National Academies’ Committee on Women in Science, Engineering, and Medicine

Report of the Leadership and Engagement Working Group

I. Charge to Leadership and Engagement Working Group

The Working Group on Leadership and Engagement was asked to review the National Academies’ Committee on Women in Science, Engineering, and Medicine’s proposals regarding institutional leadership and community engagement. In developing its recommendations, the Working Group considered: the Committee’s underlying findings; MIT’s goal of eliminating sexual harassment at the Institute; MIT leadership’s prior initiatives and communications regarding sexual harassment; MIT’s current community engagement practices; and the leadership initiatives and community-engagement models of MIT’s peer institutions.¹

The Working Group’s charges, and the sections of this Report where each charge is addressed, are:

1. Describe opportunities for MIT leadership to be more explicit or visible in conveying MIT’s goal of preventing and reducing sexual harassment, including encouraging reporting and progress made. (Response in Section IV-A)
2. Identify any training opportunities for MIT leadership and the larger MIT community on conflict resolution, mediation, negotiation, and de-escalation. (Response in Section IV-B)
3. Describe ways community leaders at all levels can be utilized to foster a climate where reporting is encouraged and sexual harassment is not tolerated, including climate survey practices. (Response in Section IV-C)

II. Composition of Leadership and Engagement Working Group

The members of the Leadership and Engagement Working Group are:

- Alyce Johnson, Special Advisor, Office of the Provost, Co-Chair of Working Group
- Maryanne Kirkbride, MindHandHeart Executive Administrator, Co-Chair of Working Group
- Ramona Allen, Vice President for Human Resources
- Chris Bourg, Director of Libraries
- Corinne Carpenter, Postdoc, Chemical Engineering
- Professor Craig Carter, Materials Science and Engineering
- Meghan Davis ’21, Biological Engineering
- Mahi Elango ’20, Electrical Engineering and Computer Science
- Leah Ellis, Postdoc, Materials Science and Engineering
- Ken Goldsmith, Assistant Dean for Finance and Administration, School of Architecture and Planning
- Kim Haberlin, Senior Advisor, Office of the Chancellor

¹ The Committee elected to defer peer institution assessments, considering it to be more valuable to gain deeper and more specific feedback on a targeted set of potential options.
III. Working Group’s Process

The Leadership and Engagement Working Group met nine times as a full group and convened separately in three subgroups to address the three elements of the charge. The Working Group defined “leadership” to mean members of Academic Council, school and department leaders, student group leaders, and faculty with additional roles that bring them into regular contact with students outside the classroom or lab (e.g., heads of house).

IV. Recommendations

A. Overall recommendations for changes to visibility in conveying MIT’s prevention goals, including encouraging reporting and progress made

The visibility subgroup approached its recommendations along two vectors: 1). Opportunities and venues for increased visibility and, 2). Potential content for messaging.

For opportunities and venues, the group felt it was important to consider proactive and regular messaging across platforms such as the Faculty Newsletter, The Tech, department communications, and public events.

For content, the group decided it was important that messaging reinforce the importance of civility; affirm that reporting is honorable and brave; be clear about zero tolerance for assault and harassment and be intentional about preventing microaggressions. The group noted that tone matters – messaging must be passionate and authentic, and be coupled with tangible, clear action steps.

The visibility subgroup recommends:

- **Central communications support**: Talking points/key messages about these issues should be developed and distributed to senior leaders at the start of every academic year and as necessary thereafter. The President’s Office should be responsible for development and distribution.
- **Direct communications from school leadership**: At the start of every academic year, school deans and department heads should write to their respective communities about the importance of civility and creating a culture free from all forms of sexual harassment. These messages should also include a commitment to sustaining this work throughout the academic year; staunch support for anyone who reports harassment; and accountability and consequences for anyone whose behavior create harassing, disrespectful environments.
  - Student and post doc leaders should send similar messages to their constituents at the start of every academic year.
• **Orientation**: Senior officers, school and student leaders, and faculty with additional student-facing roles (e.g., heads of house) should attend undergraduate and graduate orientation programming about these issues. They can leverage orientation programming to set an important tone with new members of the community and, in these settings, can have authentic conversations about these topics.

• **Consistent Reinforcement**: To ensure these important messages are conveyed throughout the academic year, the following steps should be taken:
  
  o Launch a public awareness campaign featuring faculty, student, and post doc leaders. The campaign, which can leverage posters, digital signage, videos, and other platforms, could be about values (e.g., “As president of the UA, I value kindness and respect” or lessons-learned (e.g., in a faculty member’s voice: “I used to think it was okay to hug my students. I’ve learned that may make some uncomfortable. I now ask students if they’d like a hug or a handshake.”))
  
