

# **Demands Section 1: Reform graduate admissions and faculty hiring**

**Demand 1A - Make strategic commitments to reform  
graduate admissions and improve URM graduate student  
retention**

**Demand 1B - Promote diversity in faculty hiring & tenure  
through evidence-based practices**

**Demand 1C - Increase student participation  
in hiring and tenure decisions**

# Why change is needed

It is a moral imperative for MIT to uphold equitable access to engineering, science, and the pursuit of knowledge, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, and national origin. MIT's own [mission statement](#) points out that the work we do as scientists, engineers, and scholars should be done "to best serve the nation and the world." As MIT currently operates, however, the Institute is doing a disservice to society by limiting the access of large swathes of people to the pursuit of knowledge due to its lack of diversity and representation of marginalized identities.

The demographics of MIT's graduate students and faculty members do not reflect the diversity of the United States. The graduate student body at MIT is [currently](#) 2.1% African American, 5.5% Hispanic American, 0.13% Native American, and 11.5% Asian American. The [faculty](#) is 2.7% African American, 4.2% Hispanic or Latino, and 0.00% Native American. The [U.S. population](#) at large, however, is 13.5% African American, 15% Hispanic American, and 1.5% Native American.

Over the past ten years, there has been [little to no progress](#) in creating a more inclusive and representative student body and faculty at MIT. In fact, the percentage of Latinx graduate students has increased by a mere 2% (faculty by 1%), and the percentage of African Americans, American Indians, and Pacific Islanders in either faculty or the graduate student body has not increased at all since 2010. Additionally, the proportion of women graduate students is only at 36%, up from 31% ten years ago. Representation of women among faculty is even worse, with the current percentage of women at 25%, up from 21% ten years ago.

These numbers are only the tip of the iceberg, and they reflect a general failure to combat racism and sexism at MIT. This failure is manifested not only in demographic discrepancies, but much more broadly in harmful and even exploitative patterns of exclusion, discrimination, and harassment. These patterns of behavior rely on, and reproduce, the disempowerment of graduate students, particularly students of color and gender-oppressed students. In struggling against racism and sexism in our classrooms and workplace, it is essential that those who are most marginalized and vulnerable to harassment and discrimination be empowered to make bottom-up changes. This approach is validated both by the experiences of URM graduate students and by the [2018 NASEM report](#) on sexual harassment in academia, which "highlights the importance of a bottom-up approach that relies on support from the campus community rather than from individuals at the top to change the culture of an institution."

Some may argue with the claim that MIT has failed to effectively act by noting that this state of affairs is merely reflective of racism and sexism in the US more broadly. In a certain sense, this is true: the presence of systemic racism and sexism at MIT is certainly the manifestation of the systemic oppression permeating US society. But this does not absolve MIT from the duty to act - in fact, it makes this duty all the more urgent. Without taking active steps to dismantle the structures of academia that result in disparities along racial, gender, and other identity lines, MIT is enabling the inequities and vast underrepresentation we see in our classrooms and labs. This has been the case for at least the past ten years and likely longer. To make progress, MIT must begin to truly question and confront its status quo:

*Who is systematically excluded from entering MIT because the metrics used to evaluate are inherently biased? What are more equitable metrics?*

*Whose voices are heard when deciding 1) which students are qualified to do research at MIT, 2) which professors we should hire, and 3) which professors are to make tenure, and are those voices working toward equity?*

In this document, we lay out demands that will answer these questions and rigorously provide solutions. We first demand a commitment from MIT. MIT must incorporate concrete accountability measures and immediate action into the Strategic Action Plan which is being developed on the Institute level. After laying a bold and actionable plan, MIT must take immediate steps to move toward becoming a more representative and more inclusive institution by including graduate student voices in faculty hiring decisions, taking lessons from other institutions who have made more progress on equity and inclusion than MIT, and consulting with and hiring experts in equity and inclusion.

