

Strategy and Equity AY20-21 Report August 2021

INTRODUCTION

The Strategy and Equity (S&E) team in the Department of Architecture was formed in June 2020 by the incoming Department Head, Professor Nicholas de Monchaux. Professor Terry Knight, in her new role as Associate Department Head for Strategy and Equity, was asked to lead the S&E team. The other S&E team members included:

Katharine Kettner, student representative
Inala Locke, staff representative
Tonya Miller, support staff and contributing member

Stacy Clemons replaced Tonya Miller (on temporary leave) in the spring of 2021, however Miller continued to participate in S&E discussions as she was able.

The S&E team set its charge to:

- 1. Review the state of our department in relation to topics of diversity, equity, and inclusion for our student, staff, and faculty community, and identify areas of concern.*
- 2. Develop recommendations for policies, practices, and actions to redress areas of concern and, more generally, enhance and promote diversity and equity within our community.*
- 3. Monitor policies, practices, or actions following from our recommendations, and keep watch on policies and practices not already addressed that may be in need of reform.*

We (the S&E team) met once a week during the summer of 2020 and throughout the following Fall, IAP, and Spring semesters. The Department Head, Nicholas de Monchaux, joined our meetings biweekly and was a partner in our work. The focus of our initial summer work was on our first task – to assess the state of the department with respect to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and to identify areas of concern. This effort was propelled in large part by the work of NOMAS and the ASC that summer, in particular their articulation of necessary, immediate actions to address racial inequities in the department and to build a more inclusive and anti-racist community.¹ Our S&E work thus directly targeted pressing issues of racial disparities to a large extent – but not exclusively – from the start and throughout the year. Our overarching ambition was to identify equity issues across multiple populations in our department.

We spent our early weeks on a “fact-finding” mission, including a review of current and past department, School, and Institute DEI efforts and reports; discussions with department, School and Institute-level individuals with DEI-related responsibilities; conversations with department staff, students, and faculty about their DEI concerns and hopes; reviews of current department policies; and more. We then sorted

¹ Department Head, Nicholas de Monchaux, worked separately to address many NOMAS/ASC demands as discussed in the June 9, 2020 Town Hall.

concerns under different headings, as listed in the following section. Within those areas, we defined general goals and more specific recommendations for new or revised policies and practices. In the following months, we worked on implementing some of those recommendations, with an eye towards those on which we could take immediate action. In the spring semester, we also began to monitor and assess the outcomes of some of those new practices.

While we could not, of course, cover in one year all the issues and concerns we identified, we did make substantial progress on many, and with the help of others in the department.

- We paid particular attention to student issues, including
 - reforms to the graduate admissions process
 - new outreach and support programs for potential applicants
 - admissions bias training
 - inclusion of students in departmental governance and decision-making
 - a new student peer-to-peer support program
 - a new values and goals protocol for studio, thesis, and other class reviews
- We made substantial headway on identifying serious and worrisome concerns of staff, an often ignored but essential part of our community, regarding their treatment and their lack of voice. We initiated department-wide staff and faculty discussion of these concerns, and outlined specific next steps to address them.
- We were unable to get to all the faculty issues we identified; however, the School-wide Faculty Diversity Committee (with the participation of S&E member Terry Knight) made some much-needed improvements to the faculty search process to ensure more equitable and diverse searches.
- Importantly, for our entire department community, we launched a partnership with Courageous Conversation, a San Francisco-based consultancy, to help us in our first steps toward meaningful cultural and organizational change with the goal of building and sustaining an actively anti-racist department.

We summarize below our **Goals**, initial **Recommendations**, **Actions** taken, and suggested **Next Steps**. The actions we and others took this last year are just a start. We look forward to continuing this critical work and moving swiftly with the next steps outlined below. We look forward to continuing our collaboration with students, staff, and faculty, and with a new department officer for diversity, equity, and belonging (DEB) this coming year.

SUMMARY OF WORK

Data Collection

Goals

Gather and keep up-to-date quantitative and qualitative information on our students, staff, faculty, and alumni. We are a decentralized community with several different programs and groups, so it is difficult but essential to have an overview of where we are, who we are, what individual groups and programs are doing, and how we compare to other departments, schools, and universities (benchmarking).

