The primary purpose of the Undergraduate Association (UA) is to serve as the voice of the student body vis-à-vis the MIT administration. The Association contains an umbrella of committees and working groups focused on major facets of our undergraduate career. With its newsletters, the UA will showcase its wide array of involvement by documenting policy initiatives and projects. This first issue reports the UA activities of the Fall semester 2013 and offers a glimpse of the projects of this Spring term.

The UA takes breath from the energy and commitment of its student advocates. I joined the Committee on Education (CoE) three semesters ago in the hope of reaching the student body’s shared goal of not only becoming more knowledgeable but smarter. The CoE offered the opportunity to collaborate with students with the same drive to improve our already top-notch MIT education. The authors of these newsletter articles are students with an equal dedication to the various needs of their fellow undergraduates. Their assiduous work will continue to ensure your voices are heard by the MIT faculty and staff.

UA Executives and Committee Chairs
Take an active role in your undergraduate experience and apply for a UA Committee! For descriptions of the committees and application forms, please visit http://ua.mit.edu/join/executive-committees/. Looking forward to having you on the team!

Billy Ndengeyingoma
Editor-in-Chief
Letter from the Chief of Staff

Dear Undergraduates:

You may be wondering about the role of the Chief of Staff in the Undergraduate Association (UA). According to the UA's constitution, the Chief of Staff must “manage the UA's interaction with the MIT Faculty. He or she chairs the Nominations Board which appoints, oversees, and communicates with the approximately 60 representatives to a total of about 40 presidential and faculty committees.”

Personally, I see my role as Chief of Staff as an opportunity to actively engage with undergraduate institute committee members, to shape policy and to improve student education and life at MIT. These undergraduate members are selected through a competitive process run by the UA Nominations Board, including an application and interview.

This year’s nominations slate was printed in the Tech [Volume 133, Issue 46] and lists the students who are members of such committees as the Presidential Advisory Cabinet, the Corporation Joint Advisory Committee, the Faculty Policy Commit-tee, to name only a few. On these committees, undergraduates have contributed to policy that formed new majors (most recently, 6.7), curriculum changes (such as the inclusion of 6.00 to course 9), and policies that have been co-authored by faculty members. I have been lucky enough to have contributed to policy changes as a member of the Committee on Curricula, Council for Educational Technology, and Woman’s Advisory Board. Now, as Chief of Staff, I get to support undergraduates who shape similar (and even not-so-similar) policies.

MIT undergraduates have a unique opportunity to contribute to institute governance. Unlike most colleges, our faculty members trust students with confidential matters on committees like the Committee on Discipline. Students on these committees take their role seriously and, as noted by Professor Redwine, "greatly improve Institute governance". Like many faculty members, I am very proud of students who contribute so much to Institute governance.

Through my time as institute committee member and Chief of Staff, I have met with President Reif, Chancellor Grimson, and various Deans and Professors to discuss changes to our MIT education ranging from topics of online education to the future of mentorship. For instance, these discussions led to 79% of freshmen now having a faculty advisor, up from the mere 23%.

Shruti Sharma
UA Chief of Staff
The Elections Commission ran an election for the 2017 Class Council. The election saw a participation rate of about 45%—an increase from last year (which saw 40%) and a year before (with 35%). Additionally, all but two of the positions were contested, and no position was filled by a write-in candidate. The election also ran on a brand new website, which is hosted off of the same server as the main UA website, rather than a dedicated co-located server.

We also proposed, and the Council approved, an updated election code. The changes to the code eliminate all formal positions within the Commission (except the Chair), including the Campaign Rules Board. They also push back the freshman elections to October, enabling freshmen to spend some time settling in before determining if they want to run. The new code provides for the senior class council to oversee the freshman class budget until the elections take place, which allows for study breaks and other class-building programming to keep happening.

Report from the Election Commission

President/Chair of Election Commission

Leonid Grinberg
Chair of Election Commission

Treasurer report

The basic responsibilities of the UA Treasurer mostly involve reimbursements and budgets. For these, I have streamlined the reimbursement process for internal UA operations and have instituted a better expense-tracking tool on the UA website. In addition, I have utilized a better budget template such that this past Fall semester’s budget was both more accurate and more sensible. To see the Fall 2013 (and past semesters’) budget(s), visit [http://ua.mit.edu/funding/budgets/](http://ua.mit.edu/funding/budgets/).