# **Demand 1A - Make strategic commitments to reform graduate admissions and improve URM graduate student retention**

## *The demand*

1. Reform the graduate admissions process by implementing Institute-wide standards for equitable admissions processes.
  - a. First and foremost, prospective students applying to each department will be evaluated holistically, in that no one metric can discount applicants from consideration for admission. Department Admissions Committees will be trained on the holistic admissions process. This training may be provided centrally through bodies such as IDHR, through outside experts, through DEI officers (see Demand 2B), or some combination of these.
  - b. In a similar vein, bias training will be conducted for members of Admissions Committees annually, including additional training for interviewers in non-cognitive assessment. This training may be provided centrally through bodies such as IDHR, through outside experts, through DEI officers (see Demand 2B), or some combination of these.
  - c. Rubrics will be implemented for candidates' answers to interview questions and letters of recommendation.
  - d. Remove the GRE from graduate applications in all departments outright. Retaining the option for applicants to report GRE scores could skew admissions committees' perceptions of students who choose to not report their scores.
  - e. Remove the application fee, or revise the application fee waiver process such that students who need to take advantage of this policy are more easily able to do so.
  - f. Introduce fee waivers for URM applicants.

- g. Provide rapid reimbursement of any costs incurred by students during their on-campus interviews so that applicants do not experience additional financial hardship while waiting through an extended reimbursement period.
  - h. Introduce graduate fellowships (with a financial commitment/fundraising goal that must be established to be on par with competitive student support or research fellowships as are currently provided by MIT or external funding bodies) specifically for URM students.
  - i. Require meaningful student input in departmental graduate admissions decisions. Student representatives from departmental graduate student groups/graduate student government will make up at least  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the Admissions Committee and have equal decision-making power in acceptance decisions of prospective students.
  - j. Review each department's admissions process at the Institute level to ensure that all standards for equitable admissions processes are met. Departmental admissions processes are non-transparent, and the Institute must hold departments accountable for not meeting these standards.
  - k. Establish strategic partnerships with other colleges & universities to facilitate active recruitment of URM graduate students.
2. Actively work toward a more inclusive climate at the Institute level to improve retention of underrepresented students.
- a. Offer orientation events tailored to URMs and improve such preexisting orientation events. These events will include engagement with IDHR, mental health resources, and statistics on the URM student experience at MIT.
  - b. Require departments to demonstrate that all degree milestones, and especially Qualifying Exams, have equitable outcomes (e.g., are not correlated with gender or race). Appropriate metrics for these milestones include advisor selection date, number of thesis proposal attempts, Qualifying Exam pass/fail rates, thesis defense pass/fail rates, and rates of early exit with a Masters degree. If departments are unable to do so, these milestones will be reformed until they can meet this requirement or, in the case of Qualifying Exams, eliminated.

- c. Require all faculty members who will serve as student mentors/advisors to complete in-person bias/diversity training (with a proven track record of efficacy) every two years. All incoming graduate students will also be required to complete comparable training as similarly highlighted in Demand 3 of the Petition to Support Black Lives at MIT.
- d. Provide mentorship programs and professional development workshops tailored to promote the success of URM students. Add graduate-undergraduate mentorship to the OGE Diversity Ambassador program.
- e. Seek evaluation of currently available mental health and counseling services from students asking for counseling services related to harassment- or discrimination-based trauma, including race- and sexual assault-based PTSD.
- f. Require departments to commit to send a representative to a diversity conference (chosen from a shortlist of such conferences) every year. Provide travel funds for current MIT graduate students from each department every year. This can be implemented as an expansion of the Office of Graduate Education's Graduate Diversity Ambassador program.

