

The SPeaker

Take the Plunge—Apply to be an Officer at SP!

Gregory Izatt, VP of Residential Life 2016-2017

At the midpoint of my first year, I wasn't sure of much -- but, between Open Doors Nights and Coffee Hours and Tea Times in the lobby, I had a strong feeling I might want to stick around Sidney Pacific a while longer. After exploring the options, I applied to be a Hall Councilor on the simple basis of it seeming to be a good fit. I can point to that decision as a cornerstone of my graduate life at MIT,



and I would make it again in a heartbeat! With the title of Hall Councilor came plenty of responsibilities that I expected, and that I found plenty rewarding. When first years arrived during Orientation, I made a huge batch of brownies and knocked on each and everyone's door to welcome them to MIT and SP -- which was scary for the first few doors, but pretty fun by the end! I learned the details of making things like hall dinners and outings

actually happen, and grew comfortable mediating conflicts and helping folks get along. But there were a few unexpected experiences that really stuck with me. When I started the job, I didn't see myself as a person who could motivate a half-dozen busy grad students to take a few hours off from work to man a team in a pizza making competition. Or a person who would inadvertently become head chef for a 300 person BBQ. (Seriously, whose idea was that?) It's only by working with the other members of the House Government that year that I learned how to do those things. I grew a ton personally, in ways I was very surprised by -- sure, I became more effective and decisive, but more importantly, I became more confident in my ability to make and recover from mistakes and to take bold actions.

Being an officer also proved an excellent way to make friends and find a home. The other Hall Councilors I went through training with and asked tons of advice of -- and the other officers that I got to know through coffee hours and brunches and insane Orientation events -- are among the closest friends I have! Sidney Pacific is an incredible building full of unbeatable resources and people -- getting to continue living here, and actively working to make it a better place, was worth it.

From my bird's eye view this past year, I've seen that my story isn't unique at all -- every officer, regardless of position, lives a story like mine, in which they've encountered challenges they may not have expected, and have overcome them with the help of new and old friends within the house team. It's a critical part of the mission of SPEC to *ensure* that SP officers don't just make the lives of other residents better, but also take something away from the experience themselves! Take the plunge -- apply for an officer position at Sidney Pacific!



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Contribute to the Speaker!

Do you enjoy writing short stories, poetry or prose?
Do you enjoy painting, drawing, or photography?
Submit to the SidPac Speaker *Creative Corner* to show off your talent and compete for a prize!

If you are interested in providing a news article as well, let us know! Submit writing, photographs, scans or ideas to:

sp-newsletter-chair@mit.edu

Fostering Connections through Research: A Look into the Graduate Seminar Series

Editor

One of the newest additions to the diversity of programming that takes place within the walls of the Sidney Pacific community is the Graduate Seminar Series, an off-shoot of the long-running CoSI Dinner Series. The difference here is the speaker—instead of bringing in well-established faculty members from MIT or other institutions to speak about their research work, this series encourages *graduate students* to do the speaking. From students who are just embarking on



Aaron Smargon speaks about computational biology at the first Graduate Seminar Series.

their research journey to those who can almost hear the applause at their defense, anyone and everyone is encouraged to share their work in a structured yet informal setting to receive feedback or to spark new discussions. The very first seminar took place in SP just a few weeks ago featuring students speaking about design, robotics for learning in children, and computational biology, and was very well received.

So what motivated the creation of this exciting new initiative, and how can we get involved? I sat down with one of the students who spearheaded this initiative and brought it to fruition, Neil Gaikwad, to find out more!

Why do you think the Seminar Series is an important initiative? What motivated you to get it started?

Often times when you come to a place like MIT as a

graduate student, after a few weeks into your first semester, you've already dived into your highly specific field of research. After a few orientation events or social activities, you don't really get to interact with students in other departments in an academic setting—this is a huge opportunity lost in terms of collaboration. We want to give students a space to connect with researchers of different backgrounds and spark interdisciplinary collaborations, or at least provide a forum where students can share meaningful ideas and conversations that might drive their own work in an unexpected direction. Thanks to the hard work by and support from Nicholas Triantafillou, Madhav Kumar, Aaron Smargon, and a grant from MIT ODGE, we were able to get this initiative off the ground!

