

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)
in the
School of Science

DEI Action Items

Office of the Dean

December 2021



School of Science

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Letter from the Dean's Office

Dear School of Science Community,

Over the past few months, I have met with many of you to hear your thoughts, reflections, and experiences pertaining to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). Thank you to each of you – students, postdocs, staff, faculty, leadership – who took the time to meet with me. Your thoughtful comments and insights, along with resources and reports that you shared – over the course of more than 200 meetings – form the basis of the list of DEI action items that we have developed in the Dean's Office. I am delighted to see so many DEI activities across our School.


As the events of the past year have shown, DEI work often includes sensitive and charged issues, and there is much to be done. Our perspectives on DEI are often shaped by our own life experiences, and we need careful judgment and patience as we work to create a larger cohesive structure out of individual pieces; and humility, as we acknowledge that when we aren't personally impacted by something, our knowledge of it differs from someone who is. DEI is not simply about race/ethnicity or gender – those are pieces of a larger whole that includes quality of life, work environment, mentorship, inclusion, and belonging.

DEI work is about our most valuable asset – our people – and about promoting scientific excellence. Talented people come from all backgrounds, but there is often a gap in access and opportunity. Often what we call merit is the outcome of having access to opportunities and resources that enable one to fulfill one's potential. As an institution of higher learning, we owe it to ourselves to enable that access to traditionally underrepresented groups. Because that enriches our science and our community. This is not the work of a moment or even a semester. It requires a multi-pronged approach, which must be nurtured and sustained over several years.

For now, here is a proposed list of DEI action items, which provide a framework for aligning our activities with the vision and mission identified in the [MIT Strategic Plan for DEI 2021-2026](#). These action items vary widely: some cost nothing, others require funding; some are relevant to students and postdocs, others to faculty, staff, and leadership; some can be done right away; others need planning and preparation. Collectively, they reflect the direction in which we would like our School to go. This is by no means an exhaustive list – it is simply an illustration of the sort of systemic and systematic approach that we need to address DEI at the institutional level.

Thank you once again for all the DEI work that so many of you have done and continue to do – work that benefits our School at large. With your engagement, our goal is to collectively shift our baselines towards greater inclusion and belonging across our School.

With best wishes and gratitude,



Dr. Kuheli Dutt (she/her)
Assistant Dean for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Activities to Promote Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in the School of Science

The following list of DEI activities reflects our commitment to the principles of inclusion and belonging in the School of Science. Some of these activities already exist, while others are aspirational. Grouped into twelve broad headings, these activities reflect the spirit and mission outlined in the draft [MIT DEI Strategic Action Plan 2021-2026](#) with its focus on three key priority areas: composition, belonging, and achievement. The activities listed here encompass one or more of these priority areas. This list of action items provides a framework for aligning our DEI activities with the MIT DEI Strategic Plan while ensuring DLC autonomy.

The activities listed here are aimed at promoting systemic change towards greater inclusion, rather than focusing on any particular underrepresented group or identity. We have highlighted best practices and noteworthy examples from each of our six departments. Some activities would occur at the DLC level, others at the School level, and some a collaboration between the DLC and School. We recognize that each DLC has its own needs and priorities, and request DLCs to use this document as a broad guideline as they develop their DEI plans. We expect to develop templates and guidance to assist with implementation. Further, we expect to send out periodic communications with information on next steps, guidelines, resources, and best practices.

I. Outreach and Education

STEM URM data show that pipeline issues begin well before graduate school. Accordingly, we would like to see the MSRP program be a feeder into the Bridge Program, which could be a feeder into graduate programs. And we note that whether students stay at MIT or pursue careers elsewhere, investing in these efforts will help expand the pool of URM scientists.

MIT Summer Research Program (MSRP): An outstanding success, [MSRP-Bio](#) can serve as a model for DLCs across the School. Many MSRP alums go on to faculty/fellow positions either within MIT or in the larger STEM community. While there is also [MSRP-OGE](#), an overwhelming majority of those internships (around 60%) go to the School of Engineering, with only around 15% to the School of Science. We encourage DLCs to develop department-level MSRPs where possible.