## ***Background & motivation***

The Institute has been relatively successful in its efforts to increase the population of underrepresented minority students (URMs) in its undergraduate population. However, due to the individualized nature of the graduate admissions processes which vary by department, similar improvements are not entirely realized in the graduate student population. Between 2004 and 2012, the population of URMs in the graduate student population increased from 7% to 12%. However, the majority of this increase has been a result of the increase in the number of students identifying as Hispanic or Latino, Native American, Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian, or other Pacific Islander. The population of Black students (including international students) in the graduate population has remained nearly fixed at approximately 3.5%.

The data demonstrates that the Institute clearly struggles to retain and support students from underrepresented backgrounds, and there are many structural problems which reinforce this discriminatory state of affairs. To that end, we demand that the Strategic Action Plan being developed at the Institute level include concrete mechanisms to dramatically increase the admission and retention of URM students.

## *MIT's current policies & procedures*

### **Graduate Admissions**

Graduate admissions at MIT are decentralized, with each department having complete control over its own admissions process. There are no Institute-wide standards for equitable admissions processes nor mechanisms of accountability or transparency for the processes used in each department. This is problematic because many of the metrics that are used to evaluate prospective students are inherently biased, leading to the systematic exclusion of groups that are traditionally underrepresented in higher education. For example, many studies ([Miller 2019](#), [ETS 2018](#), [Langin 2019](#), [Powers 1986](#), [Dixon-Roman 2013](#)) have found that the GRE, which is required by many graduate programs at MIT, is actively biased and exhibits deep disparities in test performance based on gender, race/ethnicity, citizenship status, and monetary resources.

Similarly, biases in graduate admissions are incurred from hiring processes that involve scientific nepotism. Some professors [exclusively hire](#), or are more willing to hire, students that are a part of their academic genealogy or that of a collaborator. A major problem in these cases is that lack of diversity is perpetuated amongst these research groups. This can be due to implicit biases against members of URM groups, which then leads to disproportionate hiring of overrepresented students when nepotism is involved. Another problem in these cases is that students who are members of a professor's genealogy are put in a position of privilege over otherwise deserving candidates who may be more qualified for the position.

In the [final report](#) from the 2018 AAS Task Force on Diversity and Inclusion in Astronomy Graduate Education, a set of clear recommendations was made with the goal of reforming graduate admissions to diversify the demographics of students admitted to PhD programs. Included in these recommendations was partnering with and recruiting from Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs), including Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), and Tribal Colleges. The Task Force also recommends holistic evaluation of candidates using systematic, evidence-based approaches, as laid out in the demand. The recommended approach for a well-developed, proven system of holistic review is the Fisk-Vanderbilt method, which is linked in the report and includes rubrics for scoring interviews. Finally, the task force recommends supporting and amplifying programs and policies geared toward diversity and inclusion initiatives at the Institute level.

Similarly, this report also outlined a clear set of recommendations toward the goal of improving the retention of underrepresented groups. These recommendations include engaging in open conversations on difficult topics, conducting assessments to identify needs that are not currently

being addressed, creating short- and long-term plans to achieve these goals, incentivizing and supporting professional development programs toward these goals, and taking actions based on the short- and long-term plans, monitoring their progress, and iterating through this process to develop a more inclusive climate.

### **URM Retention**

Although there has been some progress in terms of orientation events geared toward URMs with the Graduate Students of Color welcome event, this event is more of a banquet-style networking event and does not include engagement with the Bias Response office, mental health resources, and statistics on the URM student experience at MIT as laid out in the demand. Efforts toward retention should start before students even arrive on campus and so orientation events, including wide publicity to students and the offer to make connections with current students in advance, are crucial to this end.

As of Fall 2019, all incoming graduate students at MIT are required to complete a diversity training online module. However, this module is only optional for current graduate students, and is inherently flawed in that online training modules are less effective. Students are less engaged in online training, and have the ability to click through most of the content without gaining much. In-person training needs to be implemented whenever possible, and should encompass all graduate students, faculty, and staff.

