

Institute Community and Equity Office

Created by President L. Rafael Reif in 2013, the mission of MIT's [Institute Community and Equity Office \(ICEO\)](#) is to foster a respectful and caring community that embraces diversity and empowers everyone to learn and do their best at MIT.

Leadership Structure

In July 2018, Professor Ed Bertschinger stepped down as the inaugural Institute Community and Equity Officer (ICEO can refer to both the office and the officer). Provost Marty Schmidt asked Alyce Johnson to serve in the interim while he examined the leadership structure of ICEO. To further the office's work of diversity, equity, and inclusion, and with community input, the provost created a second position that is to be focused on faculty engagement in addition to the ICEO role. Professor Tim Jamison was appointed associate provost in July 2019.

Letters from President Reif to the Community

In response to various incidents of mass violence within the US, President Reif wrote to the community condemning violence, racism, harassment, and bullying. His letter reaffirmed MIT's values of respect and inclusion and invited MIT to attend a community-wide vigil to honor those affected by these hateful actions.

President Reif wrote to the community on February 6, 2019, regarding the findings of Associate Provost Richard Lester with regard to continuing global engagement with Saudi Arabia. The president was clear that MIT condemns brutal human rights violations and the suppression of dissent. He also remarked on the need to reassess MIT's international engagement processes and to continue to improve on them.

On June 25, 2019, President Reif wrote in response to the larger context of growing tensions between the US and China. He reminded the community about the strength and value of belonging to a global community and the vital role of immigration in advancing US society.

Institute Initiatives

The National Academies' Committee on Women in Science, Engineering, and Medicine released a report on sexual harassment of women in fall 2018. In response, President Reif asked senior leaders at MIT to review the report's findings and offer recommendations on how MIT can address and prevent sexual harassment. Four working groups were created and charged with addressing leadership and engagement, training and prevention, policies and reporting, and academic and organizational relationships. The working groups will report on their findings in fall 2019.

Committees

Academic Council Working Group

Members of the Academic Council and a group of senior administrators formed a working group to consider a set of recommendations that originated with the 2015 Black Student Union (BSU) and the Black Graduate Student Association (BGSA). Since February, ICEO has led the working group and narrowed its focus on the BSU and BGSA recommendations with the goals of communication, implementation, and ownership.

Committee on Race and Diversity

The Committee on Race and Diversity approved and provided funds amounting to \$24,000 for 18 grant requests. The committee created draft definitions for diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging.

Privacy, Obligations, and Rights in Technologies of Information Assessment

The interim ICEO led biweekly gatherings of senior administrators to address a number of Institute-wide issues.

Milestones

- The BSU celebrated its [50th anniversary](#) in 2018. In October, 44 undergraduate MIT students, along with several MIT faculty and staff members, traveled to Washington, DC, to gain a deeper knowledge and appreciation of African American history and culture. The group visited Howard University, the National Portrait Gallery, and the National Museum of African American History and Culture.
- In October 2018, the MIT News Office interviewed the interim ICEO about the Institute's steadfast commitment to, and [protection of, the rights of MIT's transgender community](#) in light of the midterm elections and Question 3 on the ballot for the 2018 Massachusetts general election.
- In January 2019, Data for Black Lives hosted its second conference at the MIT Media Lab, welcoming more than 500 attendees.
- In April 2019, the Association of Women in Science honored Mareena Robinson Snowden, PhD '17, an MIT alumna, with the Next Generation Award. The office sent a delegation of eight students and staff members to support Snowden and attend the summit and awards banquet.
- In May 2019, MIT sent representative to the Massachusetts Board of State Examiners of Plumbers and Gas Fitters to follow up on the temporary variance for the four all-genders, multistalled restrooms pilot program, which was approved.
- In June 2019, to streamline diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts across campus and to coordinate initiatives, the interim ICEO convened the first diversity partners meeting. Diversity partners are colleagues across campus that are responsible for diversity, equity, and inclusion work in their respective areas. The goals are information sharing, skill building, networking, and collaboration.

Campus Incident

In February 2019, during “BlackHack,” a Black History Month display in Lobby 7, a Buddhist swastika was drawn on one of the posters. Suzy Nelson, dean of student life, and Alyce Johnson, interim ICEO, sent a letter to the MIT community responding to the incident that reminded the community of MIT’s core values.

