

Abigail Taussig

Demographics: School of Engineering, PhD, Expected graduation: 2025, she/her/hers, bisexual, white, American, 23

Hours available per week: 10

Why do you want to join these committees? What do you bring to the table?

As a queer woman, I care deeply about the representation of women and LGBTQIA+ folx at MIT. While I am only in my first year here, I spent time at my undergraduate institution working with Queer Student Resources through programs such as Sharing Our Stories At Stanford, a queer storytelling program designed to destigmatize conversations and questions about sexuality. In my undergraduate chemical engineering major of around 20 students, I was in the company of six other queer-identifying individuals. I now find myself in a cohort of around 40, as the only openly queer woman. I am intimately familiar with the specific policies that made Stanford such an inclusive place, and I look forward to introducing similar measures here at MIT.

What do you think these committees should do? What do you want to achieve through these committees?

With 1 in 14 students at MIT experiencing nonconsensual sexual contact, and marginalized groups such as female and queer students experiencing such contact at even higher rates (AAU Survey 2019), we urgently need to address the campus culture surrounding sexual assault. While our main goal must be to get the number of impacted students down to zero, we must also support the non-zero number of students who currently are survivors of sexual assault. I believe that the resources that MIT currently provides its students are insufficient. I want to see free trauma therapy on campus for survivors of sexual assault. I do not want students to be referred off-campus to pay out of pocket for the treatment that is so key immediately after traumatic incidents. I want to champion these students who so dearly need a voice.

Abraham Herzog-Arbeitman

Demographics: School of Science, PhD, Expected graduation: 2025, He/Him/His

Hours available per week: 3

Why do you want to join these committees? What do you bring to the table?

I have worked previously as part of student and staff advisory boards for sexual misconduct prevention and survivor support during undergrad. I would love to continue this work as a graduate student.

What do you think these committees should do? What do you want to achieve through these committees?

Student committees should examine and overhaul fact-finding and disciplinary procedures regarding sexual misconduct, particularly with regards to power-dynamics at all levels between undergrads, graduate students, senior graduate students, postdocs, faculty and staff. Care must be taken to ensure a level playing field in these proceedings regardless of the identities of the complainant and accused, such as gender, race, socioeconomic background and other factors.

At the same time, a toolbox of immediate mandates that do not require protracted disciplinary hearings must be developed. These should go beyond typical "no-contact directives." Such options serve as a short term measure to support survivors and protect the student body, and also illustrate the seriousness with which the administration should treat these reports. Such transparency is proven to reduce misconduct behavior

More broadly, the social and economic dynamics inherent to the power structure of the university should be scrutinized to minimize harmful practices such as social retribution. In the long term, this might lead to restructuring graduate advising practices, undergraduate greek life, and other influential bodies. Throughout all, communication must be complete and transparent. We must continually strive to question our actions as individuals and as a university, until everyone is safe.

Gowtham Thakku

Demographics: School of Engineering, PhD, Expected graduation: 2021, Male, South Asian, He/Him, 28 years, Heterosexual, Indian

Hours available per week: 4

Why do you want to join these committees? What do you bring to the table?

As a fourth year PhD student, I've seen firsthand how lab and academic climate can influence one's well being, productivity and life overall; of how, two individuals in the same lab and academic program can have wildly different experiences because of who they are and the circles of people they interact with; of how, navigating the complexities of academia, are, in the end, one's own choice, and that there isn't a "right" or "wrong" way; of how, along the way, building a support system - people you can trust and trust you back, both in lab and outside - is so so important and makes all the difference in navigating the challenges of a graduate program at MIT. Issues around campus climate is something I personally care about, and I want to create

an environment that enables everyone to realize their personal goals while also becoming better and more sensitive individuals, regardless of who they are. I've also been involved in multiple teaching and mentoring roles, which has given me an appreciation for issues others deal with. I believe for these reasons that I bring something unique to the table, and would love to join the Campus Climate, Discrimination, and Misconduct Committee.

What do you think these committees should do? What do you want to achieve through these committees?