Some departments within MIT have already taken steps to make the graduate experience more equitable. For example, the Department of Aeronautics and Astronautics has eliminated qualifying exams. The Department of Chemical Engineering has taken similar action by replacing written qualifying exams with a heavier emphasis on the written and oral thesis proposal. Lastly, the Department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science also does not require qualifying exams. These few positive examples are helping to pave the way toward a more inclusive MIT, but there is still no overarching Institute policy on qualifying exams.

For many students facing race-based traumatic stress, the support resources at MIT are not adequate. The [2020 updates](#) to the [BGSA 2015 recommendations](#) stress that URM students are currently being referred to off-campus resources for many of their mental health and therapy needs. The Institute has a responsibility to support all of its students and doing so requires a greater ability to provide support resources for race-based trauma.

### ***What are other universities doing?***



## **Graduate Admissions**

The Department of Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering at Berkeley has instituted [new DEI policies](#). Included in this statement, the Department has “determined the Graduate Records Exam (GRE) is a proven identifier of race and socio-economic status. Its association with successful completion of the doctorate is minimal, and its fulfillment is an economic burden on applicants” and will no longer consider the GRE for admissions. The Department is also reviewing the policy for application fee waivers to reduce the economic burden placed on students by application fees. Additionally, the Department is guaranteeing funding for up to three students and faculty that wish to attend major URM STEM conferences, which could potentially serve as an opportunity to recruit more URM students.

The University of Michigan has made significant strides toward developing a diverse and inclusive environment at the University, including the appointment of a Chief Diversity Officer, development of an Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, and the development of a 5-year strategic plan in 2016 for implementing key policies and programs aimed at DEI initiatives. Many of these key policies and programs are aimed directly at recruiting and retaining a diverse graduate population. One of their significant initiatives is the Building Bridges to Doctorate Program. The program is a fully funded master’s program designed to attract and support URM students into doctoral education, which also includes matching to faculty advisors and a mentoring workshop. This program has had a significant effect on the URM student pipeline to doctoral study at UM. Of the students in the program 94% completed the master’s and 77% matriculated into PhD programs at UM and peer institutions.

The Minority Serving Institutions (MSI) Initiative collaborates with programs and departments to attract, recruit, and retain students from MSIs, with the overall goal of expanding access to UM graduate and professional programs. Efforts through this initiative include outreach to MSIs, organizing graduate school awareness and preparation events for students from MSIs, and offering seed funding through grants to support MSI outreach. The Rackham Graduate School has also implemented workshops for faculty and staff involved in the admissions process that provide background information, strategies, and best practices (including legal considerations) toward making the admissions processes more equitable and holistic. Furthermore, unlike many other graduate schools that provide little public information on their admissions process and procedures, the Rackham Graduate School makes publicly available the materials for faculty describing holistic graduate admissions, including the value and strategies of holistic admissions.

Brown University has implemented a series of systemic practices to improve diversity and culture within its biomedical and public health programs. These include developing partnerships with select undergraduate institutions, providing a personalized education program for student

support with skill-based modules that aim to supplement discipline related work, and engaging with faculty in supporting diversity-related goals and practices. Data comparing URM enrollment and academic performance before and after the implementation of these practices support their effectiveness.

### **URM Retention**

Along with their efforts to make the admissions process more equitable, the Department of Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering at Berkeley has also made commitments toward increasing the retention of URM students. These include an annual anti-racism colloquium, expanding Ph.D. exit surveys to cover more graduate experiences and allow students to share insights that can allow for change, releasing employees at noon on Juneteenth for review, reflection, and participation in activities recognizing the end of slavery in the United States, a yearly lectureship series on anti-racism, and the creation of a senior administrative post and standing committee for DEI action.

The University of Michigan has made commitments towards increasing the success and retention of URM students and faculty. UM has a stated 5-year objective of increasing year-by-year the percentage of female and URM enrollment while establishing and maintaining parity in overall academic performance and retention-to-graduation. The Michigan Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation (MI - LSAMP) was established in 2005 with NSF funding with the primary goal of increasing retention and representation of URM students in STEM education and degree attainment, and activities of this program include first year acclimation programs to support URM students as they begin their degree. The Rackham Graduate School at UM also provides graduate student retention programming, including workshops on common graduate concerns, social events, emergency funding for students, and a graduate student community grant program.

