



# Under the Microscope

Magnifying Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Efforts in BE

First, we'd like to wish you a happy...

## TRANSGENDER DAY OF VISIBILITY

March

31

### Introducing the Diversity Co-Chairs!

by Diana Gong and Kalon Overholt

In this edition of our newsletter, we highlight our magnificent Diversity Chairs, Cal Gunnarsson and Miguel Alcantar! During their tenure as Diversity Chairs for the past three years, they've done a lot of behind-the-scenes work, and we want to ensure that their dedication is recognized by the BE community.

The Education working group has a [blog!](#) Visit [deimitbe.wordpress.com](#) for recommended readings and highlights of anti-oppressive work in the MIT community.

**Also check out:** [Changing scientific meetings for the better](#): Advancing equity at scientific conferences.

[NIH Director apologizes for structural racism](#)

**A bit of history...** The Diversity Chair role has evolved over time from the first iteration of the position. Until 5 years ago, the main responsibilities of the position were to organize a Beers of the World event and the BE talent show. Miguel and Cal gave a shout out to Claire Duvall, Scott Olesen, and Manu Kumar, previous Diversity Chairs who spearheaded the evolution of the role into the advocacy-focused position it is today. "They really laid the groundwork for this role and set the stage for the changes we've made toward improving DEI in our department."



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Recently, Cal and Miguel oversaw the creation of the graduate student DEI working groups and are now continually supporting their success. They established these working groups in collaboration with the BE Board coordinators and students involved in Institute-wide diversity work, in response to BE graduate student recommendations.



Cal (left) and Miguel (right) were a match made in Hollywood! Keep reading for a snippet on how they met and a brief history of the diversity chair role.

Miguel noted that he appreciates that these working groups give everyone an opportunity to contribute to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts, which was more difficult in the past for people not on the BE Board. Cal added, "From our perspective as diversity chairs, we're two people. Two people can do their best, but they can't represent a whole graduate student body. So this was a really great opportunity to bring a little bit more democracy into some of the things that we had been doing as diversity chairs."

Since the start of the working groups late last fall semester, Cal and Miguel have already seen them support the mission of fostering diversity within the department. They highlighted that the education working group has created a blog to share resources and has been facilitating educational discussions. They also noted that this newsletter (woot!) is an awesome way to keep people updated on the work being done in the department, to share DEI opportunities that are open to the general BE community, and to provide relevant literature for people to read throughout the semester. Overall, the working groups are providing a way for many graduate students to increase their involvement and take tangible action on important issues.

Reflecting on their time as Diversity Chairs, Miguel and Cal cited increasing inclusivity during Interview Weekend as their biggest accomplishment. The changes they have made to the weekend include introducing the use of pronoun stickers at all graduate student-hosted events, working with Welcoming Chairs to ensure accommodations, and implementing a diversity panel. Cal and Miguel created the diversity panel during their first year as a place for interviewees to ask identity-based questions. For example, students may inquire about the experiences of underrepresented students in the department and Boston in general. Altogether, interviewees are interested in the level of support they will find in our department and whether they will have a sense of community within MIT BE. Cal and Miguel noted that this year in particular, there were many more questions asked at the diversity panel than in previous years--they attributed this to the virtual environment, which allowed interviewees to feel more comfortable asking the panelists truly anonymous questions. In post-interview weekend surveys, interviewees have mentioned that it's the best diversity panel they've seen at their interview weekends!

After three years of serving as Diversity Chairs, Cal and Miguel have seen various areas where our department can still improve in building diversity, equity, and inclusion. Some of the most salient areas, they noted, include implementing relocation assistance to mitigate the up front financial burden of grad students moving to Boston and hiring a diversity officer who can make substantial contributions with a comprehensive focus on the BE department. With many avenues ahead to enact change, Cal and Miguel offered their advice to those who might be willing to take on the role of Diversity Chair in the future. "Think about finding small ways that you can have a big impact," Cal said, recalling efforts such as implementing pronoun stickers during Interview Weekend events to create a more inclusive environment. Miguel added, "Remember, not everything has to be done alone. There really are people out there who are just as invested as you are in DEI topics. For whatever goal you have, try to find the right people to talk to in order to streamline the process of implementing the changes you want to make."

**A match made in Hollywood...**  
**Miguel:** "My first introduction to Cal was actually during a BE Board info session. We were both first year students trying to learn more about different roles in the graduate student board. We were sitting next to each other and they were going around the room to ask us to introduce ourselves. When it got to me, I forgot what I was doing so there was a 10 second silence and I made a joke like 'Sorry, I'm a first year and I don't know what I'm doing. My name's Miguel,' and Cal goes right after me and they say 'Hi, I'm Cal and I'm also a first year, but I do know what I'm doing.' And I feel like that really epitomizes our relationship right there. That has persisted over these 3 years."  
**Cal:** "So true. I knew you were going to roast me in this interview."  
**Diana:** "I don't know if that was a roast of you or a self-roast."  
**Miguel:** [to Cal] "You really helped boost my confidence those first few weeks of grad school, so thank you."  
**Cal:** "It's ok, it's ok. Sometimes I'll lend Miguel my jacket so he can wear that and feel cool. You know I'm boosting it back up again."  
**Kalon:** "That is definitely going in the newsletter."

### Working Group Spotlight: Recruit, Hire, Admit

The Recruit, Hire, Admit (RHA) working group focuses on student-led ways to promote equity and inclusion in the BE department's admissions and hiring processes.



Currently, the RHA working group is focused on:

**Making the graduate application process more transparent and accessible.** We are putting together two resources for the MIT BE website. One resource will help international students through the process of applying to American universities. The other will discuss the "unspoken rules" of what to include in applications, which are often informally passed on in networks of people at higher education institutions, but unknown to those who don't have access to these spaces.

**Advocating for relocation support for first year students.** We are working with the diversity co-chairs on ways to support first year students through the stressful process of relocating to attend graduate school.

**Increasing BE involvement in the MIT Summer Research Program.** We are working on building and strengthening relationships with historically black colleges and universities and local universities, while encouraging BE faculty to participate in [MSRP](#).

If you or your lab would like the chance to host and mentor a talented undergraduate student next summer, please talk to your PI and contact [MSRP@mit.edu](mailto:MSRP@mit.edu) to get involved with MSRP!

If you're interested in helping to make the BE department more accessible to applicants of diverse backgrounds, please reach out to us on the MIT BE slack #dei\_wg\_recruit\_hire\_admit, by email ([mfpars@mit.edu](mailto:mfpars@mit.edu)), or come to one of our meetings on **the first Thursday of every month at 3pm**, at <https://mit.zoom.us/j/91758215221>.

### Upcoming Events

**Trans/Non-Binary Mixer** — Mar. 31st, 7pm  
RSVP [here](#)

**On Causes and Responses to Anti-Asian Violence Webinar** — Mar. 31st, 5pm  
Register [here](#)

**Harvard/MIT Queer Speed "Networking"** — Apr. 7th, 7pm  
RSVP [here](#)

**Equality Act Discussion** — Apr. 28th, 6pm  
(hosted by Science Policy Initiative, LGBT Grad & RISE)  
RSVP [here](#)

### Contact Us

Feedback? Upcoming events? Want to get involved?  
Get in touch at: [be-dei-comms@mit.edu](mailto:be-dei-comms@mit.edu)

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