



GSC Update and Plans for this year

By **Alex Hamilton Chan**

As the economy continues in an uneasy state, a global reduction in resources is being realized. In that context, our financial challenge is material and pressing. From student stipends, to transportation, to funding student groups and running the orientation, the work of the Graduate Student Council (GSC) impacts every graduate student and the current team is aware of its importance. We have great confidence that the Graduate Student Council will be able to chart a financially prudent path to better graduate student life and to maintain core activities and services* provided to students.

This past year has seen many important developments at the GSC. As a direct result of the work by the GSC, a graduate student dental plan was created. Our continued advocacy on student welfare had also led to a reasonable stipend increase as well as improvements in various aspects of campus life. Signature events were very well attended while creative new initiatives were launched.

There appears to have been a significant increase in interest in participating in the Council over the past year.

One of the biggest achievements in these past two years was the creation and implementation of the *first graduate student dental plan*. The plan launched attracted 1049 subscribers this semester.

In addition to our work on health, the GSC has continued its tradition of making annual stipend recommendations to the administration.

The GSC recommended an increase in stipends to match the increase in cost of living. Relying on the Cost of Living Survey and local Consumer Price Index data, we found that the average MIT graduate student's cost of living had increased in the past year by about 4.9%. We made a recommendation for a stipend increase to match this figure. While facing budget cuts across the Institute, *the administration approved the GSC's request for an increase in stipends at a slightly lower level of 3.4%. We are beginning the process of making sti-

pend suggestions for the next academic year. *

Our continued advocacy had also led to the *elimination of the summer DAPER fee* for the use of athletic facilities for students, as well as the construction of the shuttle shelter outside of Tang Hall and Westgate.

Each year, the GSC partners with the Undergraduate Senior Class and the Society of Women Engineers to host *one of the largest career fairs in the country*, bringing together 300 companies and 5000 students. For every 30 students enrolled at MIT, there is one employer at the Career Fair, while at other universities this ratio is typically around 150:1 (e.g. at Harvard, 146:1; Yale, 143:1; Berkeley, 148:1; Dartmouth, 116:1). Our *Career Fair is exceptional not only in its size but also in the fact that it's run by students*. The GSC Career Fair Directors and the other Directors demonstrated the ability to collaborate across campus populations to run an event professionally.

For a second consecutive

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year, the GSC teamed up with the Writing and Communication Center and Center for Health Promotion and Wellness to offer the Dissertation Boot Camp for students who would like additional support while writing their dissertations. Also, in collaboration with Postdoctoral Advisory Council and the Career Development Center, the GSC held the Academic Career Series (previously the award-winning Professional Development Series), and our latest session on academia versus industry attracted over a hundred attendees. Furthermore, the GSC Travel Grants continue to benefit many students in need of support to present their work at conferences.

GSC activities like the country's most successful graduate *orientation*, Two Dollar Tuesdays, GSC Ski Trip, and the *Grad Gala* were all extremely successful, with high participation, several new events, and significant positive feedback from participating students. The most substantial addition is the launch of joint university events. The First Ever BU-MIT Party attracted over 700 people while the first Boston Graduate Party that we took lead in organizing attracted almost 1000.

The *GSC Funding Board awarded \$63,435 to over a hundred student groups* in the fall semester. Hundreds of events were made possible because of this funding. In this coming year of budgetary contraction, my team and

I are determined to maintain this vibrancy of student activities by keeping the funds available to the student groups at a similar level. We will also launch a small fund to encourage creativity and new student groups.

Early this year, our team started the Boston Graduate Leadership Organization as a platform to connect with the graduate student population in the greater Boston Area (there are over 65,000 graduate students in greater Boston). This year the GSC also hosted the National Association of Graduate-Professional Students (NAGPS) Northeast Regional Conference for the northeastern U.S., helping to build support for NAGPS in an area of the country where membership has generally been somewhat weak. GSC members also traveled to Washington, D.C. to support the lobbying efforts of NAGPS. We have lobbied for tax exemption for graduate student stipends, open access and expansion of the H1B visa quota. Our longer-term goal is to *establish MIT as a leader in the graduate community nationwide and globally*.

The MIT Ring (the Brass Rat) is one of the most recognizable rings in the world. The Grad Rat is a new tradition initiated by the GSC half a decade ago. This past year, the GSC *Grad Rat committee crafted a new design *that features many hidden images of the graduate experience in MIT. I encourage all of you to

take a look at it and be part of this proud tradition!

We have also renamed the Graduate Student News as The Graduate. The Graduate was the name of the original publication that was created in the last century as part of the Graduate Student Council. As we revive this tradition, we will also *move our publication to a more electronic format to save paper and help the Council become a more environmentally-friendly organization.*

In this coming year, the GSC will continue our work and provide better services for the graduate community. In addition, we will try to harness the value of *diversity *within the Institute, enhance relations and interactions between graduate students and *alumni*, and we will move to expand the social sphere of the graduate students at MIT *beyond the walls of MIT*. Also, we will work towards building *better communication* channels between the graduate students and their Council. Our publicity efforts will be elevated and new means will be used in addition to traditional ones. (Check out the MIT GRAD

BLOG <<http://gsc.mit.edu/blog/>>.) We have many important allies within the MIT administration, with whom we will continue to have cordial and constructive relationships, while we will strive hard to make the voices of the graduate students heard. We are committed to bringing the graduate community of MIT to new horizons.