  o The President’s annual harassment policy letter should include a link to the Title IX and Bias Response (T9BR) annual report to convey how seriously MIT takes reporting and complaint handling. (*The subgroup on training – see IV-B below – made the same recommendation, and suggested that other relevant data collected through campus-wide surveys be included in the letter to illustrate that senior leadership takes this issue seriously and will not tolerate a climate where sexual misconduct and gender-based harassment exists.*)
  
  o Communications from the President – speeches and writing – could always include messaging about the value of a respectful, kind community striving to prevent gender and sexual harassment. Faculty, student, and post doc leaders could also consider this approach for all communications. (*Related recommendation from subgroup on training in IV-B below.*)
  
  o Regular columns in the Faculty Newsletter and *The Tech* from senior faculty, student, and post doc leaders could reinforce the importance of preventing and responding to misconduct and harassment in our work and residential communities.
  
  o The President’s Office should charge campus experts with organizing and leading an annual Gender Equity Summit for the entire MIT community. (*Related recommendation from subgroup on training in IV-B below.*)
  
  o The President’s Office should elevate the T9BR and Violence Prevention and Response (VPR) Change Makers Awards:
    
    ▪ All senior faculty leaders, student, and post doc leaders should be encouraged to attend to show their support.
    
    ▪ A prevention or culture change award category should be created in high-profile, campus-wide recognition programs and ceremonies such as the Excellence Awards.
  
  o Other event ideas:
    
    ▪ MIT should sponsor the Boston Area Rape Crisis Center Walk in April and community leaders, including senior officers, faculty, students, and post docs, should attend.
    
    ▪ “MIT I Messed Up”-like event should be created to give students, post docs, and faculty a space to talk about personal experiences with misconduct,
prevention and response, or culture and climate change work.

B. Overall recommendations regarding training opportunities for MIT leadership and the larger MIT community on conflict resolution, mediation, negotiation, and de-escalation

The training subgroup divided its recommendations between MIT’s senior leadership, which as defined above is comprised of Academic Council, school deans and department heads, and heads of house; and student leaders. The subgroup acknowledged likely overlap between its recommendations and the Training and Development Working Group.

The training subgroup recommends for MIT’s senior leadership (Academic Council):

- **Leadership Discussion Opportunities:**
  - MIT should schedule a new presentation for Academic Council about the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine’s (NASEM) report. This presentation, which initially took place at MIT on September 18, 2018, was facilitated by Sheila Widnall (Report Co-Chair), aerospace researcher and Institute Professor, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Paula Johnson (Report Co-Chair), President, Wellesley College, and Anita Hill, MIT Research Affiliate, Professor, Brandeis University. The subgroup recommends that this presentation be repeated for the Academic Council specifically and be scheduled in the 2019-20 academic year.
    - The subgroup also recommends recognizing and including student and post doc leaders for current and emerging leaders that could also benefit from this presentation as well (see student leader section below.).
    - The subgroup also recommends holding a similar discussion for heads of house.
    - The subgroup also recommends integrating/embedding this work into existing leadership programs.
  - MIT should schedule a discussion session on sexual harassment for Academic Council, to follow the presentation noted above. This discussion should be facilitated by an expert in the field and provide the opportunity for members of Academic Council to discuss specific commitments they can make as Institute leaders to address and prevent sexual harassment in the MIT community. The working group recommends that this discussion be scheduled within one month of the above recommendation. As part of the discussion, basic vocabulary to build skills to lead in this area should be included (e.g. professional development could also include utilizing specific student testimony).
  - MIT should hold an annual forum for Academic Council with the Vice President of Human Resources (who is a member of the Council) to discuss the status of sexual harassment prevention and education at MIT, as well as review of prevalence data and outcomes. Forums should be scheduled to coordinate with the implementation of the staff and faculty online sexual harassment program.

- **Communication:**
The subgroup recommends that MIT include links in the President’s annual harassment policy letter to the community to relevant data about sexual harassment and the climate at MIT. Data can include the annual T9BR report as well as other relevant data collected through surveys. This will show the community that the senior leadership takes this seriously and will not tolerate a climate where gender based harassment exists.

To address the NASEM report recommendation that institutions “should convey that reporting sexual harassment is an honorable and courageous action,” the subgroup recommends that such a statement be made in all oral remarks and written statements by any member of MIT senior leadership when addressing the topic of sexual harassment, or whenever the opportunity presents itself.

- **Community Engagement:** To address the NASEM report recommendation that, “Sexual harassment needs to be addressed as a significant culture and climate issue that requires institutional leaders to engage with and listen to students and other campus community members,” MIT senior leadership should hold an annual town meeting on campus climate, with a particular focus on sexual harassment and how MIT is addressing the issue. MIT senior leadership should ensure school deans do the same thing in each of their respective schools on the off year. As part of the cascading effect, school deans should work with their department heads to actively engage in addressing this topic in their departments and labs. This will send the message to the community from all levels of the Institute that MIT will not tolerate harassment of any kind in our community. MIT should also tap into student and post doc leaders to encourage participation among students and post docs.

- **Training:** To address the NASEM report recommendation that institutions “support and facilitate leaders at every level [at the Institute] in developing skills in leadership, conflict resolution, mediation, negotiation, and de-escalation, and should ensure a clear understanding of policies and procedures for handling sexual harassment issues”, the subgroup noted intersection and overlap with the Training and Development Working Group’s recommendations. The subgroup notes that MIT should commit resources and support that also address cultural differences toward this topic.

