



MIT Alumni Association

## GRADUATE ALUMNI WORKING GROUP

The Graduate Alumni Working Group (GAWG) was created by the MIT Alumni Association to study ways to enhance graduate alumni engagement with MIT. (This cohort is known as GSE alumni, for Graduate School Exclusively). The Graduate Alumni Working Group was chartered to study the following paradox:

**While GSE alumni report more positive feelings about their MIT education than their undergraduate alumni peers, they have lower levels of engagement (philanthropic, volunteer, and electronic) with the Association and Institute.**

This issue is of significant importance to the Association, because as the graduate student population grows while the undergraduate population remains static, the number of graduate-degreed alumni is increasing faster than the number of undergraduate alumni. GSEs now compose a majority (52 percent) of the total alumni population, and that percentage is increasing over time. The Institute and Association have a strategic interest in increasing GSE engagement.

As part of our effort, we are seeking input from current graduate students about their experiences while at MIT. To obtain this input, we are conducting a series of focus groups across the Institute to gather the opinions and ideas of a broad cross section of the community. We hope to learn more about how to strengthen community among graduate students, and about how to better connect them to the larger MIT alumni community.

The GAWG begins work with the following initial hypotheses to explain the difference between GSE and undergraduate alumni engagement; we will use the data gathered from the focus groups to test these hypotheses and propose recommendations to address them:

- Graduate students are not as connected to the Institute as a whole; they tend to be focused on their academic department or lab.
- Graduate students have fewer common shared activities and experiences that build engagement across the Institute; there is no common graduate student curriculum, fewer campus-wide events for graduate students, etc.
- Living group culture is not as strong in the graduate student population; about two-thirds of graduate students live in off-campus housing, while virtually all undergrads live in living groups.
- Graduate students arrive at MIT at different points in their lives. Many have families and may be less engaged in graduate student life on campus.
- Graduate students may have less in common with each other than entering undergraduates and thus may be less likely to build enduring relationships outside of their academic department.
- Many GSEs are only here for a year or two; in some cases, not long enough to build enduring relationships with people outside their academic department.
- Graduate students are a more international population; many may come from cultures with less tradition of alumni engagement with their universities, and international alumni may have fewer opportunities to engage with MITAA and the Institute than do domestic alumni.
- Some graduate students may see their time at MIT as employment, rather than a life experience worth remaining connected to.
- There is not an expectation established for graduate students that they should remain connected to the Institute as alumni.

After completing the focus groups, we anticipate proposing a number of recommendations to the Alumni Association, DSL, and ODGE on steps that can be taken to enhance graduate student life at MIT and grow the community of engaged graduate alumni.