Recommendations

- Create a centralized repository for quantitative and qualitative data on students, staff, faculty, and alumni, with access on our website or links to where data can be found. Update annually. Data will need levels of privacy and access, from public where prospective students, staff, and faculty applicants can see at a glance who we are, to more confidential data accessible only to those with MIT certificates.

Actions

- We had productive discussions with Institutional Research staff (Lydia Snover, et al.) about the data that MIT collects and what they can provide for us (a lot). We spoke with Darren Bennett and other department staff about data important for us to track and how to store it. Because our current website is being redone, and because this is a large, time-consuming initiative and not our most urgent priority, we didn't attempt to tackle it this year.

Next Steps

- Create a small task team to decide what data we should track, and how it should be stored and accessed. Ensure that demographic data and data collection are considered throughout the website redesign.

Outreach And Recruitment

Goals

Expand the pipeline for undergraduates, graduate students, and faculty – all are connected – to improve and diversify the pool of potential applicants for our undergrad programs, graduate programs, and faculty/instructional staff. All levels are connected, one impacting the next further along the pipeline.

Recommendations

- Have a dedicated staff member oversee this substantial outreach task, someone who can have an overview of all the programs and practices we have or should have.
- Outreach should start with elementary/middle school as high school is often too late. Consider bridge programs and Hammond Report recommendations to groom grad students for faculty positions.

- Expand participation in existing MIT programs (MITES, MOSTEC, and MSRP), and begin work on developing a free MIT summer program to target high school students and/or undergraduates and recent college grads from underrepresented populations.
- Keep data on the use and success of these programs.

Actions

- We (Kettner) completed a comprehensive survey of outreach programs (for K-12 and undergraduate students) across MIT and at architecture schools throughout the United States.
- Along with the above, we (Kettner) developed a list of potential outreach initiatives that our department could target, including for example, the development of a summer high school program.
- We compiled a comprehensive list of schools across the United States with undergraduate architecture programs, to assist with the diversification of future outreach for grad programs.
- Paul Pettigrew expanded his outreach to colleges, including HBCUs. He is working this summer with a TA on new outreach initiatives.

Next Steps

- See recommendations above. A portion of our outreach efforts could become part of the incoming departmental DEB officer's responsibilities.

Graduate Student Admissions

Goal

Create a more diverse body of students.

Recommendations

- Develop a more inclusive and transparent application process.
- Minimize barriers in the graduate application process.
- Create a peer support program for applicants.
- Minimize the impact of biases during admissions decisions.
- Track the reasons why admits don't accept us, in order to make future adjustments.
- Reinststitute the SMArchS admissions overview meeting to review all BIPOC (Black, Indigneous, and People of Color) applicants.
- Have more consistent follow-up calls by faculty to admitted students.
- Reform Open Houses, both Fall (e.g. better advertisement to potential BIPOC applicants) and Spring (BIPOC attendees see few people, if anyone, who look like them).

Actions

- Last summer, we surveyed approximately 150 graduate students on their past experiences during the admissions process, to help identify problem areas, application components that pose the strongest barriers to applicants, and reasons why students hesitated to enroll at MIT.
- We developed and launched new peer-to-peer mentorship and outreach programs for POC and low socio-economic background applicants: AMP (Architecture Mentorship Program) and ArchCatalyst (based on MIT's GradCatalyst program). In both programs, current grad students from our department directly engaged with prospective applicants.

