MIT in Transition

Student Perspectives on MIT's Legacy Strengths, Emerging Challenges, and Future Directions

Extracurriculars and Community Life Briefing Paper
of the
Student Advisory Board to MIT's 16th President

31 January 2005

This document is the second of three specialized documents prepared by members of the Student Advisory Board (SAB) for MIT's 16th President, Dr. Susan Hockfield. It is intended to support the February 2nd luncheon to be held with the President. The remaining documents in this series, as well as input from open forum discussions and the luncheons, will culminate in a more comprehensive report by the SAB to the President.

"MIT is dedicated to providing its students with an education that combines rigorous academic study and the excitement of discovery with the support and intellectual stimulation of a diverse campus community. We seek to develop in each member of the MIT community the ability and passion to work wisely, creatively, and effectively for the betterment of humankind."

-- MIT's Mission Statement

The MIT community plays a fundamental role in the development of individuals that are capable of using their talent and knowledge to fulfill the Institute's mission. MIT's living groups, student organizations, communal facilities, and student life programs all play a fundamental role in creating this rich educational environment. The following topics analyze the community's role in student life and suggest areas for future improvement:

1. **Community Culture and Standards** – Institute culture shapes the daily lives as well as the personalities of students, and is firmly tied to the living groups and organizations to which students belong. The scope and importance of students' choice in pursuing their own interests in each of these aspects, and the self-developed and self-owned nature of the culture that results, are the strengths that underlie MIT's school spirit.

2. **Extracurricular and Community Resources** – while student culture is largely shaped by students themselves, culture would not survive without the programs, financing, and general structure that the Institute provides. All are in some way scarce goods -- there is only a finite amount of money, space, and time to allocate to student needs. Given that these resources are allocated for students, it only makes sense that students, both undergraduate and graduate, be involved in every step of the process.

3. **Personal Development** – while much of students' personal development takes place informally through daily interactions, much of this informal development is facilitated by MIT's "ownership culture," in which students assume responsibility for managing their lives. In addition, more formal residence-based advising and mentorship programs can effectively supplement this training and ensure a safe environment for such growth.

4. **Balance** – achieving a balance between work and life is essential to personal and professional success anywhere, and the Institute is no exception. MIT students oftentimes lose perspective of lifestyle balance when consumed by the intensity of their work and activities. Our community will need to promote the development of balanced lifestyles to breed responsible graduates and global citizens.

1. Community Culture and Standards

This introduction to the background, key aspects and standards of MIT student culture has been divided into the following sections:

- IHTFP & Intensity: School Spirit at MIT
- Choice and MIT's Ownership Culture
- The Role of Housing in MIT Student Culture
- The Role of Activities and Student Groups in MIT Student Culture
- Risk and Experimentation in MIT Culture

IHTFP & Intensity: School Spirit at MIT
It is a well-known adage that members of elite groups which must undergo rigorous training tend to be more stressed and even resentful during the training phase, but simultaneously more proud of their achievements and tightly bound to other members -- even those with whom the training was not performed concurrently. At MIT, this dichotomy is commonly represented by the acronym IHTFP, whose most common two expansions represent the opposing ends of this spectrum: "I Hate This F***ing Place" and "I Have Truly Found Paradise." It is not advisable to consider one translation without the other, and indeed it would not be correct to view the expression itself solely within the isolation of MIT: unknown even to most MIT students, the phrase has been used at other institutions such as the US Air Force Academy since at least 1956 and remains so today.   Though it is not unique to the Institute, it remains a valuable insight into the holistically unique culture of which it is a part.

MIT students frequently feel heavily invested in MIT beyond their own financial and educational stake. They feel that the Institute's successes reflect on them and theirs reflect on the Institute. In this respect, the IHTFP phenomenon is a mirror of the range of feelings many MIT students experience about themselves during their time here. The intensity of the Institute drives students to personal successes that give them great pride, and seemingly interminable, grinding slogs that can make students question their fitness even to be in attendance. These extremes – and everything in between -- contribute to an esprit de corps that can be hard for outsiders to gauge, often appearing sardonic or absurdist; for example, MIT's distinctive gold beaver ring is colloquially referred to within the Institute as the "Brass Rat."