Bridge and Support Programs for Underrepresented Groups: Bridge programs provide key support and guidance to first generation and underrepresented students, and often serve as a pathway into higher education. An excellent example is the [BCS Research Scholars Program](#). We encourage other DLCs to create similar programs. An initial suggestion is for DLCs to start small, having MSRP programs serve as feeders into the Bridge/Postbac programs. Also, programs such as [MathROOTS](#) and the [Leah Knox Scholars Program](#), which focus on high school students from underrepresented backgrounds, will help build a STEM talent pool at the K-12 level.

Research shows that some key factors determining whether URM students will pursue STEM fields include: a sense of belonging; helping society and/or the environment; seeing URM faculty

as role models; knowledge of the college application process; math preparation; and funding. We request DLCs to keep these in mind when developing MSRP and Bridge programs, and we welcome ideas on shared programs with possible cost sharing by the Dean's Office.

Partnerships with Minority Serving Institutions: In addition to developing activities that are housed in MIT, developing collaborations and partnerships with other institutions that serve underrepresented groups can lead to sustained exchange and engagement. The [Mind-Brain Course](#), taught by BCS faculty at both Howard University and Florida International University, is an excellent example. Two other possible activities are listed below.

Outreach to Navajo Nation Math Circles: The [Navajo Nation Math Circles \(NNMC\) project](#) is aimed at teaching math to Navajo students, with the goal of building capacity to pursue STEM. The project partners with mathematicians across the US, none from MIT. We envision a collaboration where our faculty participate in teaching math to Navajo students and teachers, with the eventual goal of a partnership. We welcome ideas on how to implement this.

Coordinated Presence at SACNAS Conference: We would like to see a coordinated School-wide presence at [SACNAS](#), the largest URM STEM conference in the US. For this, we envision various activities such as developing educational materials, pre-conference networking, creating a database of students who visit our booths, and following up with them after the conference. We welcome ideas for this. Also, the Dean's Office would be willing to sponsor the booths.

II. Application Assistance, Review, and Mentoring Programs

[Application assistance programs](#), where prospective students can get assistance on applications for graduate school, are especially relevant for first generation students. A related program is an admissions review program, such as the [Grads Advising Grad Admissions \(GAGA\)](#) program in our Physics Department, where proactive steps resulted in a notable increase in candidates from diverse backgrounds, including institutions not typically a source of applications to MIT.

Closely related to these are student-led mentoring programs, the rationale being that student mentors are more likely to be perceived as accessible and relatable to other students. Two excellent examples are [Graduate Undergraduate Math Mentoring Initiative \(GUMMI\)](#) and [Council for Math Majors \(COMM\)](#), noteworthy initiatives by students of our Math department. These are aimed at providing advice and support, focusing on issues pertaining to Math students, and building a sense of community among the students. We encourage DLCs to create and support similar application assistance, review, and student-mentoring initiatives.

III. Awards and Recognition

Awards are a way of recognizing the valuable work done by members of our community. We encourage DLCs to offer awards and honors acknowledging community members who contribute towards community building, mentoring, inclusive teaching, and others.

Some awards (new and existing) given out by the School are described below.

School of Science DEI Service Fellowships: This is a new initiative from the Dean's Office, aimed at recognizing the extraordinary service contributions of graduate students in support of their community by leading local DEI activities. We envision giving out six fellowships, one per department. These fellowships will provide graduate students financial support (tuition, stipend, and health insurance) for one semester.

Staff Awards: The School gives out Infinite Mile Awards (for staff) and Infinite Expansion Awards (for postdoctoral researchers and research scientists). Solicited twice annually, [these awards](#) recognize individuals who go the extra mile to make MIT a better place. Activities include: mentoring fellow community members, building communities, promoting inclusion, and/or going far above one's job description to support the goals of DLCs.

DEI Quality of Life Grants: Similar to the [Science Quality of Life \(SQoL\)](#) grants, we plan on giving out DEI QoL grants to support activities that promote DEI, build community, and support the well-being of our community members. Like the SQoL grants, these will be capped at \$3,000 per grant. We expect to give out up to 25 such grants every year.