- There were 84 participants in AMP and/or ArchCatalyst (a majority were interested in the MArch program).
- Approximately 70% (59) of participants in these programs applied to MIT.
- Of those who applied, approximately 25% (15) were either accepted or waitlisted. After final waitlist decisions were made, approximately 19% (11) of applicants who did AMP and/or ArchCatalyst were admitted. By comparison, only about 5% of all applicants to all our programs are admitted. 6 AMP/ArchCatalyst admits enrolled.
- An admissions implicit bias workshop was led by Noelle Wakefield (OGE) and Beatriz Cantada (ICEO), and attended by members of admissions committees across the department.
- Students were appointed as members of all admissions committees across the department.
- The MArch application was redesigned (spearheaded by Brandon Clifford) to increase access for BIPOC applicants and people from low socio-economic backgrounds, including:
 - Permanent elimination of the GRE requirement.
 - More visible access to the application fee waiver.
 - Revised text and prompts in the application itself.
 - Elimination of writing samples.
 - Revision and de-emphasis of the letters of recommendation requirement.
 - Training admissions committee members to look for potential, instead of just existing achievement.
- Work has begun on similar revisions to the SMArchS/SMBT/SMACT/PhD applications (it has already been established that the GRE requirement will be permanently dropped in all these programs except for the SMBT, where it is being test dropped in the upcoming application cycle).
- A financial aid questionnaire was created to understand applicants' needs for financial support. MArch funding was restructured to give all students the same level of funding, with a few exceptions at higher support levels based in part on the financial aid application.
- The questionnaire for admits who decline their admission offers was revised (financial aid being one key reason for declined offers).
- Admissions faculty were active and committed in reaching out to admits.
- A SMArchS admissions overview meeting was held to review all admits, including BIPOC admits.
- Fall and Spring Open Houses had increased participation of and attention to students of color.

Next Steps

- Review and make any needed improvements to the AMP and ArchCatalyst programs, which were created and implemented late in the admissions cycle last fall. Ideally, expand AMP to have a longer timeframe.
- Consider additional measures to improve inclusion and diversity at the Fall and Spring Open Houses.
- Get admissions benchmarking data for competitor schools.
- Increase funding offers and continue revisiting MArch funding distribution practices.
- Continue implicit bias workshops with admissions committees.
- Work with faculty to develop more consistent and robust outreach to admitted students.

Graduate Student Support

Goals

Provide better academic, financial, social, and emotional support for graduate students.

Recommendations

- New student orientation – this should include anti-bias components geared especially for incoming students and an introduction to the greater Cambridge and Boston area (what to expect, the history of the area and its various communities).²
- Faculty advising – written, consistent, clearly communicated policies are needed. Need to clarify what exactly advising covers beyond just approving registration forms.
- Introduce awards/support/recognition for individual or group initiatives and work that engages BIPOC communities and issues.
- Improve career development and alumni connections. Work with Paul Pettigrew to see what more can be done, and where he needs additional support.
- With Dean's Office support, increase tuition/stipend support with the goal for our programs to be tuition-free.

Actions

- Increased the participation of and attention to students of color in the Fall '20 new student orientation.
- A new archREFS program was implemented (see Climate section).
- We conducted a student survey of faculty advising. MArch students reported much more dissatisfaction with advising than students in other degree programs. Some of the main findings include that MArch students want advisors to be personal and professional mentors, and they want more interaction with their advisors. There were also some differences in gender/racial responses.
- Paul Pettigrew (MITArchA dept liaison) held several career workshops this year, and is planning upcoming workshops to connect current students with BIPOC alumni, and a workshop for non-traditional career paths.

Next Steps

- Develop clear and improved policies for student advising, particularly for MArch students who expressed the most unmet needs in the advising survey.
- Work on recommendations above: improve new student orientation, increase tuition and stipend funding, implement a URM student mentor program, secure funding to support work that engages BIPOC communities and issues.

² Additional suggestions:

- The department could email incoming students with a few resources (readings, etc.) and encourage them to do a bit of research before coming to campus. This could help get students to a common baseline during orientation. The resources could be about Boston/Cambridge, anti-bias related, and so on.
- Many components of orientation are inessential; D&E training should be centered as a top priority.
- Any anti-bias training that happens during orientation should be different than ongoing anti-bias training for continuing students. Many of these trainings require trust amongst participants that hasn't yet been formed for an incoming cohort. A few students suggested that anti-bias trainings should differ every semester, becoming increasingly in-depth as a cohort develops more trust and becomes more familiar with the MIT and US context.

Undergraduate Student Support

Goals

Identify, understand, and respond to concerns of undergraduate majors and minors.

Recommendations

- Include undergrad student representatives in NOMAS.
- Meet with ASC UG representatives to check in on any specific concerns they might have.