The intensity of both the curriculum and the strength of feeling for MIT is legendary -- as the popular saying goes, "An MIT education is like taking a drink from a fire hose." As a result, MIT students have a reputation for both working hard and playing hard.   Neglecting to eat, sleep and bathe can be commonplace -- often out of necessity, during final project periods, but also during "leisure" activities, such as during IAP's 3-day marathon Mystery Hunt. While this can sometimes be a matter of concern, it is a manifestation of the remarkable passion MIT students demonstrate towards both their work and their other interests. It leads them to take on challenges that others would ignore, but can also lead to emotional stress and questions of self-worth.

Choice and MIT's Ownership Culture
 MIT students care very deeply about their freedom to select and manage many aspects of their Institute life: where they live, how they eat, their social events and other activities. Informed choice allows students to find their appropriate niche within the intensity of the Institute: to adjust their comfort level at a pace that suits each individual. Students believe that not only must these freedoms be preserved, but significant effort must be directed towards ensuring that incoming students have the best possible information and environment to make the decisions that will, to a large degree, determine the support networks they will rely on during their time here.

In recent years there has appeared to be a line of thought among MIT management that has alarmed students: that student culture at MIT is insufficiently focused on MIT as a whole, and instead too compartmentalized into narrowly interacting subcultures. As a result, students perceive that their ability to make important choices, and the resources necessary to make those choices wisely, has been limited in favor of emphasizing cultural structure at the school or class level. Students see this as short-sighted in light of the very intensity and breadth of choice that is available. It is easy to feel, before classes begin, that the selection of housing and student groups is of minor importance, because there will be plenty of opportunity to spend time at other residences and groups. But in reality, time rapidly becomes a scarce resource and an all-inclusive lifestyle

cannot be supported. Students believe that it is extremely important for MIT to continue to recognize and support the ability of students to take control of and inject their passion into their lives outside of class.

This is not to say that MIT's maze of opportunities is not without drawbacks which should be monitored. Isolationism and self-segregation remain causes for concern at MIT: students can become self-absorbed and unaware that other people's situations are in many ways not so different. More effort needs to be made to identify subcultures that should be brought into contact, and then to find means of achieving this. The "grassroots" support networks that students create for themselves are usually highly effective, but sometimes are less so -- the difficulties of providing institutionalized support for activities and individuals, and in identifying the cases in which students are in need of assistance, remain challenges that need to be addressed.

The Role of Housing in MIT Student Culture
It is hard to overstate the importance of housing – encompassing dormitories, fraternities, sororities and independent living groups (FSILGs) -- to student life at MIT. Students' living selection ultimately fulfills a number of needs beyond simple accommodation: 24-hour support network, social nexus, sanctuary, study hall, environment to learn independence and self-sufficiency, and, particularly in those cases such as FSILGs in which selection criteria must be met, the need to belong. For many students, their choice of living group will be one of the most important decisions they make at MIT, on par with choosing a major. In addition to different prevailing attitudes and cultures, different living groups offer variations in the amount of responsibility they give to and expect from residents, and resources for social and educational activities, such as house taxes, facilities, tutoring, and student labor. Many living options also assist their residents in forming strong bonds with alumni from years well beyond the residents' own tenancy. These alumni affirm that the bonds formed from living together are stronger than any other.

When residence selection is mentioned, many people think of the process formerly known as "rush". Since the implementation of the decision to house all freshmen on campus, FSILG rush no longer exists in its prior form. Many FSILGs have struggled to maintain recruitment numbers under the new housing system, and the ones who have been successful still face enormous challenges to maintain their community with their youngest members living elsewhere. To dormitory residents "rush" also refers to dormitory selection, and is therefore an equally important process. Dormitory residents are extremely concerned that the removal of FSILG rush from the orientation period has caused "dorm rush" to be neglected, as students will have to fill the dormitories anyway. A lack of official support and adequate time for dorm rush leads students to worry that incoming students will underestimate the importance of residence selection, and that the residential cultures will suffer from this lack of concern for optimal placement. At the same time, FSILG rush needs to be supported as these cultures form a unique and important counterpart to MIT's dormitory system. Students in all living group types are worried that the increased capacity in the housing system and the freshmen on campus decision have turned residence selection into more of a competition for bodies, rather than a process of finding the best place for each individual, and that in fact there is now a dangerous motivation to ensure first year students do not become so complacent during their compulsory dormitory year that they do not consider other options.

