

Summary of BAMIT Advocacy Committee meeting with black MIT faculty

New House, April 6, 2005

On April 6, 2005, BAMIT convened a meeting with black faculty to discuss opportunities to reenergize “Black MIT” around BAMIT’s aspiration to build a “Community of Leaders & Laureates” (CL&L). Seven black members of the MIT faculty and three BAMIT members participated in the 90 minute discussion hosted by Wes and Sandra Harris in their New House home. Faculty members had reviewed beforehand the BAMIT white paper “Community of Leaders & Laureates” and the BAMIT proposal to establish a visiting committee focused on Black MIT. BAMIT Chairman Rob Hillman provided an introduction and context for the meeting, emphasizing the importance of the issues.

Key points of the discussion

1. In general, the faculty strongly supported the BAMIT aspiration and commented positively on its articulation in the CL&L paper.
2. The faculty raised some concerns about the effectiveness of the MIT visiting committee process. Apparently the credibility/effectiveness of visiting committees varies somewhat by department. Should key MIT leaders, such as department heads and the provost, be forced to report on their progress on black issues to a Visiting Committee on Black MIT?
3. The ability of BAMIT to drive change was also discussed, including recent BAMIT initiatives, such as BAMIT’s letter in support of Shirley Jackson’s candidacy, the BAMIT 25th celebration, and the Harris Fund for MITE²S.
4. Members of the black faculty feels disconnected from key processes that affect black students. For example, black faculty members present could not name the Admissions Office leader for black recruiting. One pointed out that in a generation past (with Nels Armstrong in Admissions) they could.
5. Financial contributions from BAMIT and others to Black MIT are viewed as one key potential lever for change:
 - a. Major contributions to OME would be a powerful signal of alumni support for Black MIT. This kind of gift should require matching funds from MIT
 - b. A development officer focused on blacks/black issues should be designated
6. There is a need to address an MIT culture that is difficult for black students:
 - a. Professors have lower expectations of minorities than of non-minorities
 - b. There is a sense (among undergrads) that you are not here because you deserve to be here (Claude Steele was mentioned as describing this phenomenon. The Meyerhoff program at the University of Maryland was described as being effective in “flipping” expectations)

7. It was pointed out that there are currently no consequences for passive bad behavior. MIT should develop programs that empower students to address biases that they encounter day-to-day, analogous to approaches used to combat sexual harassment. OME might help faculty be more responsive by sponsoring diversity discussion forums during faculty orientation.
8. BAMIT can help to provide “institutional memory” by passing along perspectives on faculty/MIT to generations of black students.

Meeting Participants

Faculty	BAMIT
Wes Harris (host) Paula Hammond Ken Manning Melissa Nobles Adam Clayton Powell IV Kristala Jones Prather James Sherley	Rob Hillman (per phone for introduction) Bernard Loyd Darcy Prather