Actions

- We met with UG ASC student representatives a few times. They raised a number of concerns, including lack of diversity in faculty hiring and reviews, structural problems with studio curricula, a need for a clearer program structure, poor advising regarding electives, and inadequate venues for voicing concerns.
- We then met with Skylar Tibbits (Director of UG programs), Renee Caso, and Les Norford about responding to these concerns. Les had a meeting with UG instructors to remedy advising problems. Renee set up an elective spreadsheet for advisors. Skylar is in the process of responding to curricular concerns. The department is also beginning to secure studio instructors on multi-year contracts to ensure a level of continuity and consistency in the UG studio curriculum.

Next Steps

- Continue to monitor UG issues. (Some are or will be addressed under different headings here.)

Faculty Hiring, Support, and Retention

Goals

Rethink and reform search and hiring practices to achieve a more diverse faculty. Rethink and reform policies and practices to support retention of faculty, in particular POC and women.

Recommendations

- Initiate a Cabinet discussion of current recommended search practices versus actual practices, and what new practices are necessary.
- Related to the above, initiate a Cabinet discussion on frameworks for judging merit and excellence. What do these concepts mean and how are they used in searches, appointments, and promotions? How can these concepts be dismissive of certain types of work or career paths?
- Coordinate with the SA+P Faculty Diversity Committee (FDC), which oversees approvals of searches, on their work on faculty searches and hires.
- Review and implement the very comprehensive Recommendations for Action in the 2019 SA+P Report on Women and Minority Retention (which cover some of the points below).
- Complete faculty appointments and promotions should be accessible to faculty on our website.
- Clarify and document criteria for tenure.

- Implement a new faculty/instructional staff orientation – include an anti-bias component geared especially for incoming faculty, which should include an introduction to the greater Cambridge and Boston community. This should happen every semester as new instructors join the department.
- Faculty mentoring – develop written, consistent, clearly communicated policies and expectations for mentors and mentees. Put together a faculty group to develop policy.
- Awards/support/recognition for individual or group initiatives and work (e.g. HASS awards, named chairs) – get data on applicants and recipients to identify any potential problems.

Actions

- Terry Knight is on the FDC, which has done much work this past year on overseeing faculty searches to ensure diversity, and also redesigned the faculty search process to include more collaboration with the FDC. Terry has asked for an Institute guide for faculty searches (like those provided by other institutions).
- The faculty appointments and promotions handbook is now accessible on the School's intranet: <https://sap-resources.mit.edu/human-resources/appointments-and-promotions-handbook/>.
- We reviewed faculty awards and chairs for the past several years and did not find any inequities in their distribution.

Next Steps

We did not focus on faculty-specific issues this year. The recommendations above need attention this coming year.

Staff

Goals

Improve the climate and culture for staff, a marginalized community in our department and across MIT, and often ignored or underserved with respect to DEI.

Recommendations

- Engage our department staff through in-person meetings and formal surveys to identify, understand, and address staff concerns.

Actions

- We (Locke and Miller) conducted a survey on processes for voicing concerns, which was sent late summer 2020 to all department staff. Survey questions asked staff about their awareness of, comfort with, and effectiveness of processes at the department and Institute levels. The main findings of that survey include:
 - Approximately 3/4 of respondents said they knew about processes for voicing concerns at the department level.
 - Approximately 1/2 said they knew about processes at the Institute level.
 - A majority said processes at both levels were ineffective.

In their additional comments, some respondents said that they have no voice or no presence in the department, that they have been disrespected, and are fearful of retaliation.