In addition, upon taking this role, I decided to work on other projects to improve financially-related aspects of the UA in general. For instance, I developed new webpages regarding the student life fee1 and the UA/ASA Fresh Fund2. Moreover, I am collaborating with the Finboard to improve their bylaws and their allocations process such that groups receive higher amounts of necessary funding. For example, in the July-December 2013 period, the Finboard allocated 164% more funds than in the July-December 2012 period, albeit the total requests by groups in each period were almost equal.

2. [http://ua.mit.edu/funding/fresh-fund/](http://ua.mit.edu/funding/fresh-fund/)

If you ever have questions regarding UA finances or the UA in general, feel free to contact me at ua-treasurer@mit.edu.

Cory Hernandez
UA Treasurer
MITx: a click away from an extra special MIT

Despite the ever-growing presence of MITx, many undergraduates are unclear of the motivation behind the online platform. Aren’t world-renowned lectures one of the most valuable parts of our MIT education? Are online assessments an improvement from the classic problem sets? It all boils down to one simple idea: how can we make MIT even more special?

The main counterargument about MITx is the limitation of student-faculty interactions. I assure you that MITx will vastly improve the quality and quantity of such interactions. Our faculty has amassed extensive real-life experiences and unparalleled depth of intuition. However, lectures often come down to an exposé of basic formulas and facts. With MITx, students can be introduced to the fundamentals of a subject. Concept questions or other types of evaluations can ensure students have assimilated the notions. Professors can now have the time to conduct lectures in more exciting ways. A survey of faculty reveals that the average time spent preparing for a lecture is five hours, which amounts to fifteen hours for a MWF lecture-based class. Professors could instead utilize fifteen hours meeting with students in smaller groups, preparing labs and demonstrations or talking to the class about interesting research in the field. There is some magic in the classic format of our lectures, but there’s even more magic in a global intellectual leader engaging with eager undergraduates in ways that are interesting to both parties.

This presents another exciting challenge, which everyone at MIT can work to solve. Is it feasible to create more opportunities for students to participate in hands-on work? For instance, chemistry enthusiasts in 5.111/2 could take on interesting and challenging lab modules under the professor’s guidance. More introductory engineering courses could adopt an open-ended project component. Students could directly apply the principles learned in class to complete their projects. This will create an intellectually stimulating and collaborative environment for both students and faculty that surpasses the traditional lectures-psets-tests class format.

With MITx, every assumption about college education is currently being questioned. The UA MITx committee, the Office of Digital Learning and the Committee on Curricula are aiming to provide the best educational experience. If you are interested in taking part of the online learning movement or have ideas of educational experiments, please email ua-mitx-chairs@mit.edu.

A survey of faculty reveals that the average time spent preparing for a lecture is five hours, which amounts to fifteen hours for a MWF lecture-based class. Professors could instead utilize fifteen hours meeting with students in smaller groups, preparing labs …

Colin McDonnell
MITx Committee Chair
IHTFP: the “paradise” version

The UA Student Support/Wellness Committee has joined Harvard in implementing a successful project of theirs at MIT. The “Happiness Project” involves a series of wellness-related challenges over a 6-to-8 week period that encourages people to build healthy habits in a fun way. Our hope is to introduce the challenge to show where undergrads can start to make choices that improve their quality of life. Through simple changes in your daily routine and by taking advantage of on-campus resources, it becomes easy to manage and relieve stress!

There are more exciting projects in store for this coming term. In addition to putting on Wellness Week, an annual collaboration with MIT’s student groups and health services, there will be a hackathon to promote technological solutions to support student wellness. Committee member Alexander List ’15 will bring very useful insight he used when co-founding Domo, a start-up aimed to improve well-being, reduce stress and build community. Did you know your dorm had a mental health and counseling liaison? If not, you will get the chance to meet them and discuss their role thanks to a program that we hope to base on student-faculty dinners!