# **Demand 1B - Promote diversity in faculty hiring & tenure through evidence-based practices**

## ***The demand***

1. Before beginning the search/selection process, all hiring/tenure/leadership selection committees must:
  - a. Guarantee that the committee is capable of executing an equitable search/selection process in that it:
    - i. Receives a standardized, live (as opposed to pre-recorded) annual training with a proven record of improving equity in the hiring and selection process.
    - ii. Requires all members of the committee to submit statements addressing their own beliefs and track record on diversity and inclusion, which will be reviewed and considered by whoever is charged with appointing committee members and the department's DEI officer (see Demand 2B). If an individual's statement is not in line with the department and Institute values, this member will be removed from the committee.
    - iii. Includes graduate students on the committee with equal decision-making power as faculty committee members (see Demand 1C).
  - b. Review failures and successes of previous committees in the department in coordination with the department's DEI officer (see Demand 2B).
    - i. This review will include metrics such as the number of URM candidates who have applied for past positions in the department as a percentage of the total applicant pool, how many URM candidates have been brought to campus for interviews in their field in previous searches, what has happened to URM candidates who were not offered positions in previous searches, and how URM candidates have been successfully hired/selected in recent searches.

2. During the search/selection process, all hiring/tenure/leadership selection committees must:
  - a. Include any and all past disciplinary offenses of harassment/discrimination that have been processed through IDHR and equivalent offices at MIT and previous institutions in the application/tenure package.
  - b. Require candidates to submit statements addressing their own beliefs about and track records in support of equity and inclusion in the workplace
  - c. Require candidates to disclose any previous institutional investigations or disciplinary actions for harassment, discrimination, or abuse. Disciplinary actions for sufficiently severe behavior must be automatically disqualifying. Student perspective in this process is crucial to ensure fair application of this policy.
  - d. Require candidate letters of recommendation to address candidates' professionalism and respectful behavior in the workplace.
  - e. Ask candidates direct questions about the importance of respectful and inclusive behavior in the workplace and their role in engendering these behaviors, particularly what strategies they would use to actively combat harassing or discriminatory behavior among students, trainees, staff, and other faculty.
  - f. Evaluate candidates according to the agreed upon criteria (including metrics for evaluating how well candidates would create an inclusive and equitable working environment) using a standardized tool. An example of such a tool can be found in Harvard's [Best Practices for Conducting Faculty Searches](#), Appendix, page 22.
3. After the search/selection process, all hiring/tenure/leadership selection committees must:
  - a. Critically evaluate the search/selection process with respect to equitable hiring practices and outcomes in coordination with the DEI officer (see Demand 2B). This review will ask questions such as:
    - i. Was the candidate's ability to create a safe, equitable, and inclusive working environment given sufficient weight (with special consideration given to the ability of recently hired candidates to create such a working environment)?

- ii. (For new hires) Were the selection criteria job-relevant and bias-free? Was the job description defined as broadly as possible to avoid unnecessarily narrowing the hiring criteria in a discriminatory manner?
  - iii. Were sufficient active recruitment (for new hires) or career development (for tenure and leadership selection) efforts made in advance to create a large pool of URM candidates?
- b. Share the results of this review with the ICEO and department leadership, and make these reports publicly available within the department. These reports will be referenced by future search/selection committees and must be shared with the entire department as part of annual climate/culture reports.