See above

Jonathan Melville

Demographics: School of Science, PhD, Expected graduation: 2021, male, south asian, he/him, 24, bisexual, american

Hours available per week: 4

Why do you want to join these committees? What do you bring to the table?

as a fierce student advocate at the undergraduate and graduate levels in multiple roles (GRT, CSL graduate representative, Grad Students for a Health MIT Rep, MIT Democrats exec (former), GSC HCA chair (former)), I have a deep institutional knowledge from a student perspective and a strongly vested interest in increasing accountability and oversight at all levels of administration

What do you think these committees should do? What do you want to achieve through these committees?

MIT has a particular history of throwing controversial issues to committees of faculty and students to decide, in effect tasking the community with cleaning up the mess higher-level MIT administrators have often created without delegating any guaranteed power of action to these committees to ensure that their recommendations are ever followed through. The needs of these committees are multifarious and, quite frankly, their charges speak for themselves. If selected, I will do my utmost to ensure that whatever conclusions reached, they are taken seriously by the Institute and not overlooked like many dozens of committees over the past several decades (e.g. the 2001 Mental Health Task Force <http://web.mit.edu/chancellor/mhtf/>, which in 2001 made recommendations on mental health advocacy and support at MIT that were supposedly approved by the MIT Corporation that have yet to be implemented today.

Madeleine Laitz

Demographics: School of Engineering, PhD, Expected graduation: 2022, Gender: female, Pronouns: she/her/hers, Age: 25, Sexual Orientation: Lesbian, Nationality: USA

Hours available per week: 3

Why do you want to join these committees? What do you bring to the table?

I have served as an EECS REFS for going-on three years, the Graduate Community Fellow working with the Violence Prevention and Response office, and founded THRIVE in EECS (Tools for Honing Resilience and Inspiring Voices of Empowerment) to support mental health and diversity, equity, and inclusion at MIT (www.thrive-eecs.mit.edu).

What do you think these committees should do? What do you want to achieve through these committees?

I am interested in serving on the Campus Climate, Discrimination, and Misconduct committee. I care deeply about the MIT community, and hope to contribute to ongoing efforts to bolster support for and empower underrepresented groups at the institute. I believe this committee could, among other efforts, focus on recruiting processes and application assistance programs to bolster representation across MIT. Implementing bi-directional feedback forms to facilitate structured, productive conversations between graduate students and advisors could work to empower graduate students. Enhancing support networks - either via mentorship programs or multiple academic advisors per student etc. - would combat isolation and ensure no student falls through the cracks. Often DEI work falls on those who have experienced instances of acute discrimination, which is simply unfair. Distributing this work and holding ourselves and others accountable for fostering an inclusive environment is essential.

~~Michael Forsuelo (withdrawn)~~

Michael Smithers

Demographics: Sloan School of Management, Masters, Expected graduation: 2021, Black, Male, 28, He/Him/His, USA

Hours available per week: 4

Why do you want to join these committees? What do you bring to the table?

I believe having a fully integrated student body means one that is connected and has a formalized say in the proceedings of the administration. As a future graduate of MIT it is important for me to attend a University that consistently iterates to become the best version of itself possible. In my past work I have had experience facilitating session on Diversity and Inclusion and Conflict Management within teams. As a funder in the education landscape in New Orleans, I was responsible for synthesizing many community voices into a clear narrative to support our decision making; this usually involved working through tough feedback on strategic direction and ensuring that decisions reflected the communities the proposed solution impacted. I believe these skillsets apply to both committees as it will be important to have a working theory of action, but it will be critically important to make time and space for the larger student body to have an opportunity to weigh in on the direction.

What do you think these committees should do? What do you want to achieve through these committees?

Outside Engagements committees should utilize it's time understanding the current entities MIT is affiliated with, and support them in institutionalizing a values-based document that will support MIT's decision to engage with specific entities. Second, there should be a formal document that explains to outside partners what engagement with MIT means and how the values of the wider institutions and subunits are the minimum requirements for any future partnership. Third, there should be clear points of engagement on campus whether that be student or faculty, or both, that provide opportunities for all to learn about MIT values in practice and understand the impact of productive partnerships. Fourth, there should be a clear place that highlights how MIT has arrived at this point, detailing the clear lessons learned in the past from fruitful and unsuccessful engagements.