Despite their distinct cultural identities, many MIT living groups are not monocultures. The subcultures within them, especially the larger dormitories, are critical to the safety and support zones that students find themselves immediately surrounded with. For example, the halls or entries within a particular dormitory may have a specific theme or identity, such as the halls of East Campus or the Language Houses at New House; in other residences, the subcultures are less defined by geography. These thematic elements often manifest themselves in shared activities such as social events and cooking groups. This type of cultural difference also manifests itself across the type of residence -- within a particular class of living group, there is typically a distinction according to the generally different expectations and desires the residents have from their university experience. This seems to be both a result and a contributor to the cultural distinction between the east and west campus dormitories: students initially gravitate to the side that best represents their ideal MIT experience, and then set about making sure that it indeed conforms to that ideal. This gravitation causes students to be suspicious of "social engineering" approaches to residential culture: since people will be attracted to situations that appeal to them personally, attempts to force them to do otherwise are unlikely to be successful. Similarly, demonstrating allegiance to one's living group is a natural outcome, and should be thought of as a counterpart to demonstrating allegiance to MIT in general, rather than being in conflict with it.

MIT's living groups also have a variety of house traditions. Traditions are important to recognize at MIT; not all traditions are good, but much of MIT's rich cultural identity comes from rituals and traditions set up by its former students, and these positive legacies should be preserved and encouraged. Traditions serve to draw current residents into shared activities, and promote connections with alumni. Alumni engagement assists in

mediating the effects of "institutional memory" - without it, a valuable tradition may only have to miss one class cycle to be lost forever. A relatively small amount of support and recognition may be all that is needed to entirely prevent this occurrence. Similarly, since so much of a living group's cultural structure is implemented by the house government, it is important to provide support and encouragement to the individuals who volunteer their time and energy for these positions, in order to foster an environment in which there is an expectation of participation by all residents. Since the freshmen on campus decision, this has been an emerging problem for dormitory culture: many of the people who would otherwise continue on in residence to mentor the next wave of students are instead being siphoned off to FSILGs, leading to something of a leadership vacuum, and many first year students are hesitant to fully participate -- or feel like they truly belong -- during their initial year, as they know they will be leaving at the end of the year. Conversely, FSILGs have lost one quarter of the time per student available for full immersion in their culture, and subsequent transfer of responsibility for perpetuating that culture. Some affiliated freshmen also complain that being forced to live on campus does little to enhance their experience, as some dormitories may not offer the level of community or underclassman-upperclassman interactions that they can attain in their FSILG.

The Role of Activities and Student Groups in MIT Student Culture
Student groups are another significant part of MIT's student-owned culture. Students are wholly responsible for the success or failure of these activities, and their dedication to the former is often nothing short of astounding. Some groups might better be thought of as fully functioning small businesses; the skills students learn in staffing and operating them extend to management, budgeting and accounting, manufacturing, marketing, athletic prowess and more, as well as a host of valuable cross-cultural exposures. In addition to imparting valuable real-world experience, student groups build the confidence of their members and leaders, rather than the "learned helplessness" that frequently results from having activities organized by paid staff.

Student groups tend to be the main mechanism other than the residential system by which students develop social networks and make contact with one another. At MIT, associations tend to be formed elsewhere and carried over into class, rather than the other way round. When this is combined with their passion for the subject matter, it is easy to see why students take such pride in their activity groups and aggressively recruit new members. Students are aware that everyone at MIT has limited time resources, and the only way to survive and thrive is to attract new blood. The result is a pleasant departure from the exclusivity and elitism that too often characterizes group "marketing" -- everyone wants you to be a part of what they are doing, for their own sake as well as yours.

