



Under the Microscope

Magnifying Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Efforts in BE



MAY

IS MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH

#breakthestigma

Spotlight: Choosing a Diversity Officer for BE

by Miranda Dawson, Diana Gong, & Christine Zheng

The departments of Biological Engineering, Chemical Engineering, and Material Science and Engineering are currently in the process of hiring a diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) officer. In this issue of our newsletter, we thought it would be helpful to highlight the role a DEI officer could play in our department, as well as highlight the ways in which DEI officers have improved the cultures at other departments at MIT.

What is the role of a DEI Officer?

At MIT, initiatives led by students and staff have traditionally been the main avenue used to advocate for DEI-related goals. However, because these initiatives have relied on students and faculty who must balance these responsibilities with their other commitments, these efforts have historically been inefficient. In this [Tech article](#), fellow BE graduate student Bianca Lepe, highlights the need for DEI officers in our institutions: "Centrally-coordinated diversity professionals are needed at the department level to ease the burden on student advocates, retain institutional knowledge, engage with faculty, develop tailored solutions, and hold the administration accountable for DEI progress." Our future BE Diversity Officer will collaborate with current department members to push for meaningful and positive change in our department's climate and practices surrounding DEI issues.

How has a Diversity Officer assisted other departments at MIT?

After hiring their DO in 2005, MIT Biology was able to increase their URM graduate enrollment from 5% to a high of 18% in 2012. MIT's Aeronautics and Astronautics (AeroAstro) department recently hired their departmental DO, Denise Phillips, in the fall of 2019. As a member of the AeroAstro community, Denise is involved in recruitment, she serves as a liaison between faculty and students in challenging conversations, and she helps student groups to fundraise in efforts to support under-represented minorities (URMs). She also leads events for URMs and women in science, including a monthly Blind Spot discussion series where invited speakers facilitate conversations about DEI-related issues. Fun fact: Denise Phillips is on the search committee for hiring our DEI Officer!

What is our DEI Officer Working Group doing?

The desire to hire a diversity officer has floated around the graduate student body as early as 2017 when the BE Application Assistance Program (BEAAP) was first developed. This effort was formed to mentor URM students in applying to our program. While BEAAP was seen as a first step in improving recruitment, the ultimate aim was to eventually hire specialists to assist in these efforts. This intention was formalized in our [graduate student feedback to the March 2020 BE Visiting Committee](#) in which we stated:

"While current department initiatives are mostly student-run, there is interest in expanding these programs. These efforts would require significant time, resources, and training beyond what faculty or students alone can provide. A dedicated diversity staff person could provide the support needed to expand and ensure sustainability of initiatives."

As such, the BE grad student DEI working groups decided to form a group specific to helping our department's future diversity officer meet student needs. Currently, we are focusing on communicating with department leadership during the hiring process and finding ways in which we can elevate students' voices. Thus far, we have collaborated with students in ChemE and DMSE to submit a proposal for student involvement in the hiring process. In this proposal, we suggest that there be three different interviews for each final candidate: one for the search committee, one for student representatives, and one that includes both students and the search committee. We also proposed that students work together with the search committee to develop the rubrics and interview questions by which candidates will be evaluated.

Given that the three departments envision this DEI Officer fulfilling different roles in each department, our working group will continue to advocate for BE students' highest priorities as we evaluate the candidates in interviews. We have been informed that the biggest common priority between the departments is recruitment and retention, so this will certainly be a focus topic of interviews and evaluations. However, if you have other priorities for this DEI Officer that you'd like to share, feel free to reach out to the DEI Officer Working Group at any time! (contact be-dei-comms@mit.edu who will pass suggestions onto the DEI Officer Working Group)

DEI Conversations: Navigating Disability, Both Visible and Invisible

by Joseph Berleant & Megan Tse

MIT's Departments of Biological Engineering, Chemical Engineering, and Materials Science and Engineering are excited to kick off the next seminar of the series *DEI Conversations*, which will feature the diverse forms disability can take in our society. Two inspiring panelists, Lizzie Velásquez and Dr. Darcy Gordon, will take part in a live-stream discussion to describe their experiences and answer questions about navigating disability in today's world.

Lizzie Velásquez's story to becoming an activist is truly unique: She suffers from an extremely rare disorder that prevents accumulation of body fat, leading to cyber-bullying and discrimination from a young age. Starting with her first self-published book at the age of 21, Lizzie Velásquez has drawn from her experiences to promote kindness and compassion.

Dr. Darcy Gordon is an instructor with the Department of Biology at MIT, working with faculty to enhance on-campus instruction through technology and build Massive Open Online Courses for public use. Dr. Gordon, as a young adult, struggled with mental illness and was diagnosed with an invisible disability, which motivated her to pursue biological research. Dr. Gordon's experiences have guided her personal and professional passion for promoting accessible and inclusive teaching.

When: Monday May 3rd, 1-2:30pm

Link to Discussion: <http://web.mit.edu/webcast/cheme/s21/1/>

Links & Updates

Please Read!

[MIT Five-year Strategic action Plan for Diversity Equity and Inclusion \(2021-2026\)](#)

DEI @MIT Diversity Equity Inclusion Action

You can give feedback on this plan [here](#).

