



## Getting involved – more than just a line on your resume!

By **Leonid Chindelevitch**

You may have noticed that graduate students at MIT, generally speaking, tend to be a lot less involved in non-academic or extracurricular activities than the undergrads. Sure, we don't need to get those extra achievements on our resumes anymore, as the quality of our research matters a lot more than our other activities for both academic and non-academic employment. Some of us may also have very demanding work schedules. Nevertheless, if you are not doing much outside of you research, you are missing out on a whole lot, and I will try to describe some of the things you may be missing out on.

First of all, Sidney Pacific has a lot of great opportunities to get involved, not just in student government, but also with the different committees (such as Plant Committee, Committee on Scholarly Interactions, Aquarium Committee, to name only a few). In addition,

the SPICE program is an amazing way to meet people from different backgrounds and discuss important topics in an informal atmosphere and the numerous interest groups are a great way to organize group activities and share your interests.

Secondly, despite our busy schedules, sports can provide a much-needed break while helping us stay healthy and active. Sidney Pacific and the various departments all have several intramural teams, and as graduate students, we are eligible to take PE classes at no extra charge. A variety of dance forms are also taught at various levels, both at MIT and around Cambridge. A number of other art forms, such as photography, painting and pottery, are also available, and free movie screenings are ubiquitous here.

Thirdly, there are over 500 student groups at MIT, which are listed in the ASA database. These range from

cultural to political and from department-based to interest-based groups. Just exploring that list could provide a good break from work. There will undoubtedly be a few names that you won't even recognize, but the curious nature of your mind will very likely encourage you to find out their meaning.

Of course, you may find yourself overwhelmed with the number of different activities you can dedicate your free time to, once you start exploring – and striking the right balance between research and everything else may be a challenge. However, that is certainly not a reason not to try an activity you find appealing. Chances are, you will not only meet new people and discover a new hobby, but your overall well-being will improve, and rather than suffer, your research may actually benefit from it!

Hopefully you would be out of your labs by now!

**Inside This Month's SPeaker:**

Page 2:  
Officer  
Spotlight

Page 3:  
The story  
behind  
Diwali

Page 3:  
MIT Grad  
Dorm  
Block Party



# Officer Spotlight: Thanh Huynh

By **Po-Ru Loh**

We have all sorts of “Chairs” in the S-P government who do all sorts of jobs – and when things are running smoothly, it’s easy to let them blend into the background. Of course, in reality, all of our officers are graduate students just like you. Who are these people, and how did they become your S-P Chairs? For the first installment of a human interest series for the S-Peaker, I caught up with Thanh, our Cultural Chair.

Thanh grew up in Vietnam before coming to MIT in 2007. His first impressions? “To be honest, I was a bit sad... because everyone was so huge and tall, and whenever I played sports I would always lose! I wished I could be taller so I wouldn’t always lose.” However, “I actually really liked being at MIT and being able to meet amazing people: amazing students doing all kinds of amazing things. I found that people here are really friendly; they helped me to improve my English.”

Thanh became our Cultural Chair this past spring – impressive, to say the least! What inspired him? “This is a true story,” Thanh begins. “Last year one of my office-mates won an MIT Institute Award for TAs. I went to the ceremony to support her. Then I saw that there were many other students being honored as well.”

As it turned out, one of them was Robert Wang, a former S-P President. “I heard about all of the good things he did, like petitioning for graduate student stipend increases and many other causes – in addition to being very good at research. It made me think, why shouldn’t I do some good things for people too?” Then coincidence struck. “I came back home and saw posters in S-P looking for officers.” A moment of motivation, a well-placed ad, and voila: “That’s how I became Cultural Chair,” Thanh concludes with a smile.

One quirk of the Cultural Chair position is that its biggest responsibility is also its first: the annual Cultural Festival in June, which features food and performances from student groups across campus. “It was a huge event and I was so tired!” Thanh recalls. “But I got to know many people and make lots of contacts. I learned how to recruit people and get them to do what I want.” Like many officers, Thanh found the management role somewhat strange at first: “I felt like I didn’t do anything – I just organized people.”

Beyond developing leadership skills, however, “One of the best things about being Cultural Chair is getting to know other officers: they are so amazing and so kind. For example, Craig [our Athletics Chair] introduced me to Frisbee and rock climbing – I would never have learned to

play if not for him. He changed my mind about sports!”

There was one more question I wanted to ask: “What was your funniest experience as Cultural Chair?” Thanh pauses for a bit and furrows his brow; nothing in particular comes to mind.

“Has anything surprising or unexpected happened?” I suggest. Still nothing... and then Thanh’s face lights up.

“I didn’t expect I’d become so famous!” he exclaims.

Famous? I can’t help but start laughing as I look at him quizzically.

“After Zenzi asked me for Officer Spotlight info, my face popped up all over SP on SPTV for a whole month! My friend randomly asked me, ‘You like to eat Pho?’ I was so surprised: ‘What?! How the hell did you know that?’”

“It was kind of annoying, actually,” Thanh confides good-naturedly.

Unfortunately for S-P, Thanh will be leaving at the end of December to complete a degree program in Singapore. We will miss him both as our friend and Cultural Chair.

Have any interest in filling his shoes? Write to Thanh or SPEC!