One reason that this method of doing things remains sustainable is that the intensity of the Institute carries over into the extra-curricular region. MIT's intensity is not just about the rigorous academics that are imposed; on the contrary, the students tend to have surplus intensity within themselves that needs an outlet. The largest threats to MIT's student groups stem not from lack of interest, but from over-commitment. It is thus very important that MIT provide adequate support and recognition for the many students that keep the myriad organizations in shape.

Risk and Experimentation in MIT Culture
When choice is a principal element in the culture, not everything students choose is necessarily without risk. The innovative minds that are drawn to MIT also tend to be those types who are interested in "pushing the envelope" of what can be achieved, both in the academic setting and in their outside interests. Students can learn extensively from the unstructured exercise of concepts learned in class, as well as from each other. Some of the remarkable feats of engineering to be found at MIT are built outside the laboratories or the classroom, in unsupervised and possibly less than ideal conditions. In such situations, students are free to make creative mistakes and learn from them without the limited feedback of evaluation or grading.

Fortunately, there is strong social pressure at MIT to make smart decisions and approach risks in an intelligent manner. It is understood within the student body that caution and forethought are the underpinnings of the responsibility and independent status that MIT students have historically been allowed to take on. Risk-taking should be, and at MIT often is, an informed choice. Projects are planned, safety "sanity checks" are made, and more experienced students act as mentors for those approaching new experiences. In this way, knowledge and skills are passed from one generation of students to the next. In addition to informal peer group monitoring, student organizations such as the Interfraternity Council (IFC) frequently have formal risk management systems in place to protect their members.

A prime example of the conscientious self-regulation within MIT culture is hacker ethics. Both senses of the term hacking -- the practice of exploring and pulling technically challenging pranks -- are concerned with

exploring the limits of what is possible. Accessing difficult to reach places, finding spaces forgotten since they were constructed, and thinking of creative ways to amuse the Institute community, figuring out how to implement them, and doing so in a grand and stealthy fashion are envelope-pushing behaviors and not without risk. These traditional activities are of great importance to the Institute's culture and image, and students recognize that in our increasingly risk-averse and litigious society they can not be sustained if performed without due diligence. Hackers follow a strict self-imposed code of ethics that are set down in writing and distributed to new students in a variety of forms. Hackers are required to leave no permanent damage, and to ensure their hacks are safe for the intended duration of the spectacle. Large hacks are accompanied by letters to facilities staff detailing the construction of the hack and how it can be most expeditiously disassembled. Furthermore, hacks that are not removed by the authorities are typically discreetly removed by the hackers themselves after an appropriate time window. The hacking community understands that recklessness and ill-preparedness benefit no-one, so the peer code is strictly adhered to.

It is true that students, even at MIT, are not always fully aware of the nature and scope of the risks that they take. Students acknowledge that there have been instances of poor judgment among their number. We do not call for the absence of supervision or accountability. But we sincerely believe that students come to MIT to educate themselves as much as they come here to receive an education, and that this process must include the right to experiment, take risks, make mistakes, and grow from them; that they are intelligent enough to take responsibility for their own investigations, and that they should be offered support and guidance in these endeavors rather than arbitrary or blanket restrictions.

2. Extracurricular and Community Resources

Economic Stewardship
The economic and physical resources of The Institute are finite, and we are constantly faced with demands for more space and more money for student extracurricular and community resources. Both undergraduate and graduate students seek further input in the setting of the Institute's economic priorities for these funds -- when we can't have everything we want, we would at least like to voice input in selecting which things we can't have. We seek both student membership on resource allocation committees and broader student input for wide-reaching policy decisions.

Community Housing Priorities: Conflicting Messages
The vast and diverse collection of student life programs have ambitious and sometimes conflicting goals, and currently there is little prioritization of these goals. Administrators continually preach the virtues of student community, yet the current break-even goal of housing has resulted in near-market rates for graduate housing, forcing many graduate students far off-campus. Housing costs continue to hamper the formation of strong graduate student community ties, and hinder graduate student recruitment. The Institute needs to develop and communicate a clear vision of how to balance the competing virtues of community and financial independence.