### ***Background and motivation***

A key part of creating a safe environment for all students and workers at MIT is building inclusivity into the general culture. Faculty play an important role in setting the culture in their labs, research groups, classrooms, committees, and departments. Faculty have a great deal of power and responsibility in maintaining a safe working and learning environment, and so it is imperative to take concrete steps to promote meaningful diversity and anti-discriminatory practices at the level of faculty hiring, tenure decisions, and leadership selection. One obvious way to improve the working environment for URM graduate students is to dramatically increase the number of URM faculty, especially post-tenure. There are many simple procedural changes which are known to facilitate this targeted recruitment.

At the level of recruitment, faculty searches which draw from a small set of institutions unnecessarily exclude many URM candidates. To combat this, the faculty hiring process must cast a wide net by defining faculty searches as broadly as possible. Furthermore, the hiring and tenure committees themselves must develop job-relevant hiring criteria prior to considering candidates, and these criteria must be kept central to all committee decisions - a standardized tool for evaluating candidates according to these criteria is a key part of this. Finally, the importance of creating inclusive and equitable working environments must be elevated in the hiring and tenure process. To that end, hiring criteria must include metrics for evaluating how well candidates themselves would create an inclusive and equitable working environment; letters of recommendation must address candidates' professionalism and respectful behavior in the workplace; candidates must submit statements addressing their own beliefs about and track records in supporting equity and inclusion; and potential members of the search and selection committees themselves must submit statements addressing their own beliefs and track records on

diversity and inclusion and must receive live trainings with a proven record of improving equity in the hiring and selection process before they are allowed to serve on those committees.

These reforms which we are demanding in order to combat discriminatory practices and a culture of harassment can't simply be viewed as boxes to check. They must be part of an active and continuous process of evaluation and improvement, accompanied by real financial commitments on the part of the Institute to bring them to full fruition, and executed with the full buy-in of faculty allies.

## ***MIT's current policies and procedures***

### **Faculty Diversity**

According to MIT's [own data](#), the number of BIPOC faculty at MIT is far from representative of the US population: 13.5% of the US population are African American, but only 2.7% of MIT faculty are African American; 15.0% of the US population identify as Hispanic or Latinx, compared to only 4.2% of MIT faculty; and Native American people comprise 1.5% of the US population but 0.0% of the MIT faculty.

Despite the administration's supposed commitment to increasing faculty diversity at MIT, they have achieved extremely little in the past 10-15 years. The proportion of women faculty [stands](#) at 25%, an increase of only 4 percentage points from 2010. The proportion of Black faculty is even worse: in every year since 2005, Black faculty have made up only 3% of MIT faculty. This is an abject failure even by MIT's own standards, as the university's [Report on the Initiative for Faculty Race and Diversity](#) “[stemmed] from a unanimous 2004 resolution of the MIT faculty to double the percentage of URM faculty (and triple the percentage of URM graduate students) within ten years.”

### **Recruitment and Hiring**

[MIT's own investigations](#) found that a significant majority of Black, Latinx, and Native faculty at MIT received PhDs from MIT, Stanford, or Harvard, noting that “the narrowness of the sources of URM faculty ... indicates a significant lost opportunity to gain faculty from other schools,” and furthermore “the fact that these schools also do not have a large number of minority candidates in their pools can exacerbate a problem presented from narrow recruitment sources.”

It will come as no surprise to those familiar with the Institute's general lack of structural support for graduate students, staff, and faculty that there is no standardized training process for faculty search committees. MIT's 2010 [Report on the Initiative for Faculty Race and Diversity](#) itself recommends that faculty search chairs receive training and general information on "hidden biases" and other such issues, and that the offices of the Provost and the Associate Provost provide resources for the implementation of such training programs.

Despite the mild nature of these recommendations, MIT has still failed to meet its own standard - yet another failure of its impotent working group model. We demand the implementation of robust and proven live training programs (not the clickthrough checkbox "solutions" which are the norm) for *all* members of faculty search and selection committees, and we further demand that departments be held accountable by dedicated DEI officers in all departments and schools who are empowered to take action, not just make recommendations.

