"Definitely exists, but URM by definition excludes international. Much of MIT is international. How can we balance the two? Also, how do people identify? How do we reach the people who are missing from MIT?"*

5. Enhance services to assist students in coping with race-based traumatic stress.

Summary

Anti-oppression training should happen annually. MIT must increase the number of Black therapists available at MIT Medical, many URM students are currently directed off-campus for their mental health and therapy needs. **Especially against the backdrop of continued incidence of acts of overt racism on campus (swastika drawn on Black Hack installation, 2019; East Campus party email, 2020; etc.), this should be prioritized.**

- *"decrease race-based stress, decrease triggers, which includes learning in a curriculum that includes scholars of color."*
- *"it has been 3 years since the last anti-oppression training"*
- *"Better than before, but not great."*

6. Require implicit bias training for research laboratory personnel – including faculty, staff, and students. Personnel should be required to complete this training once every 3 years.

Summary

This recommendation has yet to be addressed in any significant capacity at an MIT-wide level. The bias training should be rolled out as soon as possible using the current incoming student diversity training as a starting point.

The frequency should likely be more often than once every three years, MIT should consider what timeline is most appropriate and effective for helping the community to maintain and improve their awareness of the issues facing URM students, staff, and faculty.

Individual Community Comments

- *"implicit bias training is not mandatory"*
- *"bias training should be done in person"*
- *"why is it currently on a 3-year cycle?"*
- *"I don't think this is compulsory yet. More progress needed."*

7. Provide tailored resources to help URM graduate students to compete successfully on academic and professional job markets.

Summary

This has yet to be addressed on an institute-wide level. While some mentorship programs do exist, MIT could do a better job of facilitating career support specifically for URM students and should expand support for programs like the University Center for Exemplary Mentoring so they can reach more students and more departments.

Individual Community Comments

- *"I think that the University Center for Exemplary Mentoring program does an excellent job of this and there should be some ways to extend a subset of these resources to the greater MIT community. Encouraging and offering student grants to attend the Southern Regional Educational Board Institute for Teaching and Mentoring on a wider scale would be a great start."*

- *"Mentorship programs could go a long way for specifically for students who are interested in academic positions post-graduation"*