Student Real Estate
Student real estate and student controlled spaces are in short supply at The Institute, and allocation issues abound. Nonetheless, we are concerned that the Institute's desire for profit substantially reduces both the availability and utility of these spaces. The Stratton Student Center (W20) exemplifies these problems. Coffeehouse, a long-time late-night study and support option for students from all over campus, was closed several years back due to being unprofitable – and the Institute was not willing to step in and cover the cost of this existing support network.

Similarly, the desire for exorbitant rents in the Student Center has pushed out a wide range of vendors: Newbury Comics, Toscanini's, Arrow Street Crepes, and even MIT's own Athena Consulting. At the moment, only Alpine Bagel and LaVerde's remain, and students seeking computer support must trek up Massachusetts Avenue to N42. As food and support options have been driven from the student center, MIT administrators can be seen bemoaning the lack of "support resources" and "community" at the Institute.

Health and Wellness
The wellness of both undergraduate and graduate student populations is dependent on the efficacy of MIT's medical services. There exists a considerable lack of awareness of available support networks and services, and many students complain of excessive wait times. Concerned about mental health, MIT Medical sponsors a series of student-groups including MedLinks and SaveTFP, in an attempt to reduce stress and foster community. Improving student awareness of existing programs, particularly within living groups, will encourage more students to take advantage of these services.

Orientation
The arrival of new students on campus in August represents an expansion of our existing community, but recent orientation trends have hindered new student integration into the MIT family. Official "ice breaking" events and mandatory lectures have replaced the previously free-form "explore the Institute" environment. As a result of reducing choice at such an early stage in their MIT experience, students complain that current Institute orientation is both patronizing and ineffective. Oftentimes, disinterested students choose to skip these seemingly over-manufactured activities, detracting from the overall spirit of Orientation.

In each case, we recognize a trend in MIT student resource management: attempt to generate revenue, drive out or destroy existing support resources, and then try and enact more expensive, top-down support solutions. We recognize funding is finite, but it makes more sense, from an economic and community standpoint, to embrace and extend existing resources rather than destroy them to generate revenue. Furthermore, we feel that empowering students through direct governance or the use of student input usually yields policies that generate the student support necessary for success.

3. Personal Development

Graduate mentorship in living groups - the GRT/RA system
MIT's system of placing graduate students in residence with undergraduates in a pastoral care role (mentoring, emergency response and social support) seems to be somewhat unique. Many other universities employ a system of formal peer advising -- hiring fellow undergraduate residents to monitor and advise their halls. MIT's system has numerous advantages, including the increased maturity, experience level and academic focus of graduate students, and the reduced stress level for the advisor compared with an undergraduate who has a more difficult task balancing the need to simultaneously act as both a peer and a supervisor.

The Graduate Resident Tutor (GRT) system in dormitories is well defined, including a Tutor Roles and Responsibilities document that attempts to clarify their sometimes confusing jobs as role models and respondents but not police. GRTs are immediately subordinate to their housemasters, which generally works well by allowing each residence team a flexible approach to dealing with issues in their houses. Occasionally, however, housemasters and GRTs come into disagreement in areas which are not specifically covered by the Roles and Responsibilities document; in these cases, due to the close hierarchical relationship between housemasters and GRTs, some GRTs feel they have few resources for arbitration.

The Resident Advisor (RA) system in FSILGs is less well defined. As there are no housemasters within FSILGs, the role of the RA is largely decided by the RA and the house residents themselves. In some instances the RA can be viewed as a "big brother or sister" to the undergraduates, and in that context a resource for them to approach when they experience problems. In other houses, the role is more formal. The RA may work with the house officers to make sure the house operates safely, or the process of house management may proceed with less involvement of the RA. Some students believe that the roles and responsibilities of FSILG RAs should be codified in a document similar to the one defining those of the GRTs, and that more resources should be available for training and support of FSILG RAs.