DEI Grants for Staff: We plan on giving out grants to promote DEI activities relevant to staff (administrative and research). Capped at \$3,000, these grants would be staff-specific, aimed at promoting inclusion and belonging. Given that staff roles vary widely across the School, we welcome ideas and suggestions from staff on how best to shape this initiative.

Spot Awards: The School gives out [Spot Awards](#), which appreciate and recognize exceptional contributions to the School of Science community. Individuals can be nominated at any time by any SoS member, and award winners will receive a token of appreciation shortly after.

IV. Faculty Search, Hiring, and Review

Search Processes: We have drafted a School of Science Handbook for Faculty Searches, which incorporates DEI considerations into every step of the search process, and provides guidelines and resources, which can also be used for non-faculty searches. Once finalized, we expect to make this handbook available to all. Examples of activities from this handbook are:

- Comparing applicant demographics with national level data provided by NSF-NORC
- Briefings for search committees on best practices and guidelines for inclusive searches
- Proactive efforts to post job advertisements in diverse venues (detailed list provided)
- Use of social media to advertise searches in diverse venues
- Information on implicit biases and guidelines on avoiding them
- Using inclusive language in the job description
- Asking candidates to include information on any activities that they have undertaken to promote inclusion (including informal mentoring)
- Involving students and postdocs in the selection process

Cluster Hiring: Research shows that having faculty role models from underrepresented groups plays a key role in promoting a sense of belonging among underrepresented students; and that cluster hiring, or hiring multiple scholars based on shared interdisciplinary research interests, is a best practice to promote both scientific excellence and faculty diversity. We expect to work with departments across the School to do cluster hires. We expect that these will be based on broad research areas rather than individual departments, and we welcome ideas from departments on proposed shared/interdisciplinary areas of research.

Junior Faculty Review: We are in the process of developing a review form that acknowledges, in addition to the conventional metrics of teaching, research, and publications, activities that promote inclusion. This could include education and outreach, mentoring (formal and informal), service, and ways in which the individual has been a good department citizen. As we focus on the importance of promoting an inclusive environment, we would like to work towards incorporating these activities into our review processes, as these add value to the DLC and the School at large.

V. MLK Visiting Fellows Program

MIT established the [Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Visiting Professor Program](#) to honor the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. by increasing the presence of minority scholars at MIT. Nominations for MLK Fellows must be endorsed by the host faculty, Department Head, and the Dean's Office before submission to the Provost's Office. As part of the nomination process, the host faculty and the MLK Visiting Scholar need to develop an engagement plan. Going forward, the Dean's Office will review this plan with the host faculty, Department Head, and others as appropriate.

Funded primarily by the Provost's Office, and managed by ICEO, the program typically has 5-7 scholars per cohort, for a fellowship period of up to two years. Appointments can be made at the Assistant, Associate, or Full Professor levels. The cost per fellowship is in the range of \$150k-\$200K, typically shared between the department and the Provost's Office. Note that cost sharing from departments will increase the likelihood of funding more fellowships. We encourage DLCs to share the cost, and we welcome ideas and suggestions for cost sharing by the Dean's Office.

VI. Staff Inclusion and Wellbeing

As we work to promote a culture of inclusion, it is important to remember that staff perform crucial work for the DLC, but don't always have a voice in DEI decision-making, with the result that staff needs can often get overlooked. DLCs should make every effort to include the staff voice on DEI conversations, and ensure that staff have the support and resources that they need to succeed while ensuring their well-being. The activities below are as relevant to staff as they are to other groups, and care should be taken to include staff in these.

Workshops and Professional Development: While various workshops and trainings are offered across MIT, the reality for many people is that the demands of their workday do not allow them the time to attend these. DLCs could consider hosting some of these workshops for their

communities during the workday. These could either be cohort-specific (i.e., for students, postdocs, staff, or faculty) or more broadly applicable (e.g., bystander training, effective time management, addressing conflict in the workplace, career mentoring).

Social Activities and Interactions: For many individuals, day-to-day interactions typically involve only their immediate colleagues. Each DLC could organize social events with the goal of building community and connections. Wherever appropriate, we suggest having social events shared between DLCs, and we welcome ideas for events that the Dean's Office could co-sponsor.