Wireless Update: For You; From You

By **Po-Ru Loh**

"Good morning, Sidney-Pacific! Here's the wireless report for you as you get ready to start your day. The southern part of the building can expect clear signals with access-point visibility of at least 100 feet. Meanwhile, the northeast corridor will be less fortunate, continuing to experience whiteout conditions that render communication nearly impossible. Fourth floor residents in particular are advised to take refuge in the study room, a safe haven that has been relatively unaffected by the storm system sweeping through the airwaves. As always, we urge all residents to be prepared, as conditions may change dramatically and unexpectedly."

Let's hope that chapter of life at Sidney-Pacific is over. There are, however, a few things that your house government is doing beyond hoping – and we need your help in order to make these efforts effective.

First, please continue to report network connectivity problems at rcc.mit.edu. The information you provide there is recorded and passed on to our RCCs, Cosmin Deaconu and Deepak Mishra. (Note that Deepak and Cosmin are S-P residents, which should mean a big improvement over the frustratingly slow response times many of you experienced last semester.)

Second – and this applies to

everyone – we would greatly appreciate your assistance filling out a brief survey about the state of wireless connectivity in your room. The reason this survey is so important is that network connectivity problems are notoriously hard to track: problems appear and disappear, some are reported while others aren't, and oftentimes the result is that nobody really knows the extent of the issues until a drastic network outage occurs.

At the moment our general impression is that connectivity problems have mostly subsided. We hope this is the case, but it's hard to say whether this is for real or simply the result of people giving up on the wireless (or giving up on reporting problems). It's also very hard for us to make a case for upgrading our wireless hardware without some hard evidence. So, please go to the S-P website (s-p.mit.edu), follow the link to the survey, and take a few minutes to fill it out!

Finally, if you happen to own a VoIP phone made by LG (typically belonging to Korean residents), please be aware that if you have its base station running, you may be disrupting your neighbors' wireless connections! (The reason is that the base station broadcasts like a router – hence the "myLGNet" routers visible all throughout the building.) Fortunately, you can keep the functionality of your phone without causing interference by

connecting it directly to MITnet. Our RCCs are happy to help you do that: just file a request at rcc.mit.edu.

That's all for now. Welcome back to S-P, best wishes for the new semester, and here's hoping for clearer skies this time around!

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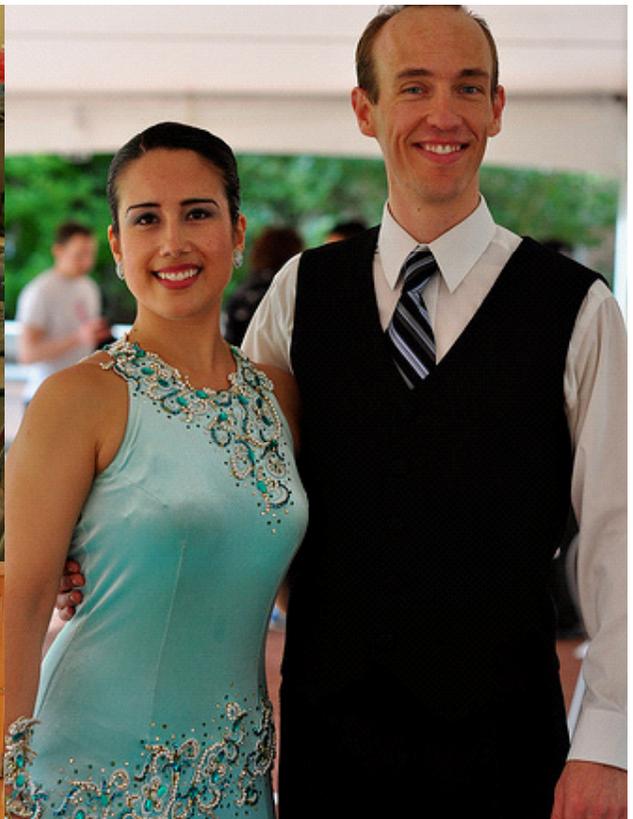
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For over half a century, the Graduate Student Council had served the community with passion and commitment. To this day, it is hard not to notice the obvious impact around campus. When you take the GSC-created SafeRide to attend an activity by a student group funded by the GSC with friends that you met at the GSC-organized orientation, or when you attend the Grad Gala before you take up a job you found at the Career Fair, you should know that there is a group of dedicated individuals here at your Council working for you.