Students believe that one of the defining characteristics of the GRT/RA system that enables it to work so well is the trust that is carefully built up between GRTs/RAs and undergraduates by making clear that they are not placed in residence to police or inform on their charges. MIT should be careful to maintain this bond of trust by making clear that the role of the GRTs/RAs continues to be one of leading by example, not one of discipline and enforcement.

Peer mentorship through self-governance
MIT's living groups, varsity teams, and other student activities provide opportunities for students to develop interpersonal and leadership skills. In fact, many students later feel that their extracurricular activities/living situation defined their MIT experiences. In order for these skills to be properly developed, students need a significant degree of autonomy in managing the affairs of their house, team or group, without being subject to excessive micromanagement from the Institute. The results are leadership, organizational, and social abilities that prepare them to be effective for the remainder of their lives.

To a large extent this is currently the case -- MIT students manage groups that have budgets in excess of $100,000 per annum, and co-ordinate events such as the IAP Mystery Hunt that involve hundreds of participants including people who never attended MIT. Dormitory and FSILG rush chairs run comprehensive orientation schedules that rival MIT's official orientation in terms of planning and attendee satisfaction. Many FSILGs have student house managers whose duties resemble those of employed house managers at dormitories, as well as officers that manage everything from finances to social calendars, community activities, and recruitment programs. It would be difficult if not impossible to replicate in the classroom the education gained by assuming responsibilities such as these.

However, students do feel that in some respects the MIT bureaucracy has begun to encroach upon their freedom to learn all aspects of managing these activities. For example, MIT student groups are no longer allowed to maintain outside bank accounts. While this was in response to a significant case of fraud, it effectively removes an important aspect of financial planning -- management of funds reserves and interest income -- from the experience, and thus it is possible that a less blanket response may have been appropriate. In general, students feel that the leadership and management skills that are developed through self-governance outweigh the risks associated with such "silent partner" supervision by the Institute. They therefore believe that MIT should be unequivocal about its support for student self-governance of living groups and activity organizations.

4. Balance

Undergraduate Work/Life Balance
"Work, friends, sleep: pick two." MIT students have traditionally adopted this mantra during their undergraduate years, and for many students, these choices remain a reality for survival at the Institute. MIT students too often sacrifice sleep, exercise, social activity, and other forms of personal care in order to enhance their educational experience. The consequences of this lifestyle imbalance can be far-reaching. Sleep deprivation can endanger students' physical health. Furthermore, stress resulting from being overworked and under-rested, combined with limited social interactions, can seriously compromise students' mental health. When individuals focus on their work and lose perspective of those around them, they are also less likely to identify fellow members of the MIT community that may be susceptible to problems such as depression. Losing touch with non-academic facets of life can induce even more academic stress, contributing to the vicious cycle of imbalance. Finally, an imbalanced lifestyle can sometimes breed one-dimensional personalities; when too much emphasis is placed on a narrow set of academic tasks, students fail to develop life skills. MIT graduates will first need to lead balanced personal lives before they can reap the rewards of professional success.

To develop solutions that promote work/life balance, we must first consider the sources that promote imbalance. The MIT fire hose places substantial academic pressure on students. While rigorous academics promote technical competence and a strong work ethic, students often struggle just to keep up with the pace and the pressure. In order to complete what can be a daunting plate of assignments, students stay up late into the night and skip numerous athletic and social opportunities. While choices must be made and tradeoffs exist, students can only be "hosed" so much before the detrimental effects outweigh the benefits. But the MIT fire hose is not the only source of pressure. The hardworking MIT culture can, at times, border on masochism. Many students compete to outwork each other, as the difficulty of a person's course load is often worn as a badge of honor. While a healthy dose of competition from fellow students provides a challenge and an incentive that promotes achievement, MIT's culture promotes a form of peer pressure on many. Students feel the need to constantly work harder, even at the expense of personal well-being. It can, however, be difficult to separate MIT's culture from its people. Since the people help create the culture, one cannot ignore the fact that MIT's students tend to be internally driven and place academic achievement at the top of their priorities.