Through these efforts, the Student Support/Wellness Committee hopes to enhance...
MIT Engineers’ SuperFan

Can you remember the most recent MIT athletics event you attended? Watching a cohort of students frantically sprinting across 77 Mass. Ave. to get to class does not count. Come support our very talented Engineers alongside the UA Athletics Committee! There is no better way to boost our morale and strengthen our school pride than shouting the Beaver Call at an MIT sports event.

The highlight of the Fall 2013 semester was the Football Tailgate on October 18th. While taking a break from cheering on the Engineers, students participated in a competition to win former MIT gear. With the help of the Student Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC), the Kresge BBQ pits were filled with the scent of grilling hot dogs and hamburgers. Our win against Nichols College fueled the rest of the celebration! With refreshments and food at hand, both student and non-student athletes faced off in lawn games.

The Winter Sports Weekend on December 7th also saw great levels of attendance. The squash, swimming and diving and women’s basketball teams really appreciated your encouragements. Many supporters at the basketball game showed off their talents at the half-time free throw competition for the chance to win SuperFan t-shirts.

The UA Athletics Committee and the SAAC took the sports weekend as good venue to support the MIT Giving
Tree. A concession stand with a North Pole themed decoration had hot chocolate and candy canes. Donations were encouraged and Super-Fan t-shirts sold for $10 donations. A total of $281 was raised in favor of the MIT Giving Tree.

The Athletics Committee will give you more occasions to show your beaver pride this Spring semester. We will also work on adding bike racks in certain problem areas such as the outside of building 1 and near the stairs leading to lobby 7. Please email <ua-athletics-chairs@mit.edu> if you would like to be involved in the committee!

**Put on your green-colored glasses**

The Committee on Sustainability had a very successful Fall semester. After an intensive round of applications and recruitment, we accepted 18 new members, more than doubling the size of our committee. The much larger member base was restructured into an executive board and five project teams: Composting, Gardening, Environmental Container Outreach (ECO), Dorm Electricity Competition (DEC) and the Trashion Show.

Led by project leaders, each team made strides in campus sustainability. In collaboration with Facilities and Dining, the Composting team focused on “greenovating” the dining halls by adding compost bins. As part of “Mission Compostable”, all dining dorms received newly designed bins at the end of IAP.

The Gardening team worked diligently to draft a proposal for opening and maintaining a community garden on campus and actively reached out to the Harvard community garden program for advice on kick starting this new initiative. The ECO project resulted in a proposal for extending the green box take-away system of the dining halls to continued on next page

“Mission Compostable” in Baker Dining. Pictured: L. Senatus ’15
other dining venues such as the Student Center and Stata Café. As for the Dorm Electricity Competition planning committee, the ongoing brainstorming meetings for the Spring contest will culminate in an exciting MIT-related theme. The Trashion Show on December 6th was a smashing success, bringing in designers from the Boston School of Fashion Design, audience members from all across the Cambridge and Boston communities, and notable speakers, including an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) representative and the mayor of Cambridge.

On the administrative side of things, the committee has continued to build relationships with various like-minded groups at MIT and in the greater community. We are incredibly excited to be working with the new Office of Sustainability and solidifying our relationship with the Environmental Health and Safety Office as well as the Campus Energy Task Force. In addition, we strengthened our relationships with sustainability committees at Tufts and Northeastern and with the EPA. We are also eager to contribute to the MIT Environmental Initiative, which was recently announced again.

Moving forward, we will continue to develop our projects, increase our involvement and visibility on campus, and establish strong relationships with other groups in putting forth a constant unified effort to improve campus sustainability. We strive to foster MIT’s leadership in environmental initiatives and dream of MIT one day becoming the most sustainable campus in the world. Contact uasustainability-chairs@mit.edu with any questions and/or suggestions.

Karen Hao
Sustainability Committee Chair

---

**UA Officers**

President
Sidhanth Rao
Vice President
Devin Cornish
Chief of Staff
Shruti Sharma
Treasurer
Cory Hernandez
Secretary General
Matthew Davis

**Photo credit**
UA Public Relations
Connie Huang