There is already precedent for making these structural reforms in some departments at MIT. In AeroAstro, faculty candidates are already required to submit diversity statements, and faculty search committees are required to undergo implicit bias training. There are also the beginnings of a process for students to have a voice in faculty hiring: the student group AeroAfro has recently been asked to meet with faculty candidates to provide feedback. These processes should be seen as an early starting point for reforms in other departments, as they do not go far enough - trainings for faculty search committees must be proven effective and actually provide the committees with useful tools moving forward instead of being checkbox solutions, and students should have real decision-making power in faculty hiring, not just general "feedback" which can easily be ignored (see Demand 1C) - but they also demonstrate that these reforms are practical and achievable.

[MIT's current policies](#) dictate that the department head must submit a statement of qualifications being sought and a search plan which includes specific steps to identify URM candidates. However, these same policies also require only a single person to "see that an active search is carried out," even if that person is not on the committee! In reality, all committee members must be responsible for these efforts, even if a point person is designated. These same policies state that "the staff of the Equal Opportunity Office will collect and assemble the information on all appointments into a report," and that this report will be used in annual discussions at the Academic Council, a synopsis of which "may be released by the Equal Opportunity Office to the community by means of an annual report or an article in Tech Talk." This is an obtuse and inadequate reporting procedure - the reports made by faculty search/selection committees should be made available directly to members of the department and to the departmental DEI officer.

## **Tenure**

[MIT's tenure policies](#) are extremely vague and excessively permissive. The current policy states that “tenured members of the Faculty must also demonstrate outstanding teaching and university service; however, teaching and service are not a sufficient basis for awarding tenure. A single standard for tenure applies across the Institute, for all Schools and disciplines and for all modes of inquiry. Although the single standard requires that all candidates be of exceptional quality as confirmed by distinguished members of their disciplines, it may be appropriate, based on the culture of the discipline or the modes of inquiry, to look at different factors as evidence of significant scholarly achievement.”

The absence of serious concrete criteria from this policy opens the door for individual bias to hold significant sway in the tenure process. Furthermore, there is no mention of advising skills, experience supporting and empowering marginalized students and employees, or the ability to create a safe and inclusive work environment in the tenure criteria. This policy creates a material incentive for faculty to focus on teaching, research, and “service” (however narrowly that may be defined) at the exclusion of healthy mentoring practices. Not only does this pressure faculty to dedicate their limited time to research (and to overwork their lab members as a result), it creates no incentive for faculty to create safe, diverse, and inclusive work environments, which certainly exacerbates harassing and discriminatory behavior in the workplace and in the classroom. Furthermore, this tenure policy provides no guarantee of compensation for faculty who do strive to combat racism, sexism, and other backwards attitudes; the fact that this unrewarded work is often left to gender-oppressed and POC faculty creates an additional avenue for systemic racism and sexism to marginalize academic workers.



# **Demand 1C - Increase student participation in hiring and tenure decisions**

## ***The demand***

1. Actively include student input in the hiring process for new departmental faculty members.
  - a. Invite student-elected representatives to sit in on the interview panel and participate in the discussion of new faculty hires. These students will also be actively involved in the search committees. These students will have equal access to all components of the application as the rest of the committee.
2. Incorporate student feedback into the tenure application process:
  - a. Include student letters in the tenure package (~20). These letters will come from currently and/or formerly mentored students, students taught by the candidate, and student representatives from departmental Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion student groups. Half of the letter writers will be chosen not by the candidate, but instead by a public call for letters. As mentioned below, there is a strong precedent for this at peer institutions.
  - b. Reform the tenure process such that faculty members are evaluated holistically, as proposed for prospective graduate students (see Demand 1A). Along with including student feedback and harassment/discrimination offenses as mentioned here, the tenure package will also include faculty statements of values regarding diversity and inclusion along with mentorship, involvement in departmental DEI initiatives, and engagement with the departmental culture, graduate student body, and broader MIT community. Faculty members are not just researchers, but also mentors to graduate students and postdocs, influencers of departmental health and culture, and leaders of the MIT community, and they must be evaluated as such.

