

ABCP Physics Division Community #ShutdownSTEM Zoom Event

Date: Wed Jun 10, 10:00-11:30am

Attendance: 67 people

Agenda:

- 10:00-10:05am - Check-in and intro to meeting
- 10:05-10:25am - Setting some context. Individual watching of youtube video: [Intuitively Obvious](#): MIT video with black students sharing their experience (From beginning to minute 15:47). [Recorded in 1996, but arguments still apply].
- 10:25-10:30am - Reconvene and initiate break out rooms' discussions
- 10:30-10:55am - Break out room discussions: Anti-black racism in academia and at MIT - What can we do?
- 10:55-11:20am - Reconvene and sharing of individual break out rooms' thoughts
- 11:20-11:30am - Future plans & strategy for ABCP Division

Further resources:

- Black Graduate Student Association's [recommendations](#) for addressing racial bias at MIT.
- MIT [Report](#) on the initiative for faculty race and diversity, 2010.
- Resources at particles for justice: <https://www.particlesforjustice.org/resources>
- Racism in academia: <https://www.shutdownstem.com/racism-in-academia>
- Anti-racism resources for white people: [link](#)

Notes from some of the break out rooms

Breakout room 1

Macroscopic problems of (1) Lack of role models, (2) Economic disadvantage, (3) Systemic racism. STEM participation thus becomes a problem of compounded attrition, $p*q = 0.1^2 = 1\%$: the "leaky pipeline" problem → too few minority applicants. So, how can we help fix the pipeline problem?

Concrete proposals:

1. Long-term involvement with local K-12 schools, not just an occasional "science day." But that won't fix things fundamentally.
2. How about opening a child-care lottery for low-income/minority families in Cambridge, followed by engagement throughout middle school and high school?
3. Reform local police -- MIT police and Cambridge police. Cut police budgets to invest more into community- and person-building programs such as "near-police" [see Denmark]: social workers integrated with community, etc. See also what Minneapolis city council is considering for police reform.

Breakout room 2

Thank you for leading the discussion this morning. The two main points from our discussion group were:

1. The notion of lowered expectations for students of color is something key that needs to be addressed. This was related to the expression of the same cohort needing to "defend acceptance" to MIT. Both are deeply rooted problems- we discussed learning more about this so that we could educate the community broadly about the firm ground which these students stand on as part of the MIT community.
2. Many of us were struck by the commentary in the video on the need for African American role models within the MIT community and agreed how important this was. We discussed how to improve MIT's reach into communities where the role models could both be found and developed for the future.

Finally, the link to the project at Columbia which includes under-represented groups is here: <https://leaders.quantum.columbia.edu/>

Breakout room 5

Here are various thoughts that people expressed in breakout room 5:

It is our responsibility to know that we're not fully objective. But just being objective and treating people nicely isn't enough. The history of race relations - not taught in schools. This fantasy that we can just be objective.

What you're taught at school is that slavery was in the past and its done and over. No, it's not done and over.

The lens that you see the world through is not a completely objective one. We think, hey we're scientists, we're objective people. Hey there's no problem in academia. Here we're all about solving physics problems. A lot of these problems still exist. Need to be more proactive about learning what to do. Educate yourself and be more proactive.

One of the students towards the beginning of the video was talking about affirmative action. The game seemed rigged - a baseball game where the rules were set against one group and changed in the 7th inning. What can we do as people who have made it this far to grease the slide? This question of the rest of the pipeline - there are limited options for helping people by the time people are adults.

If you try to demonstrate that you're welcoming people that you see as other - acknowledge to yourself that you're not objective. Can show rather than tell. Show what your values are. Higher education cannot solve this problem. Investing in education. A shift in consciousness - the new Jim Crow - mass incarceration. Fundamental shift in consciousness. As scientists, we're obligated to make clear that we're not objective.

This notion about being introspective - it is a cascading things - you may hear about a racist act, someone screaming something bad in the street. An accumulation of micro experiences. There was a comment in the video about assumptions that one black student would copy another black student. Maybe we are generating these little off-putting moments.

Do what we can do is to educate ourselves. There is no list of things we can do.

Particularly important that people are made to feel that everyone who is at MIT belongs at MIT.

Make people feel welcome, but don't make them feel different.

Breakout Room 7

Systemic racism explained -- how socioeconomic segregation acts to tip the scales and create an ingrained system of privilege.

How does affirmative action work at MIT? Does it truly act to eliminate the bias? Is there a way for academia to promote actions all the way back to the earlier stages of the educational system, helping the creation of academies that support students from an early stage, such that they compete on equal ground with their peers?

Let's not get overwhelmed by the scale of the problem and try to address first what happens in our community. Some of the most effective change is the one that happens locally, that goes by understanding how local change affects the broader issue. Things such as addressing issues that arise at a small scale, where we still have some level of control in our daily actions (like avoiding using plastic bags or reducing our consumption to contribute individually to address environmental problems). Let's move forward by supporting people in our community, where we have some direct and immediate impact, starting with taking some form of action, even a small one.

Regarding local impact: one of the difficulties is that even staying neutral sometimes can exacerbate the problem. Actively reaching out to students helps create an environment of support and respect, that counters a culture where work by black students is still largely perceived to not carry the same weight.

Make use of reports that have been produced over the years. One of the recommendations was to develop resources to educate community members on issues faced by black people in the same spirit as what we do for sexual harassment.