Nicholas Selby

Demographics: School of Engineering, PhD, Expected graduation: 2020, male, white, he, 25, straight, USA

Hours available per week: 1

Why do you want to join these committees? What do you bring to the table?

I've done a lot of research into how MIT and other universities have tried to tackle these problems in the past. I have a repository of literature and solutions ready for proposal and discussion within the committee that can, if necessary, serve as a powerful starting point to the final report.

What do you think these committees should do? What do you want to achieve through these committees?

Propose well-researched solutions and engage in activism to enact them

Pedro Reynolds-Cuellar

Demographics: School of Architecture and Planning, PhD, Expected graduation: 2022, 38 years old, Latino, father of two. He/him/his.

Hours available per week: 8

Why do you want to join these committees? What do you bring to the table?

I have been at MIT for 7 years. First as an observer, as the husband of an MIT staff member I was able to access some of MIT's offering. Later as a staff member, where I taught classes, advised students, and lead projects. Currently, as a graduate student for 3 years now. During all this time I have served in MIT committees; still serve with the CSL. I have heard countless student grievances, countless instructors, lecturers, staff, administrators, leadership, and professors grievances. I have lead student organizing myself from within my own department with the Media Lab Student Advocacy Group. I am honestly tired of all the unfairness, bias, harassment, and inequity that you can witness at MIT. A lot of this is solvable with sound policy and increased participation, among other strategies. I want to serve in this committee because I can't stand these injustices anymore, and I want to leave MIT knowing that I did as much as I could to make it the place it can be.

What do you think these committees should do? What do you want to achieve through these committees?

The first things this committee should do is work hard to not be "just another committee". I want this committee to be know for exceeding the influence prior committees have had. With regards to the charge this committee will have, I would like to prioritize surfacing the extent of the issues at hand, as well as highlighting other issues exceeding the charge, but equally important to address the current culture crisis MIT faces. I am personally interested in engaging in guerrilla strategies to fins out how all stakeholders see these issues can be resolved, what their roots are, and what are best ways for us all as a community to have conversations around these issues and propose ways forward. Beyond providing concrete recommendations, I want this committee to help MIT understand how to better engage its community in together approaching these problems under a set of values we all agree upon.

Peter Haine

Demographics: School of Science, PhD, Expected graduation: 2021, Hispanic & white; They/Them/Their or He/Him/His; 25

Hours available per week: 7

Why do you want to join these committees? What do you bring to the table?

I have felt for a long time that the math department isn't particularly engaged with the rest of the MIT community. Additionally, there are really severe diversity issues in math in general, as well as at MIT. I'd like to both become more engaged with the large community on these and related issues and hopefully be able to work with other departments to include mathematics more fully in making STEM a more diverse and welcoming place. The math community in general does not discuss diversity and other community issues openly (e.g., the Epstein scandal) openly and is like to try to work with the greater community to help change this.

What do you think these committees should do? What do you want to achieve through these committees?

I hope that the committee can help MIT set and uphold much higher standards and best practices in all policies and practices in the institute, especially those that affect the climate of the institute and women, LGBTQ individuals, racial minorities, and other underrepresented groups.

Sammuel Mendez

Demographics: School of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences, Masters, Expected graduation: 2020, I am a queer, first-gen student who grew up in a Mexican-American immigrant community, interested in how to shape the university to better support success for all students

Hours available per week: 4

Why do you want to join these committees? What do you bring to the table?

I have a lot of experience personally supporting people through difficult times in academic settings concerning power imbalances, fraught relationships with advisers, and various forms of discrimination. I know there is a lot of knowledge within the graduate student community about what's wrong with various pieces of the system and what are potential solutions. I aim to bring my qualitative research background and my own lived experience and connections with marginalized graduate student communities to help make the system work better for everyone.

What do you think these committees should do? What do you want to achieve through these committees?

I think these committees should go on a listening tour of the various departments around MIT and facilitate conversations about hurdles and negative environmental factors that students care a lot about. We should combine this firsthand research with literature reviews and conversations with groups at other universities to find some potential solutions to bring forth to the administration.