Learn @ Lunch: This is a lunchtime series for staff, hosted by the Dean's Office, offering sessions on a wide range of topics including wellness, institutional policies, and guidelines. Going forward, we will be including DEI related sessions as well. We welcome suggestions from staff on what DEI topics they would like to see covered in these sessions.

Breaks for Lactation: As per MIT policy, supervisors are [required to provide reasonable break time and a private space](#) to express milk during the workday. *A bathroom is not an acceptable space for this purpose.* Additionally, employees should not be expected to do this on their own personal time. For hourly employees, we ask that supervisors make reasonable allowances to accommodate employees with lactation needs. Note that breast pumps can be borrowed for use in one's private office if needed (see [MIT campus map of lactation rooms](#)).

VII. Postdoctoral Researchers

Postdoctoral researchers form a key part of the academic pipeline into faculty positions, whether at MIT or beyond, and we propose the following activities to support them.

Secondary Mentors: In addition to a primary mentor, having a secondary mentor can be helpful. We recognize that mentoring/advising takes time and effort. For now, we propose a pilot phase, where volunteers (postdocs and faculty/scientists) can sign up. Following feedback, we can consider a formal structure, and we welcome ideas on implementing this.

Professional Development and DEI: The [Leadership and Professional Strategies and Skills \(LEAPS\) program](#), housed in our Physics Department, offers professional development for postdoctoral researchers and graduate students. This course has two modules but we expect to add a DEI module. Our goal is to eventually offer this program to students and postdocs across the School.

Search Processes: Similar to the faculty search handbook, we expect to develop guidelines to promote inclusive postdoctoral searches across the School.

VIII. Culture and Climate

A common theme in the feedback from people across the School is that while most people are well-intentioned, a lack of understanding of the needs of underrepresented groups makes it

difficult for the latter to feel like they truly belong here. Besides, there are persistent perceptions of a lack of transparency and accountability. Some suggested activities are listed below.

Survey Results: For DLCs that have conducted work environment and/or quality of life surveys, we request that aggregated survey results be disseminated to the community, and that recommendations and/or suggestions from the survey be formally acknowledged. Also, note that data – including the [MIT Quality of Life Survey 2020](#) – show that underrepresented groups typically report worse experiences than others; therefore, focusing mainly on the majority responses might not reflect the experiences of underrepresented groups.

Mentorship Evaluation and Coaching: We encourage DLCs to identify mechanisms to evaluate faculty mentorship and also consider implementing 360 reviews if they have not already done so. Additionally, the Dean’s Office can support junior and senior faculty who would like to avail of executive coaching with the goal of becoming more effective mentors.

Reporting Concerns: In addition to standard venues such as [IDHR](#) and the [Ombuds Office](#), each DLC could designate individuals (ideally a mix of faculty and staff) who people can report concerns to. Some concerns don’t rise to the level of a policy violation but significantly impact the well-being of community members, and need to be addressed effectively.

Group-Level Workshops and Training: Since a lot of interactions happen at the level of individual research groups and labs, we encourage DLCs to organize group-level education, workshops, and training on DEI topics. We also encourage DLCs to ensure that staff are included.

International Students, Postdocs, Staff, and Faculty: International and/or foreign-born individuals form a significant percentage of our community (40-65%), and we encourage DLCs to ensure that those perspectives are also represented in DEI conversations and activities. Additionally, organizing recreational group activities will help promote a sense of community and belonging.

Affinity and Identity-Based Activities: Observances like Black History Month, Hispanic/Latinx Heritage Month, Asian-American and Pacific Heritage Month, LGBTQ+ Pride Month, Native/American Heritage Month, and others are opportunities to engage in activities that raise awareness and promote understanding of these themes.

Disability Inclusion: DLCs are encouraged to send periodic reminders to their communities about MIT’s resources and policies around [Disability and Access Services](#) and [campus accessibility, assistive technology, and others](#).

DLC-Level Activities: Initiatives like [Towards Inclusion and Diversity in EAPS \(TIDE\)](#), [Unlearning Racism in the Geosciences \(URGE\)](#) as well as the summaries of concerns compiled by students and others for Visiting Committees are immensely valuable in providing a deeper understanding of DEI issues at the DLC level, as well as detailed analyses and recommendations. We recognize that some recommendations are easier to implement than others, and in the interest of transparency we encourage DLC leadership to provide a response to all recommendations.