# The Festival of Lights

By **Manya Ranjan**

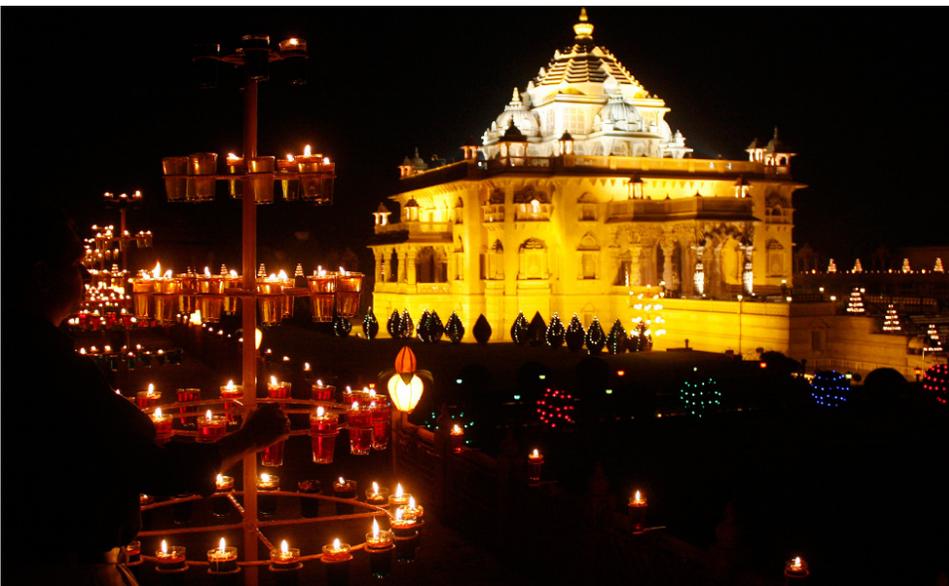
We celebrated Diwali at MIT a couple of weeks back and the response from people was very heartening. That response made

me write something about this great festival in a more formal way. A lot of people celebrate Diwali, traditionally called Deep-avali, but may not know the sto-

ry behind it.

The word Deepavali in Sanskrit means a row of lamps. Diwali has traditionally been celebrated by lighting small clay lamps filled with oil to signify the triumph of good over evil. This festival marks the return of Lord Ram to his kingdom after defeating the evil, Ravana, in Hinduism. In Jainism, it marks the attainment of moksha, or nirvana, of their Lord Mahavir. In Sikhism, it signifies the return of Guru Har Gobind Ji to Amritsar after freeing Hindu rulers from the captivity of Emperor Jehangir.

Here are a few pictures to illustrate the spirit better:



Traditionally, people lit small clay lamps to light their houses. With the advent of technology, there are more lighting options now. No wonder it is called the festival of lights!

## Sidney Pacific Speaker

Newsletter Chair  
Manya Ranjan

The Speaker is published on a monthly basis to serve the needs of the Sidney Pacific Graduate Community. Submissions of articles, photos, events, and other items of interest can be sent to:  
[sp-newsletter-chair@mit.edu](mailto:sp-newsletter-chair@mit.edu)



# MIT Grad Dorm Block Party

By **Zenzile Brooks**

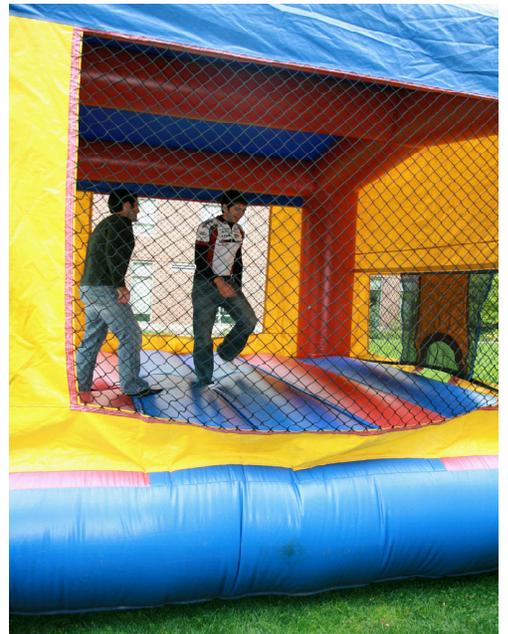
On Saturday, October 17, 2009, the MIT Graduate Dorms united as never before to host the first MIT Grad Dorm Block Party. A "Block Party" is a popular American term for "neighborhood party", and the MIT Grad Dorm Block Party featured many classic components of these popular street festivals. The event was comprised of delicious local vendors (Clover Food Truck and Slush King), carnival games, three live bands (Band of Dennis and Supa Dupa are entirely MIT students, and MONIKER is a local band soon to explode on the national music scene), a canned food drive, and even a Bounce House!

The event gave the MIT Grad Dorms (Sidney Pacific, Ashdown, The Warehouse, Edgerton, and Tang) a valuable opportunity to work together. A good time was had by all, and dorms look forward to continuing this new tradition.



The delicious Clover Food Truck served hot cider, fresh gourmet sandwiches, and those irresistible rosemary french fries right from the front entrance of Sidney Pacific.

SP Officers Spencer Schaber (SPICE Chair) and Matt Blackburn (Bikes Chair) had a blast testing out the Bounce House



The delicious food and musical performances made the evening a special affair. It was a great occasion for people to mingle freely with students across the dorms.