

Town Hall Minutes

September 18, 2020 12 – 1pm

Meeting Minutes

A) Intro from Jonathon Brearley and Nicholas de Monchaux

Brearley + de Monchaux explained that this is a promised follow-up meeting to our June 8 Town Hall to discuss creating an anti-racist community in MIT Architecture that is supportive and inclusive of BIPOC voices.

B) Departmental Updates on Agenda Items Raised in the Town Hall

Specific agenda items that were brought up in June were discussed and steps that have been taken to address them.

1. BIPOC representation in the faculty

- a. **(Knight) Currently launching A+U search for a Tenure-track position.** Cannot specifically have a BIPOC line; we will be following MIT and other institutions' best practices for maximizing diversity in the hiring process. This includes having oversight from the SA+P Diversity Committee + a broad position description.
Also launching a multi-year hiring plan to increase diversity and looking to add more students on search committees.
- b. **(O'Brien) Option Studio contracts for BIPOC** – we are committed to diversity's in instructors' backgrounds/methodologies with the goal of having a roster of wide-ranging instructors and POVs.
We are looking into **extending long-term contracts of current instructors** to keep continuity within the MArch program, however budget restrictions at the Institute-level have hindered planned hire for Professor of Practice. We intend to readdress as soon as it is financially viable.
- c. **(O'Brien) A fellowship specifically for BIPOC practitioners:** This year, the department had one existing fellowship search; we brought Deborah Garcia (who is teaching in Core 1 in the fall and a workshop on her own work this spring).
Goal is to launch three fellowships next year: Belluschi and Mahoney Fellowships, and an additional fellowship, the **Robert Taylor Fellowship** (work will be focused on impactful contributions around equity in the built environment). We will prioritize this fellowship. Brandon is also introducing a new layer of professional development and will coordinate these fellowships into a cohort.
- d. **(O'Brien) Diversity and Inclusion in Juries:** working w/ A+U to test out a new process to support mid-term and final review selection timescale that allows for discussion in juries. A+U preparing database to support faculty in seeking diverse voices in classes and juries.

2. Underrepresented Minority (URM) representation in the student body

- a. **(Knight) Need-blind Financial Aid and other funding for URM**

Received 7 (double our previous number) dedicated fellowships for BIPOC students and distributed that through incoming class. Increased average student funding by 70% for SMArchS and MArch students.

Asking for additional (optional) financial information in our application + admitted students starting this fall, which included adding FASA for US applications. This will enable us to combine need-blind admissions with need-aware distribution of fellowships.

b. (Kettner) Peer mentor program for applicants

In collaboration w/ the S&E committee, ASC, and NOMAS, we are launching a peer-mentorship application program specifically geared towards individuals from low-income and under-represented racial backgrounds. Applicants will be matched to current student who can answer questions and provide feedback on application process.

c. (Clifford) More inclusive and transparent application process

Currently redesigning admissions process with the goal of deepening the application pool. We will be separating MArch and SMArchS admissions and excluding erroneous questions (i.e. "what is your family income"), incorporating targeted questions for statements, removing GRE, resolving issues that prevented student participation in process, and seeking bias training for those involved.

For SMArchS and PhD, we are re-instituting review of all admits to assess diversity across the discipline groups and re-review outstanding BIPOC applicants for admission who may not have "fit" a particular discipline group.

d. (Pettigrew and Bennett) More expansive Outreach

Hired two dedicated TAs to expanded outreach at undergraduate and graduate level. Goal is to be more proactive in outreach to BIPOC students and young professionals/alumni.

Building own version of Institute's GradCatalyst program (student-led information and recruitment workshops) with the goal to recruit potential applicants from under-represented communities.

3. (de Monchaux) Curriculum Reform

a. Collaboration across disciplines to bring in more diverse voices

currently working with DUSP on coordinated offerings in the Spring. Have worked to connect this fall across offerings in ACT and MAS as well. We are collaborating to support and grow the BIPOC in the Built project, under the leadership of Kai Smith. Continuing discussions in the cabinet on course development.

b. Future course offerings

Discussions are continuing within the Cabinet on new classes focused on race between department discipline groups. General approach is to add several new dedicated courses, but then also to grow resources for the re-design and re-examination of many existing courses (such as the BIPOC in the Built project).

c. Early availability of syllabus and review

MIT policy makes it difficult to request syllabi ahead of the first week of the semester, however working to add syllabi from previous year, to current courses on the website.

4. (Knight) Racial bias & cultural sensitivity training for the community (virtual for now/in-person in future)

- a. After conversations with internal and external organizations, S&E group has settled on **Courageous Conversations**, a Bay-Area based consultancy with deep experience in anti-

racist training in higher education settings. We will be working with **Brooke Gregory**. They will be engaging our whole staff, student, and faculty community this fall over multiple group sessions.