Inclusive Teaching: Faculty are encouraged to learn about the resources, tools, and guidelines offered by the [Teaching + Learning Lab](#). These include [teaching resources](#), as well as guidance on [how to create an inclusive classroom](#). In addition to [faculty programming](#), the Teaching + Learning Lab also offers [graduate student programming](#).

Exit Interviews: Exit interviews can provide valuable information on the experiences of people during their time here. We encourage DLCs to conduct exit interviews and to aggregate the responses (e.g., annually) and share the anonymized and aggregated responses with the DLC.

Gender Equity Committee: We expect to implement various recommendations made by the [Gender Equity Committee](#) on promoting greater transparency and inclusion across the School, including appointments and promotions, mentoring programs, and formal review processes.

IX. Wellness and Wellbeing

Wellness and wellbeing are an integral part of DEI and essential for a healthy work environment where people feel supported to do their best work. Some suggestions are listed below.

Mental Health Services: DLCs could send out periodic reminders to their community about the various mental health services offered by MIT, both [for students](#) and [for staff](#).

Mental Health Seminar Series: Our Chemistry department offers a Mental Health and Wellness Seminar Series, along with other wellness activities, with the goals of educating, providing support, making resources accessible, and destigmatizing mental health concerns.

Meeting-Free Windows: Each group/lab/office could consider designating certain periods of the day (or certain days of the week) as being free of meetings, especially in winter months, so that people can get sunlight, which can promote a sense of individual and personal well-being.

X. Selection and Tracking Process for Invited Speakers

In the spirit of promoting accountability and transparency, we ask all DLCs to ensure a proper selection process for invited speakers. We envision this in the following way:

Colloquium Committee: Creation of a colloquium committee, comprised of students, faculty, staff, and postdocs. This committee selects the speakers after seeking broad input from members of their DLC. Members could rotate off after 2- or 3- year terms.

Speaker Demographics: The committee keeps track of speaker demographics, including: number of speakers, nature of invited lecture (e.g., weekly seminar series, special lectures), what percentage are from underrepresented groups (e.g., gender, gender identity, race/ethnicity, sexual identity), and any other demographic information. The committee keeps track of which institutions the speakers are from, including Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs).

XI. School of Science Values Statement and Code of Conduct

We expect to create a Values Statement and a Code of Conduct for the School. The Values Statement will draw on the meaningful work done by various DLCs (e.g., [Physics Community Values](#), [Chemistry Community Values](#)), and the Institute as a whole (see [Draft Report of the MIT Values Statement Committee](#)) and would reflect the values of our School. The Code of Conduct would draw on official [MIT policies and procedures](#) and the [Mind and Hand Book](#), and would reflect the behavioral expectations we have of our community. We expect to invite input from the School of Science community, and hope to have these in place by the summer of 2022.

XII. Annual DEI Reports

From DLCs: We request each DLC to submit an annual DEI report to the Dean's Office, outlining their DEI (including quality of life) efforts and activities. The report should also mention which activities the DLC has identified as most relevant to it, and what progress has been made towards implementing them. The report should also describe any other DEI related activity done by the DLC that is not mentioned in this document.

From the Dean's Office: In a similar vein, the Dean's Office will prepare an annual DEI report for the entire School of Science community. In addition to DEI activities, this report will provide demographic info, new hire info, and other data such as space info (lab and office) for faculty by gender. The Dean's Office will also periodically organize activities and events, including special seminars and screenings, workshops, education sessions, etc. – for which we expect to invite/involve DLCs. In the spirit of promoting transparency and accountability, this report will also outline our challenges and opportunities, and will propose next steps to advance DEI.