MIT students do not believe that enforced limitations on their academic choices are an appropriate solution to this lifestyle imbalance. While credit restrictions at other institutions attempt to promote lifestyle balance, MIT students enjoy having the opportunity to push themselves to their respective limits. However, some students feel that the academic environment forces them involuntarily into an imbalanced lifestyle. Professors and academic deans need to ensure that unnecessary academic pressure from unreasonable workloads or harsh testing is reduced. In addition, the Institute should help students preserve the entities that allow them to develop perspective and work/life balance. These entities include the intimate living groups that allow many students to maintain sanity and balance in their lives.

Global Citizenship
Engineering curricula have a reputation for producing technical competence but sociopolitical ignorance. On the contrary, MIT's mission is to promote the fields of science, engineering, the arts, *and* their application to the world. While MIT continues to graduate successful scientists and engineers, its edge over peer institutions evaporates in areas of global citizenship. To be fair, many MIT students are politically active – recent City Council election candidates have even included several MIT graduates. However, the MIT campus is generally viewed as politically apathetic and a socially inactive. While many students do become involved in the world and the local community, these students are too often the exception rather than the rule. Politics often becomes a private hobby rather than an interest for students to share, discuss, and upon which to act.

The reasons for the general political apathy include the academic focus, lack of personal balance, and the system of peer rewards. For most MIT students, the sciences and engineering dominate their academic experience. While all students take an occasional social science or humanities course that explores global or social issues, a vast majority of their time is spent on developing competence in a single scientific area. In effect, they put on "academic blinders" and fail to gain appreciation for a variety of non-scientific disciplines. Also, when students work too hard on their problems sets or research projects, they lose the free time they could otherwise use to explore other areas. Students socialize less, attend fewer guest lectures, and neglect to read newspapers, compounding their social ignorance and further entrenching themselves in the MIT "bubble." Finally, the MIT culture does not generally promote global citizenship. The system of peer rewards

is firmly connected to achievement in scientific and engineering endeavors; it is generally considered less "prestigious" to work for the Peace Corps than to work for Microsoft. In addition, the social sciences are viewed as a necessary hurdle rather than as an intrinsic area for exploration and application.

The resulting lack of exposure to broader issues produces many students who are politically unaware and unprepared for global citizenship. Too often, MIT graduates dominate technical positions while graduates of other institutions gain the upper hand in positions involving people and policies. Graduates lacking a global perspective will be less likely to fulfill MIT's goal of applying engineering to society.

Graduate Work/Family Balance: The Unique Needs of Student-Parents
Most of the 'Balance' section discusses how students benefit from activities *outside* their studies or teaching. In this sub-section of the document we address a unique but oftentimes ignored segment of the graduate population: student-parents.. The great challenge for a student-parent is to find a way to make all the substantial existing commitments work. Student-parents balance four fundamental obligations: research/teaching, spouse, children, and self.

Maintaining passion and dedication to each of these four elements is not easy for student-parents. This group recognizes that the time demands for each of these commitments guarantees that something always ends up being sacrificed. The financial responsibility of supporting a family on a student stipend also contributes to the burden shouldered by student-parents. The atmosphere of academia at MIT is not family friendly. Some students openly critique professors for taking time to be with their families and expound that being married, let alone with children, significantly compromises one's academic career. When professors choose to spend the weekend in the lab rather than watching their kid's soccer games, they send a strong message. Academics and families don't mix. It is not surprising that many student-parents leave graduate school convinced never to return to academics.

But many family experts argue that in some ways, graduate school is a great time to be a parent. Students have some of the greatest schedule flexibility in the working world. Kids help keep the stress of graduate school failures and successes in perspective. Having children earlier in your career also provides more stability later in life. Programs that should be augmented include the MIT Childcare Scholarship Program. Childcare opportunities are scarce and hugely unaffordable for graduate students, preventing many women, as well as men with working wives, from even attending the Institute. Additionally, graduate students could benefit from increased awareness of the under-utilized emergency discretionary funds, which offer critical short-term support for families who need it.