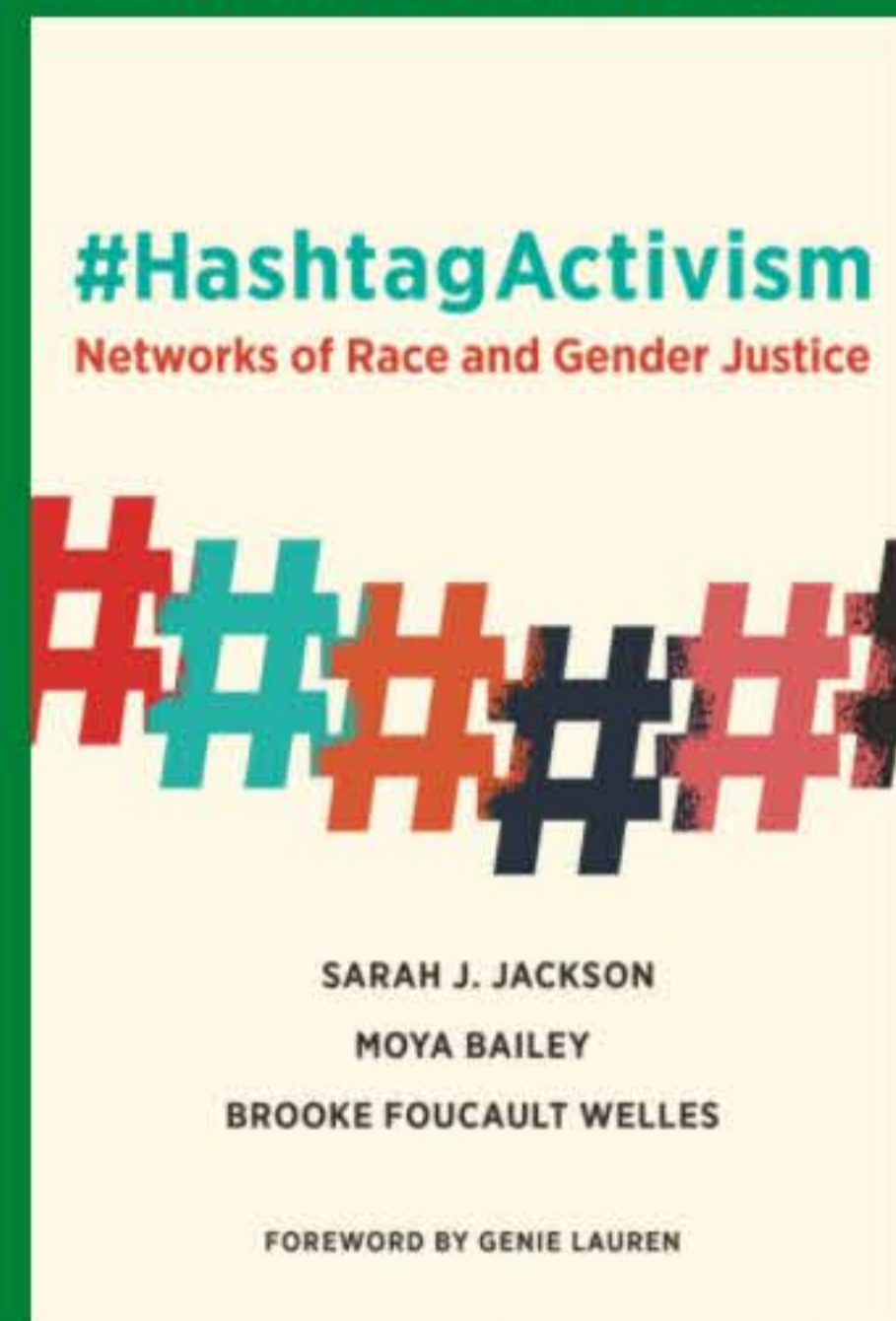
Also:

The Education working group has a [blog!](#)

Visit deimitbe.wordpress.com for recommended readings and highlights of anti-oppressive work in the MIT community.

Also check out:

[#HashtagActivism](#): Networks of Race and Gender Justice by Sarah J. Jackson, Moya Bailey, and Brooke Foucault Welles



Upcoming Events

- Apr. 30th **Celebration of Black Women in Science Panel**
12:00pm [RSVP here](#)
- May 3rd **DEI Conversations: Navigating Disability, Both Visible and Invisible**
1:00pm [JOIN here](#)
- May 3rd **DEI Conversations: BE/Course 20 Post-event discussion (following the 1pm panel)**
2:30pm [JOIN here](#)
- May 4th **Dr. Robin Scheffler – Genetown: Biotechnology and Inequality in Greater Boston**
3:30pm [RSVP here](#)
- May 10th **Picower Institute Spring Symposium: Early Life Stress & Mental Health**
9:00am [Register here](#)
- May 13th **Shifting Higher Education: Creating Inclusive Spaces in Elite Institutions**
12:30pm [RSVP here](#)

Contact Us

Feedback? Upcoming events? Want to get involved?

Get in touch at: be-dei-comms@mit.edu

To unsubscribe, email be-it@mit.edu or visit [this link](#).