5. **(de Monchaux) Funding for Student Organizations**
 - a. Increased funding for NOMAS
 - b. We are putting in mechanisms to address issues of delayed student reimbursements
6. **Representation in reviews (see item 1d above)**
7. **(de Monchaux) Develop a research fund to fund faculty and student work that engages with BIPOC communities**
 - a. Collaborations with DUSP and Architecture have made this issue our priority for the year in a series of presentations we are making to MIT fundraising.
8. **(de Monchaux) Endowed lecture Series**
 - a. We are working with development resources to secure dedicated funding. At the moment, we are combining with current lectures. For e.g. Multiple endowed and non-endowed lectures this fall are focused on equity and the built environment. We will focus several existing endowed lectures on this theme in the interim as well.
9. **(Norford) Procurements**
 - a. For purchases such as food, shop equipment, books, and office equipment, I've found that there are local alternatives (than popular retailers such as Amazon, Walmart, etc.) that are more diverse and offer fair labor practices. Though they can be more expensive, these will be shared with the department.

C) Updates from NOMAS

Moyers and **Ismail**, former co-chairs of NOMAS, gave updates on some of the activities that have been happening over the summer.

(Moyers) Items worked on over the summer include:

1. Wrote an **Open letter for greater diversity in a review environment** (plan to continue this kind of reporting to hold ourselves accountable)
2. Participated in **Town Hall**, have continued working on a list of demands alongside students and faculty
3. Expanded on above in **Open Letter called "Do the Work"** to the faculty
4. **NOMAS met weekly over the summer** to discuss updates, meet with student groups, including groups like GSU, and coordinated with external groups in GSD and Yale on their efforts.
5. **Coordinated with S&E Committee**
6. **Wrote or co-wrote proposals for grants**, such as for the class What We Don't Talk About When We Talk About Architecture and for the BIPOC in the Built Project.
7. Working with Dean's Office to develop a call for a **schoolwide Assistant Dean in Diversity, Belonging, and Student Support**

(Ismail) This fall, NOMAs has decided to focus on our mission of building community and representation for BIPOC. Hosting a student-only happy hour next week to invite students to join NOMAS.

D) (Knight) Further Existing and Proposed Departmental Actions in Response to Equity Concerns

Knight discussed further concerns in the department not addressed in the June 8 Town Hall, which the S&E team will also address.

1. **Open House:** working to include better BIPOC representation during open house and make our commitment and actions to create an equitable, anti-racist department clear.
2. **Pettigrew** is going to organize non-traditional **career graduate workshop** w/ BIPOC speakers, scheduled to start late fall or next spring.
3. Surveys revealed there is a lack of clarity/confusion for **system of complaints within departments**. Firstly, clarifying resources already in place for student complaints, compiled them in one document and placed somewhere prominent in the department. Also, adding a new resource at the department level called a dRef (department Resources for Easing Friction and Stress - student peer support program for conflict management and advice w/ formal training).
We will be working on a new department level reporting and resolution system that will allow recurring (but anonymized) concerns and complaints to be identified and tracked.
4. Looking at **frameworks for judging merit in student admissions and faculty hiring**. Will somewhat be addressed by previously noted actions, however not enough. Will be addressing this after meetings w/ Courageous Conversations. Will also be looking at frameworks for retaining women and BIPOC faculty.

E) Q & A

de Monchaux and **Breareley** opened the floor for questions.

Breareley asked for more clarifications regarding choosing Courageous Conversations.

Knight explained that the S&E committee discussed with internal groups, but the timing did not quite fit. We asked for referrals from DUSP and other groups who had worked with external contractors. We discussed with one group that had previously worked with MIT, but were not as successful. We were finally referred to CC by a student and had a good conversation with Brooke, who had specific success in an academic environment.

Breareley asked for clarity regarding voluntary reporting in admissions applications.

de Monchaux and **Bennett** clarified that it is voluntary in the hopes that those who need will include that information. All admissions should be need-blind, but once admitted it is helpful to distribute funding. The FASA is already in use for loan determination purposes, but it will also help in determining the need's of admitted students.

Cunningham asked via chat if there are any active goals and objectives related to diversifying the staff?

Knight Inala Locke and Tonya Miller are our staff representatives in the S&E committee. They've sent out a survey to staff.

Locke looking at breakout sessions with more discussions between staff to address how we can voice our concerns in a cohesive way.

As there were not many questions, **de Monchaux** clarified that we would meet again without such a structured agenda to discuss further.