Concluding notes

Change happens at various levels – individual, cultural, institutional – and it is our hope that the activities in this document will provide a framework to enable change on all these levels. We expect to work closely with **departmental DEI Officers Farrah Belizaire, Hallie Dowling-Huppert, and EmmaLee Pallai** (see Appendix 2) as we implement these activities, including developing templates and guidance to assist DLCs. Besides this, we expect to send out periodic communications to the community, with information on next steps. It is heartening to see the range of DEI activities already being done in DLCs across our School, and the reports and recommendations that have come out of these activities. We reaffirm our commitment to promoting DEI within the School of Science and look forward to working with DLCs on these activities, with the larger goal of aligning these with the vision and mission outlined in the MIT DEI Strategic Plan.

Appendix 1: Priority and Commitment Areas of MIT DEI Strategic Plan

For clarity, the 3 priority areas and 7 commitment areas of the **MIT DEI Strategic Plan** are given below, along with a table illustrating how the 12 DEI action categories outlined in this document fit into this schema. Many of our DEI action categories fit more than one priority area.

Composition

- Increase the number of underrepresented graduate students, postdocs, research staff, staff and faculty.
- Assess and strengthen our recruitment of underrepresented undergraduate students.

Belonging

- Critically engage with and empower the MIT community on the value of diversity, equity, and inclusion
- Reinforce positive interactions among members of the MIT community to foster and promote an enduring sense of belonging.
- Support academic research, scholarship and collaborations regarding diversity, equity, inclusion, social justice and related topics at MIT.

Achievement

- Eliminate differences in graduation rates and advance equality in all forms of success among underrepresented undergraduate and graduate students.
- Eliminate differences in outcomes and advance equality in all forms of success among underrepresented postdocs, research staff, staff and faculty.

Composition

Actions
Outreach and Education
Application Assistance, Review and Mentoring
Faculty Search, Hiring, and Review
Postdoctoral Programs
Invited Speakers

Belonging

Actions
Outreach and Education
Awards and Recognition
Faculty Search, Hiring, and Review
MLK Visiting Fellows Program
Staff Inclusion and Wellbeing
Postdoctoral Programs
Culture and Climate
Invited Speakers

Belonging (cont'd)

Actions
Wellness and Wellbeing
Annual DEI Reports
Values Statement and Code of Conduct

Achievement

Actions
Outreach and Education
Application Assistance, Review and Mentoring
Awards and Recognition
Postdoctoral Programs
Faculty Search, Hiring, and Review
Wellness and Wellbeing

Appendix 2: Meet Our Departmental DEI Officers

As we work to implement DEI activities across the School, we expect to work closely with our departmental DEI Officers, seeking their involvement and assistance. Learn about them below.

Farrah Belizaire, MS, EdM

Farrah serves as the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Justice (DEIJ) Officer for the Department of Brain and Cognitive Sciences, the McGovern Institute, and the Picower Institute. She is responsible for the implementation of tools and resources to grow DEIJ culture. Farrah received a Bachelor of Science degree in Health Science, Master of Science in Administrative Studies, and Master of Education in Educational Policy and Leadership Studies from Boston University. Farrah also serves in various advisory roles, such as for the Black Economic Council of Massachusetts (BECMA). She is an active member of Boston University's Black Alumni Leadership Council. Farrah also organizes social events for young professionals of color through her passion project, LiteWork Events.



Hallie Dowling-Huppert, M.Ed

Hallie serves as the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Officer in the Department of Biology. In this role she works directly with students, postdocs, staff, and faculty to identify and implement mechanisms and programs that promote equity and inclusion — with the goal of making the Department a more welcoming, supportive, and vibrant place. She partners with the Department's DEI Council and Faculty DEI Committee, and other groups within the department and across the Institute that have similar missions. Hallie holds a Masters of Education in Community Engagement and Higher Education Administration from Merrimack College.



EmmaLee Pallai, MFA

EmmaLee serves as the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Officer for the Departments of Chemistry, and Earth, Atmospheric, and Planetary Sciences (EAPS). She works across the Departments, Labs and Centers (DLCs) to promote inclusion and belonging and wishes to collaborate with others across MIT to help desilo people and build community. She specializes in education and training in the areas of professionalism, equity, shared values, and facilitated dialogues. She has particular expertise in using storytelling and personal narrative to foster inclusive organizations. Pallai earned her Bachelor's degree from Columbia University and a Master's in Fine Arts from New Mexico State University with a focus on gender and illness narratives.