## ***Background and motivation***

An important role of serving as MIT faculty is the mentorship of students. As such, we assert that it is necessary for students to be involved in the hiring and tenure processes.

## **Hiring**

There are many benefits to having students involved in the hiring process. Given the relative turnover of students versus faculty, it is not uncommon for the student body to represent a more diverse portion of the academic population as DEI initiatives begin to take place. In addition, current department leaders who are focused on recruiting graduates into their programs benefit from hearing the perspectives of young scholars who are in tune with the type of faculty mentorship and research that would attract students. Finally, exposing graduate students to the realities of navigating the hiring process is also an invaluable source of professional education.

## **Tenure**

Tenure occurs later in a faculty's career, and it offers the ability to assess the quality of one's research, teaching, and mentorship. As such, the input of former students offers a necessary perspective when assessing this promotion. It also affirms that teaching effectiveness is not merely alluded to as an important factor, but rather, it is being taken as a serious consideration. It is worth noting, however, that metrics such as traditional class evaluations are known to be flawed assessments, so we propose a more comprehensive inclusion of student feedback.

## ***MIT's current policies and procedures***

### **Hiring**

The involvement of graduate students in hiring processes varies across the Institute. In Biological Engineering, for instance, a graduate student panel is convened for lunches with prospective candidates, and their feedback is collected for review by the hiring committee. Similarly, in Chemical Engineering, students have sat in on interviews with potential department administrators. However, there is not a standardized protocol or recommendation to take part in such practices. Many departments do not incorporate any form of student feedback into their hiring decisions.

### **Tenure**

Currently, graduate students are not directly involved in the tenure review process. [MIT policy](#) dictates that "Persons awarded tenure must be judged by distinguished members of their discipline to be of first rank among scholars and to show promise of continued contribution to

scholarship. Tenured members of the Faculty must also demonstrate outstanding teaching and university service; however, teaching and service are not a sufficient basis for awarding tenure.”

## ***What are other universities doing?***

### **Hiring**

Peer institutions such as Harvard have outlined the [best practices](#) for hiring faculty that explicitly recommend the involvement of graduate students in the process. A 2016 Harvard University handbook from the Office of the Senior Provost states, “Consider forming a graduate student advisory group to work with the faculty search committee. Graduate students, especially those interested in faculty positions, find this to be a superb experience that gives them insight into the academic job market. Experience shows that graduate students—who are early career themselves—can be especially good at identifying emerging scholars.”

Additionally, Columbia University has outlined similar [best practices](#) when it comes to faculty hiring procedures. Included in this document is an urge to consider graduate student involvement in the search process and to outline the exact level of this involvement prior to beginning a search.

### **Tenure**

Peer institutions such as Stanford and Swarthmore incorporate student feedback into the faculty tenure process. At [Swarthmore](#), letters from ~25 of a tenure candidates’ students are required in the tenure package, where half are chosen by the candidate and the other half are chosen by other tenured faculty in the department. These students should have taken a course taught by the candidate or worked closely with the candidate in some manner. It is stressed that “the opinions of the advisees of the candidate would also be helpful.” At [Stanford](#), course evaluation summaries are considered in the tenure package, along with “letters from all current and former direct graduate and/or postdoctoral advisees of candidate” and when applicable, “4-6 letters from undergraduate students.”

Macalester College, although an exclusively undergraduate four-year institution, also incorporates student feedback into tenure decisions. As described by the [Provost’s Office](#), student course evaluations are crucial to the tenure package and students who have worked closely with the faculty member in question are invited to write letters speaking to the candidate’s teaching ability. Arguably, it is even more important for universities with graduate

programs to follow the lead of including student input in the tenure process. Faculty members serving as graduate student mentors have more frequent interactions with students and tend to work with them more closely so student feedback is crucial in their evaluation.