Cross-Campus Collaborations

- The office continued to provide opportunities for meaningful conversations around diversity, equity, and inclusion. Dialogue topics included understanding transgender rights, building community with MIT police, intercultural communication, and bridging, depolarizing conversations. These events were held in collaboration with various departments across campus.
- During Independent Activities Period, ICEO partnered with [Class Awareness, Support and Equality](#), a student organization, to bring [Class Action](#) to campus and to raise awareness of class diversity and equity. More than 30 participants attended the interactive workshop.
- MITell, a storytelling group, and ICEO offered a storytelling series for the MIT community twice each semester. This program provides participants the opportunity to listen and share their experiences around certain topics, including resilience, milestones, and imposter syndrome. The program was well attended and regularly had a list of would-be attendees waiting for an opening.
- Screened [Dawnland](#), a documentary about Indigenous child removal and cultural survival in the United States, in partnership with the American Indian Science and Engineering Society and the Superfund Research Program at MIT. After the screening, the director and producer served on a panel facilitated by Luke Bastian, the society’s student president.
- Co-facilitated unconscious-bias trainings with the Office of Human Resources.
- Customized and conducted workshops for various departments.
- Provided administrative and logistical support to the lunches and dinners for women faculty hosted by Professor Susan Silbey, chair of the faculty for FY2019.

Sponsorships

- Leading diversity speakers: Co-sponsored campus visits from Beverly Daniels Tatum and Joy DeGruy.
- Staff professional development: Sponsored the travel of several MIT staff members to attend national conferences and trainings on topics of diversity and inclusion, such as the National Conference on Race and Ethnicity in American Higher Education, STEMM Equality Congress, the White Privilege Conference, and the Social Justice Training Institute.

- Student support: Sponsored students to attend the Grace Hopper Celebration of Women in Computing conference, the Interfaith Youth Core conference, and Association for Women in Science awards banquet. Provided funding toward the Black Women’s Alliance retreat and the BSU trip to Washington, DC. Financially supported the participation of the Sloan Student Life Office and the Sloan Senate Diversity and Inclusion Committee in the “Developing Substantive Anti-Oppression Practices at MIT” event.
- Employee resource groups (ERGs): Co-sponsored events with the Latino ERG (Hispanic Heritage Month with Shayla Rivera), the African, Black, American, Caribbean @MIT ERG, and the Asian Pacific American ERG.
- Commencement activities: Provided housing assistance to five graduating seniors’ families during Commencement and funding to the 2019 celebration.
- Conferences and retreats: Co-sponsored the Disability and Intersectionality Summit in October 2018. Provided funding for the second annual Data for Black Lives conference in January 2019.
- Awards recognition: Co-sponsored, with the Office of Multicultural Programs and others, the annual Multicultural Awards Banquet in May 2019.

Martin Luther King, Jr. Celebration

This year’s theme for the Martin Luther King, Jr. (MLK) celebration was *Fulfilling America’s Promissory Note: We Refuse to Believe the Bank of Justice Is Bankrupt*. Rahsaan Hall, director of the Racial Justice Program for the American Civil Liberties Union of Massachusetts, was the keynote speaker at the February 14 event.

Martin Luther King, Jr., Visiting Scholars and Professors

MIT hosted four [MLK scholars](#) in academic year 2019:

- Lorgia García Peña, hosted by the Program in Women’s and Gender Studies
- Duane Lee, hosted by the Department of Physics (returning for second year)
- Kasso Okoudjou, hosted by the Department of Mathematics
- Matthew Schumaker, hosted by the Department of Music

Each MLK scholar had an opportunity to share his or her work with the MIT community through the MLK luncheon series.

Lorgia García Peña discussed the plight of Eritrean migrant women and their experience of gender violence. She also invited a guest speaker, Josefina Baez, a writer and storyteller from the Dominican Republic, in September 2018. Duane Lee spoke about the formation and evolution of nearby galaxies. Kasso Okoudjou explained the Fourier model and the advances it has made possible in science and engineering. Matthew Schumaker presented a method to derive musical lines from measurements of aerodynamic streamlines.

In December 2018, the Graduate Student Council, along with ICEO and the Office of Graduate Education's Diversity Initiatives staff, hosted an end of the semester gathering with the year's MLK scholars and graduate student community. In May 2019, Provost Marty Schmidt and ICEO hosted a farewell luncheon for the scholars at the Samberg Center.

Current Status

Alyce Johnson retired from her role as interim ICEO as of July 2019. A national search is underway to fill the ICEO position.

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