

January 29, 2021

Hi everyone,

As we welcome Spring semester and a new year, Chris and I wanted to share some important updates and progress made by the DEI Committee thus far. In September, the committee met as a group and discussed ideas and shared visions for what the department could be like in the next five years with respect to diversity, equity, and inclusion in the department. This conversation was wide-ranging and brought many perspectives to our collective attention. We identified four shared themes that intersect with all of the groups we represent. We are excited to share those here with the Department broadly:

1. **Building relationships.** We seek to enable broad, cross-functional, and lasting connections among all groups within the department.
2. **Communicating community.** We aim to encourage clear and open communication both within the department and to our world around us to promote access to our community and dissemination of the active initiatives to which we are all contributing together.
3. **Promoting education and training.** We aim to promote opportunities for regular and positive holistic training for all members of the department to encourage self-reflection and provide tools for engaging with all persons through conversation and relationship. As an example, the Department has now administered, for the first time, implicit bias training to multiple constituents, with the goal to reach everyone.
4. **Pursuing composition.** We have discussed the common interest among all sub-groups in the department to realize and maintain a community that reflects both the national and global population in terms of race, culture, and gender identities.

As we transition into the spring term, our committee will continue to refine these themes and ideas for addressing them together.

**Experiencing equity.** Another important task the committee undertook this past Fall was to reflect separately and together on what equitable experiences could look like for each sub-group in their journey through the Department and to identify barriers to getting the most out of these experiences. Listening to each other and understanding the ways in which we see the Department and those around us has been important for identifying potential common points for improving equitable experiences for all groups. Through these discussions, we have affirmed the themes noted above, and are looking forward to further discussions on actionable recommendations that could be realized in the short and long term.

**Celebrating Our Community's Commitment.** While strategic planning is essential, we note that our community is also filled with do-er's. This posture is noteworthy among our peer Departments in the School, and truly reflects the individuals we have participating to make a difference now. There are many wonderful achievements that members of our committee accomplished in the Fall. An important one that we would like to highlight is the expansion of the ChAMP Program during this year's admissions cycle. ChAMP is a volunteer-based student mentoring program which aims to assist applicants from communities that have been historically

underrepresented and/or from non-traditional academic backgrounds in higher education. After a successful pilot in 2019, the program has increased its number of volunteers and doubled the number of applicants served. We are grateful for the hard work and dedication of the ChAMP volunteers and cannot wait to see the program reach even greater heights next year.

Furthermore, as an example of our collective commitment to being change makers now, our graduate students along with the Student Office started a new pilot program in the fall to hold “Grad School Office Hours” with undergraduates at other universities to answer questions about graduate school and why it might be something to consider further. This “meet in the street” approach was conceived and started all in the fall through a series of conversations among our DEIC members and others in the graduate student body.

The facilitation of focus groups led by the committee’s staff representatives Tseganesh Gudeta, Sharece Corner, and Melanie Kaufman was another wonderful accomplishment during Fall semester. In October, the staff representatives facilitated dialogues with their colleagues, focusing on inequities faced by staff members and worked with their peers to find solutions to these experiences. The conversations were extremely impactful and led to recommendations that were presented to Administrative Officer Robert Fadel and Paula. The staff representatives look forward to continuing this momentum, helping implement the proposed solutions and partnering with the Executive DEI Committee to improve equitable experiences for staff in ChemE. Other efforts within the Department in DEI have continued and are listed [here](#).

**Expanding Our Impact to the School of Engineering.** In the Fall, the School of Engineering also formed a DEI Committee, comprising representatives from each Department, student representatives, and staff from the Institute and SoE, and is led by Prof. Dan Hastings from Aero/Astro. The charge of this committee has been to review what each department considers best practices and challenges in their own journeys. This sharing has been an amazing opportunity to learn from each other and build more connectedness in dialogue. Our practices in graduate student admissions, our understanding of the national pools of students and faculty candidates, and our track record for retention have been praised by other Departments as ones for further consideration. There has been general admiration as well for the positive momentum everyone is contributing towards DEI matters as a community, with the large number of community-led activities and forums like our monthly book clubs, topical gatherings for discussion, and active groups pursuing change in our midst. We have also heard good suggestions and discussion about new ideas for topics like exit surveys and understanding hiring practices for groups like post-doctoral fellows and associates.

**Growing our team.** An important component for strengthening our immediate and long-term plans as a Department is the hiring of a DEI Position. With the support of the ICEO and SoE for this hiring, we are finalizing the announcement for the search for this position. We are excited that this person will work directly with our Department, Biological Engineering, and Materials Science and Engineering. As we seek to enhance the climate in DEI matters both in ChemE and at MIT as a holistic community, this person will provide important strategic connections among our departments, and direct lines of communication for everyone in the Department, including our committees and groups engaged in hiring and oversight on our educational and research

missions. We are hoping that a stellar candidate can be found and available to join our team and help shape our strategic plans with our committee this spring.

**Next steps.** With the Fall of 2020 and its turmoil behind us, we now look with optimism towards the Spring and beyond. We aim to continue to define and understand the experiences of everyone in our Department, including our staff, post-docs, students, and faculty. The Committee will continue to share and develop new ideas for potential adjustments to processes and systems we can seek to implement. We will also continue to build a statement of our Departmental strategic plans and goals—we appreciate the eagerness of the community for this report. Thoughtful consideration of all perspectives takes time for listening, reflecting, and refining to actionable strategies that can matter. Nonetheless, we will continue impatiently to promote changes where we can now, including strengthening our communications on DEI matters with BE and DMSE, identifying this semester’s speaker for our joint community, and seek further learning about how we can best measure progress as a community in these matters.

In closing, we encourage everyone to remember Angela Davis’ remark to us this Fall that “*Work that really matters is collective and collaborative.*” We should not and cannot expect that any one individual (or committee) in any role will change a system by itself. It will continue to take our whole community. Thank you all for being the leaders you are to make connections and build on this effort together in what remains an important moment in our time as a Department, Institute, and society.

***Best Regards,***

Chris Love and Sharece Corner