- We met in the fall with Martha Collins (SA+P HR), Ben Moorghen (Central HR), Andreea O’Connell (AO), and Marion Cunningham (ACT AO) to get clarity around the roles and responsibilities of all four, especially with regard to conflict and complaint resolution. We subsequently met with Martha a number of times to continue this discussion and to get clarity about staff positions, promotion opportunities, professional development, and more.
- In late fall, we learned of an Institute initiative to raise awareness of abusive, discriminatory, or harassing behaviors toward staff by supervisors. This initiative included the production of videos – called Staff Monologues – showing representative scenarios of mistreatment. We requested access to the videos, and then made considerable efforts (still ongoing) to have the videos accessible to all staff, whose problems they are meant to represent.
- At a staff meeting in the spring, Inala Locke discussed the staff survey, ongoing S&E work, having staff understand the Institute HR structure and how it relates to our School and department level HR, the Staff Monologues, and to get feedback from staff on these issues. A staff meeting was held subsequently to discuss concerns and goals for faculty-staff interactions.
- At a subsequent Cabinet meeting, Martha led a discussion of staff concerns, including the Monologues. Following that meeting, Martha and Institute HR reps organized and led an all-School meeting with faculty on staff issues and the Monologues. Terry Knight also presented the fall staff survey findings and the main themes that emerged from the earlier staff meeting.³ Martha and Institute HR reps then organized and led all-School meetings with staff on staff issues and the Monologues.
- Terry Knight met with Ronnie Haas (Director of Strategic Talent Management), then with Ramona Allen (VP for Human Resources) together with Inala and Nicholas to discuss more open, readily available access to the Monologues for faculty and for staff. Following that, we were informed of a new Institute plan to roll out a *Toolkit for Trainers and Facilitators Using MIT Staff Monologues* which will be in the hands of school deans and DEI assistant deans to use for DEI-related trainings and discussion.

3

- Staff experience a lack of understanding on the part of faculty about administrative and support staff roles and responsibilities, the time it takes for tasks, and the requirement of staff to follow (not bypass) Institute policies, procedures and protocols.
- Establishing and understanding clear work priorities, and expectation of things being done immediately. Quite often staff are expected to switch priorities very fast with little communication or expected to deal with work late in the evenings or during weekends with no consideration towards staff work/life balance.
- Fear of retaliation is real at all staff levels if things [requests] are not addressed immediately or in the parameters established by the faculty (regardless if they follow policy or not)
- Respect for staff is a critical part of successful functioning of the department functioning. Regardless of backgrounds and pedigrees, staff have been hired because we have the knowledge and ability to carry out the administrative needs of the department
- How you ask for something (in person and via emails) matters. The tone of communication is too often harsh and threatening – doesn’t establish trust and instills fear.
- The behavior of faculty influences the behavior of students and often in a bad way. Students can interpret faculty mistreatment of staff as acceptable behavior. Lead by example.

- We worked with Nicholas on a plan to (1) form a small faculty/staff committee to draft a Values and Goals statement with guidelines for creating a respectful, equitable, and inclusive environment for staff, and standards for faculty and staff interactions to then be shared and vetted by staff and faculty, and (2) develop a policy regarding email and working hours expectations.

Next Steps

- Follow up on communication and access to the staff Monologues, at least within our school.
- Continue department-wide discussion of staff concerns.
- Implement the plan above with Nicholas.
- Work on other recommendations suggested by staff, Martha, and others including:
 - Invite Martha and other HR reps to occasionally attend staff meetings and host sessions on compensation, professional development, benefits, etc.
 - Explore the development of enhanced orientation and resource guides to be used by new and current staff.
 - Regular performance/development conversations.
 - Create a staff enrichment series (potentially in collaboration with other School departments and labs/centers)
 - Create an anonymous comment mechanism/ideas bank.
 - Affinity groups for support staff (like ERGs).
 - Release time and funding for staff career development.
 - School-wide staff committee focused on climate and diversity.
 - Management training for all faculty and supervisors.
 - Committed, serious searches for staff hires.

Climate

Goals

Create an equitable, inclusive, and just environment – from personal to social to cultural to academic to institutional - for students, faculty, and staff in our department.

Recommendations

- Anti-bias/anti-racist training – Hire an outside consultant to work on training modules (who can look more objectively and with possibly more expertise and less bias than MIT insiders). Training modules should be specially tailored for newcomers (students, staff, or faculty) versus those already here. Training modules should be updated and modified regularly.
- Develop a department venue for handling concerns, complaints, and conflicts.
- Better communication of Institute resources (e.g. Ombuds Office, IDHR) for concerns and conflicts. Put these resources on our website.

Actions

- We launched a partnership with Courageous Conversation, a San Francisco-based consultancy with experience in diversity, equity, and inclusion training, to help us in our first steps toward meaningful

cultural and organizational change with the goal of building and sustaining an actively anti-racist department. They led a series of smaller workshops for department leadership, HR/Equity, POC faculty and staff, and POC students, and well-attended seminars for our entire student, staff, and faculty community. We are currently making plans for the next, more in-depth phases of our work with them next year.