With initiatives like the department-sponsored graduate student health insurance we secured a few years ago, or recurring ones like the yearly stipend negotiations, the GSC needs your support. So, if you are not already an active member of our team, please join us now or send your suggestions to

changemit@mit.edu





Procrastination: Reason and Cure

By **Manya Ranjan**

Everyone starts a new year with a resolve, a new sense of purpose and a vow to achieve tangible results. So did I in 2010. I made lofty plans for my career, research, reading habit, health and every other aspects of my life, small or big. I broke the goals down to monthly ones, they say it is better to focus on short term goals than long term ones. And I thought that I was cruising along on those plans, ready to make 2010 count big and ready to turn a new page in my planned life. To my horror, I discovered that one month, that is 1/12 of my planned period, is already gone and I have not budged an inch from where I was on January 1, 2010. All I managed to create was a sense of purpose that lulled me into complacency that I was doing just fine! This made me sit up and take notice. What is that one thing that is pulling me back from all that planning.

Often times we are posed with the question: "What, if one could go back in time and change one thing about oneself, would that one thing be?"

More often than not, the answer to that question for me has been the blessed habit of procrastinating! I am a habitual procrastinator, who has to wait for the last minute to get to any task. This is clearly

not a good strategy, and being in a graduate school is not of much help either. In order to steer clear of any failures due to procrastination, I read up on this topic on the internet. Here is a brief summary of my research!

It turns out that this problem is not very uncommon. Lo and behold! Data shows that 80%-95% of American college students engage in procrastination, approximately 75% consider themselves procrastinators. While this number does make me feel good about myself, I also would love to pass the information to people who think they are worried about the same.

Procrastination refers to the deferment of actions or tasks to a later time. Psychologists often cite such behavior as a mechanism for coping with the anxiety associated with starting and/or completing any task or decision. There are three criteria for a behavior to be classified as procrastination: it must be counterproductive, needless, and delaying.

Procrastination may result in stress, a sense of guilt and crisis, severe loss of personal productivity, as well as disapproval by others for not meeting responsibilities or commitments. These feelings combined may promote further procrastination. While it is regarded as normal for people to

procrastinate to some degree, it becomes a problem when it impedes normal functioning. Chronic procrastination may be a sign of an underlying psychological disorder.

Curing procrastination is not necessarily about will power or forcefully advancing in your goals but rather it is about learning why we procrastinate, what we are afraid of and finding ways to face those fears in order to move forward in our lives.

What are you afraid of?

Below are 6 reasons that psychologists believe that are the major causes of procrastination in our day to day lives. If we keep these in mind, they say we could have a cure to this menace. While I have not tested the prescription long enough to offer my results, it is worth a look.

1. Fear of Failure.

The fear of failure is by far the most obvious fear which can cause disabling procrastination. This is especially true as it pertains to our professional lives, careers, and for college students their assignments.

If the fear of failure is causing you to put off a task then what you need to do is sit down and think carefully about all of the possible outcomes if indeed you fail.

Actually, first consider what does it mean to fail? If you can't answer this question then you have nothing to fear and your task of curing procrastination is finished. If you can certainly imagine failing in the given task then consider for a minute what is the worst possible consequence of failing.

Make peace with this, accept it and you have nothing more to fear. The Samurai of early Japan taught themselves to make peace with the fact that they could die at any time.

By doing this they eliminated almost all other fears -- because, of course, what could be worse than that. They certainly learned the trick to curing procrastination.

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



2. Fear of Success.

If you think that maybe your procrastination is being caused by your fear of success then curing procrastination becomes all that much easier.

Why are you afraid of success?

Chances are you want success but you fear that you will not be able to live up to the responsibilities of success and everything it brings. Or maybe, you are aware that success will bring negative consequences in addition to positive things. If you are to succeed in curing procrastination then you must come to terms with what to expect with success and weigh the good versus the bad.

If the undesired results outweigh the bad then just decide not to do the project at all and you have just succeed in one thing: curing procrastination. You see if you remove a task from your plate then there is no longer anything to procrastinate about.

3. Overestimating the time left to complete a task.

When your teacher assigns a research project the first week of school do you begin on it right away or wait for 15 weeks until it is due? Many students see that long semester stretching ahead of them fail to take into account the other homework and life tasks they must manage during the

semester.

4. Underestimating the time required to complete tasks.

Many students don't have a realistic concept of how much time it will take to look up sources, take notes, extract the information and formulate a paper. When they run into snags and time delays, they often feel the universe is working against them. People with a poor concept of time also think they can drive a 30 minute trip in 10 minutes.

5. Believing you must be in the mood to do a task.

Delaying the start of a task until you are in the mood is common. However, when you get started on a task well ahead of the deadline, your mood brightens and self-esteem increases.

6. Over-reliance on time-saving modern technology.

If you've ever seen a procrastinator kick and scream at a copy machine or printer that's moving slower than they wish, you are witnessing this cause.

Curing procrastination is not impossible and it is within everyone's reach. It is really a mind game. In summary, curing procrastination is possible when you face your fears head on and eliminate them with an understanding of why you are afraid.



SIDNEY PACIFIC COMMITTEE ON SCHOLARLY INTERACTION
and
MIT SOCIETY OF PRESIDENTIAL FELLOWS
present



SUSAN HOCKFIELD

**PRESIDENT OF
MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY**

**Monday, February 22, 7:00 p.m.
Sidney Pacific Multipurpose Room**

Dinner and reception to follow.



Lecture open to the MIT community.
RSVP at sp-cosi-chair@mit.edu.
for more details...

<http://s-p.mit.edu/cosi>