The training subgroup recommends the following for student and post doc leaders:

- **Leadership Discussion Opportunities:** Schedule a presentation and discussion for undergraduate and graduate student leaders as well as post doc leaders on the NASEM report. The discussion should focus on sexual harassment and the role that student and post doc leaders and their organizations can play in preventing sexual harassment on campus, as well as student/post doc recommendations for action to be taken by MIT leadership. As part of the discussion, basic vocabulary to build skills to lead in this area should be included. Participants should include students and post docs currently in formal leadership roles in organizations, including the Undergraduate Association, Graduate Student Council, Dormitory Council, FSILG councils, and the Post Doc Association. Participants should also include nominated emerging leaders from these organizations who can help to sustain MIT’s efforts longer term. The working group recommends that this discussion be facilitated by an expert in the field and be scheduled early in the spring 2020 semester, and that it be held bi-annually.
C. Overall recommendations regarding ways community leaders at all levels can be utilized to foster a climate where reporting is encouraged and sexual harassment is not tolerated, including climate survey practices.

The subgroup acknowledges the importance of both formal leaders (deans and department heads) and influential community members (academic officers, administrators, and advisors), often with more informal leadership roles, in achieving our goals. Further, to be effective, the subgroup recommends working to avoid ‘task force fatigue’ by prioritizing a manageable number of recommendations and reinforcing the notion that this needs to be a multi-year, sustained effort.

The community leaders activation subgroup recommends the following. This subgroup also acknowledged the likely overlap between its recommendations for broad skill building to reduce gender harassment among leaders at every level and the efforts of the Training and Development Working Group:

- **Diverse, inclusive and respectful environments:**
  - MindHandHeart (MHH) Department Support Project action plans will be informed by the final recommendations from these reports.
    - **Process Recommendations:** Unit heads will work with their communities, deans and MHH to create and advance 3-4 goals to be achieved over a one to two-year time horizon;

- **Gender harassment prevention for leaders at every level:**
  - Department heads, faculty, staff and student leadership should demonstrate an understanding of the drivers and dynamics of gender harassment, and take 1-2 actions to address gender harassment.
    - **Process Recommendations:** MIT should provide a leadership seminar in preventing and responding to gender harassment through faculty development, school councils, staff and student leadership groups or other mechanisms; MIT will make key portions of seminar content available online or by video to deepen its impact. Peer-to-peer shared assessment of understanding can take place in post-seminar discussion.

- **Moving beyond legal compliance:**
  - Department heads, faculty leadership, and other formal and informal leaders/community members should demonstrate an understanding that legal compliance has not been shown to impact rates of harassment.
    - **Process Recommendations:** Include in leadership seminar described above and in all faculty and staff performance review processes. Peer to peer assessment processes can be used.

- **Transparency and accountability:**
  - MIT should create methods of improving transparency and accountability consistent with the NASEM report and guidance from our Office of General Counsel, Human Resources (HR), and Institute Community Equity Office (ICEO). Department leadership should be briefed in advance and be able to respond to local questions about number of reports and general trends in disposition without compromising confidentiality. Department leadership should demonstrate an understanding of the role of climate in the incidence of sexual
misconduct in a unit, and should further understand the role of a formal leader in establishing an environment where concerning behavior is not tolerated.

- **Process Recommendations:** MIT should work with the OGC, HR, and national partners to draft language for department head use and should review the numbers with each department head before release of the email or data; Training should include content related to the importance of ‘climate’, including the role that climate can play in reducing or eliminating harassing behavior from individuals who might not otherwise share our values.

- **Support for target:**
  - Department heads should: 1) Ideally, demonstrate skill in listening to a potential target report their concerns or be responsible for creating a pathway to a senior faculty leader who can act in the department head’s stead; 2) Create and communicate an open door policy or office hours; 3) Create a trusting climate where the barriers to reporting are reduced and any community member – especially faculty and staff – take ownership of a disclosure and are well informed to support the target in taking the steps they would like to take; and 4) Formal and informal leaders should demonstrate an understanding that the climate they set directly impacts the perceived level of safety for targets to disclose.
    - **Process Recommendations:** Include in leadership seminar described above.

- **Assessment:**
  - As part of the MHH Department Support Project, department heads should identify 2-4 key data points for additional community discussion. Department heads and teams should augment broad benchmarking activities with discipline-specific outreach to assess how we compete within our academic peer groups.
    - **Process Recommendations:** Department heads and teams should work with MHH, Institutional Research, the Office of the Vice Chancellor, Division of Student Life and other units to identify and track key measures. MHH can provide support as needed to support external local/discipline-related benchmarking.

- **Involve Professional Societies and Other Organizations:**
  - Academic units should demonstrate that community members have engaged one or more professional societies and organizations in ways to reduce the risk of sexual harassment at meetings, and in the discipline.
    - **Process Recommendations:** MHH has and can continue to provide promising practices used by others in academia.