- We surveyed students, staff, and faculty about resources for reporting concerns, complaints, and conflicts. All three communities voiced strong support for a confidential departmental venue – online and/or in-person – for these reasons: to centralize and keep track of common, repeating, or egregious issues; higher comfort level reporting to people they know; more confidence about follow-up and resolution; reporting at the department-level feels less likely to lead to undesired escalation compared to Institute-level resources.
- We compiled a comprehensive list of Institute, School, and department resources for Personal Support and Complaint-Resolution on our department website, under Resources.
- We met with Institute-level offices dealing with complaint resolution (IDHR, MindHandHeart, Ombuds Office) to better understand their offerings. IDHR is aiming to make their resources better known, and to talk directly to our department community.
- We proposed and implemented a peer-to-peer student support program, called ArchREFS (Resources for Easing Friction and Stress), modelled on the Institute-wide dREFS programs.

Next Steps

- Continue our work with Courageous Conversation.
- Follow up on a department venue for concerns – how will this work, how will it be hosted, who is in charge of managing it.
- Implement ongoing anti-bias training for admissions, hiring, teaching, and more.
- Create awareness of the several Institute resources for complaints and conflicts. The restorative justice staff person at the IDHR is a new resource. Invite staff from these Institute-level offices to introduce themselves to our community directly.
- Assist with the hiring of a new department-level DEB officer.

Curriculum

Goals

Bring more diverse voices and subject offerings to the department, including more diversity in reviews.

Recommendations

- Review and revise the content (readings, guest speakers, precedents, et cetera) of existing subject offerings to increase the diversity of perspectives and topics covered in coursework. Create new subject offerings that explicitly engage with social and political issues.
- Communicate subject offerings to students that engage with POC or marginalized communities, or focus on DEI topics.

Actions

- We completed a pilot study over IAP for a syllabi audit (reviewing the diversity of assigned readings and authors). TAs will work on a full audit this summer with a focus on MArch and SMArchS required and restricted elective subjects.
- We developed a draft spreadsheet of BIPOC academics and practitioners who could be invited for lectures, reviews, open positions, etc. This is intended as a live document to be added to and edited over time.
- A draft Values and Goals statement for studio, thesis, and other class reviews was developed, to be shared with faculty, students, and invited reviewers.
- We worked with staff in Architecture HQ to facilitate demographic data collection for guest critics on final reviews, in support of NOMAS's semesterly Reviewer Report.

Next Steps

- Implement recommendations above.
- Finalize the Values and Goals statement and the mechanics of the POC spreadsheet (how to add names, etc.).
- Extend syllabi audit work to other subjects and degree programs.
- Request or encourage instructors to revise existing subjects and studios or introduce new ones that have active, active, critical, and in-depth engagement with topics concerning the structural oppression of marginalized groups
- In general, encourage all instructors to review and update as needed their syllabi and teaching practices.

Communications and Public Image

Goals

Recast how we present ourselves to ourselves and to the public through our website, social media, public lectures, and so on.

Recommendations

- Continue to improve our website with photos and stories that include a diversity of people and activities. Communicate better who we are and who/what we want to be.

Actions

- We met with Amanda Moore to discuss problem areas and improvements.
- The About page on the department website was revised to include an Indigenous land acknowledgment, our commitment to diversity and inclusion, and demographic data on our population.

Next Steps

- New website to have pages on DEI in the department and the work of S&E.
- Continue work with the communications team and monitor efforts on recommendations above.

Acknowledgments

We could not have done our work this past year without the support and time of many in the department. We give special thanks to Darren Bennett, Renee Caso, Brandon Clifford, Martha Collins, Jayson Kim, Amanda Moore, Andreea O’Connell, Paul Pettigrew, Yaara Yacoby, and NOMAS and ASC leadership for helping shape and implement many of the new practices and policies described here. We are grateful to our Department Head, Nicholas de Monchaux, for his unwavering commitment to press ahead with necessary reforms in our department and to mobilize the resources to make them happen.