Why did you decide on the format of a speaker series, similar to the CoSI events, instead of a more informal setting?

One thing Nicholas and I realized in developing this idea is that graduate students really don't get enough opportunities to give practice talks. If students need to prepare for job talks, conference talks, or simply



Randi Williams speaks about learning and robotics in children.

would like to get more experience with public speak-

Graduate Seminar (Continued from Page 2)

ing, this is an excellent forum for that—it offers structure, but without the stress. It’s designed to be a low-pressure, non-competitive environment, and the talks are not recorded for public viewing.

I’m an SP resident or an MIT student, and I’d like to get more involved in this initiative. How can I do that?

If you’d like to give a talk, you can sign up by sending me an email at gaikwad@mit.edu or emailing the CoSI chairs at sp-cosi-chair@mit.edu. For details on upcoming and past events, you can check out our Facebook page. We’re always looking for volunteers to help on the day-of or to spread the word to their colleagues who might be interested. But most importantly, we want you all to attend the talks to learn, to share, and to have a free dinner!



Xiaoqian (Annie) has been a SidPac resident for less than a year, and she’s already gotten involved in decorating! Originally from Beijing, China, Annie is a graduate student in the Biology department. In her spare time, she thoroughly enjoys wandering around New England, exploring small towns that dot the map, and getting to learn more about their history. She also is a huge fan of Chinese Opera.

It’s clear that working with plants is rooted deeply in Annie’s mind—I asked her for a fun fact or a funny story about herself, and even *that* was plant related! “My current favorite plant is a beautiful sphere shaped cactus, in one of the greenhouses of Wellesley College,”

“I chose to be the plant chair because I always felt what I liked the most about SP was the two “greenhouse” areas which made the place feel very lively.” - Annie Yu, SP Plants Chair 2016-2017

Spotlight: Plants Chair

Editor

she says. “I am addicted to looking at the picture of it I took.”

For Annie, the most enjoyable part of being the plants chair is getting to decorate SidPac by purchasing new plants and choosing where to place them, or simply moving around plants that exist already. She says that just moving plants around the floor is enough to give the surroundings a different, refreshing feel, something that amazes her. In fact, the existing greenery



was one of the reasons Annie had wanted to join the SidPac community in the first place and eventually become the plants chair. "I chose to be the plant chair because I always felt that what I liked the most about SP (when I came and visited friends) was the two "greenhouse" areas which made the place feel very lively."

So what has she been up to this semester? Bringing plants closer to the lives of SP residents with some fun and interesting initiatives. For Valentine's day, she helped to organize the rose and chocolate night, and worked with the Art and Coffee Hour chairs to have a plant decoration-themed coffee hour. When it actually does become Spring and the weather is warmer, Annie will be organizing planting events that will allow residents to have their own earth boxes and tend to home-grown veggies, and terrarium building events so residents can even have plants to decorate their rooms.

As always, I asked Annie to leave us with parting thoughts on what SidPac means to her, and why it is that she loves living here. "The large variety of events that happen year round, many centered around community building," she says. That is something that is truly unique about SP, and it is people like Annie that make these events possible with their creative ideas and planning. On behalf of the entire Sidney Pacific community, we thank her for her hard work, and we look forward to the planting events coming up!

Upcoming Events at SidPac

March 16th: Graduate Seminar (6PM)

March 18th: Beauty and the Beast Outing (5PM)

March 19th: SidPac Brunch (12PM)

March 22nd: Arts and Music Showcase (7PM)

March 24th, 25th: CASPAR Fundraiser

Sidney Pacific Research Art Night



Photo Credits: SP Photofile Chairs, Annie Yu, Gregory Izatt