

Stage 1 of initiatives to be implemented in the CTP

The following list came out of the discussions on Wednesday June 10th, and were discussed by both the CTP faculty and at a CTP wide town hall on July 2nd. The outcome from that Town Hall meeting was to implement these items, and to continue to work on other Racial Justice initiatives for future stages:

1. Encourage a regular ongoing CTP study group / book club on systemic racism in academia and beyond, and related topics, organized by a group of graduate students and postdocs: Pouya Asadi, Sarah Geller, Matt Hodel, Wenzer Qin, and Gregory Ridgway. They have scheduled the first meeting of the [CTP Anti-Racism Reading Club](#) for Monday July 6 at 5:00-6.30pm.
2. Ensure that for every CTP postdoc search, there is a faculty member explicitly assigned to monitor equity/diversity issues, and at minimum ensure a second read of all files for candidates who are known to be URM. This role should rotate from year to year. The postdoc search committee will also meet before the next postdoc search and discuss strategies that can be used to reduce bias and whether there are useful modifications that could be made to the information we request from applicants. This role exists for all other types of searches we do in the department, eg. faculty searches, Pappalardo fellowships, graduate student admissions, and so there are good templates to work from.
3. Provide information about funds available in the department as well as setting aside dedicated CTP funds for CTP postdocs/students to attend physics conferences that serve underrepresented groups (e.g. the annual meeting of the National Society of Black Physicists), separate from existing travel funds. Encourage faculty to consider attending too. For graduate students this opportunity will be explicitly mentioned in the call the Director makes each semester to the students asking for proposals for use of special CTP funds, and will be advertised separately for postdocs.
4. Set up a central page (possibly on the CTP website, as part of the current revamp) with a list of outreach/DEI opportunities for CTP members, and instructions on how to get involved. Would be good to include an embedded google calendar to point to conferences and other events if we can ensure regular updates.
5. Collect information from CTP faculty on outreach/DEI/broader-impacts work that they are currently involved in or have recently been involved in. After further discussion with the faculty and the agreement of the faculty members in question, we will aim to make available (on a secured page on the CTP website, or a similar location) an anonymised aggregated list of this work.
6. Future emails about suspicious activity/people in the CTP will when possible focus on “suspicious **activity**” (like someone systematically checking if doors are locked) rather than encouraging reporting of any “suspicious people” (unless it’s a known person), and where possible give an explicit example of what constitutes “suspicious activity”.

People from groups underrepresented in the CTP shouldn't have to worry that we are encouraging our members to report based on stereotypes of who is "suspicious" or "doesn't belong". The issue of this type of language has been reported as offensive in other contexts (like non-CTP orientation meetings).

7. We will trial a new framework for identifying and addressing microaggressions and other unsuitable behavior in seminars in the Friday LHC/BSM/DM/QCD journal club, where seminar participants can send private messages to the host or other designated people to flag something inappropriate, either from the speaker or another participant. The host, other senior faculty attending the seminar, and other seminar organizers should agree to be potential conduits for such messages, and should think about what appropriate actions are ahead of time. At present hosts are expected to intervene to handle problems, but at their discretion; the new piece would be providing a mechanism for members of the audience to make the host aware that from their perspective something inappropriate happened or is happening. The host by default would not reveal that the request came from an audience member. (We will also aim to develop a seminar code of conduct in the future, but that will take longer.) CTP Seminar code of conduct is [available here](#).
8. When we invite URM physicists (and those from other underrepresented groups) to give talks, we will make an effort to ensure productive visits: in particular, unless they decline, seminar organizers will proactively schedule meetings for them with CTP people working on relevant topics. Since there are often extra demands on underrepresented physicists' time, it seems especially important to ensure they get value (in terms of physics discussions, networking, and so on) from the time they spend on preparing and giving talks.
9. Academic advisors will be requested to meet with all graduate advisees by Zoom or in-person at least twice per semester (at registration day and mid-semester, perhaps before Drop day). For new advisees in their first semester at MIT, academic advisors should more regularly check in by email or Slack. Past the first semester, students and academic advisors should agree on a frequency for check-ins.

There were also several points that we think could probably be addressed by conversations within and across research groups:

10. We encourage mentors and mentees to discuss how they might get involved in equity/diversity/inclusion work, and to have candid conversations about how to balance the time and effort allotted to research and non-research work, as appropriate to their goals.
11. It was mentioned that some junior members of the CTP feel that discussing non-physics-research topics at lunch or in the hallway is taboo. This may be less of an immediate issue while we are all working from home, but we encourage everyone (especially faculty) to think about how to signal that other topics are welcome (without stigmatizing or preventing physics discussion).

12. We encourage faculty members to have discussions with their research groups about what structure for engagement may be missing. One example that came up is to consider holding regular meetings of larger groups with a broader context, not just one-on-one meetings or meetings focused on specific projects, as a way to foster and maintain a sense of community (especially during the pandemic).

The next few points are not as short-term and concrete, but also seem relatively doable without needing much further study/research (although they may benefit from working at the Department level with other groups trying to do similar things). Again, we'd appreciate any input you have.

13. It would be beneficial to recruit more Black UROP students to the CTP, as well as members of other underrepresented groups, provided we can ensure they have good research experiences. CTP faculty and students teaching undergraduate courses can try to chat with URM students and encourage them to explore possible UROPs in the CTP, and make connections with other faculty members who are known to be looking for UROPs. While UROPs require a faculty supervisor, the main person providing hands-on supervision can be a student or postdoc, so CTP postdocs and students could also play a significant role here (provided appropriate projects can be designed), and could help mitigate faculty time constraints.
14. Similarly to the previous point, we would like to try to expand CTP involvement in the [MSRP program](#) that brings talented underrepresented undergraduates from other institutions to MIT during the summer. Again, graduate students and postdocs could help with recruiting and mentoring MSRP students. Both this and the previous point could potentially be listed as opportunities on the list described in #4.
15. We feel it would be valuable if the CTP could host more visiting professors who are Black or otherwise from marginalized groups. The [MLK Scholars program](#) provides funding for visiting scholars. We will aim to be more proactive about these opportunities, while simultaneously considering how we could make such visits more welcoming and productive for the scholars in question.

We would also like to seek your feedback on the possibility of having regularly scheduled CTP-wide discussion events, both related and unrelated to diversity/equity/inclusion/anti-racism. As a definite proposal, such a program could have two elements:

16. A once/year meeting focused on CTP research, with lightning elevator speeches on their research (2-3 minutes) from all participants, with additional time allocated for chatting/socialization. (This event could also have non-research components, e.g. focused on diversity/equity/inclusion and racial justice.) January may be the best time for this as was done in the past when we had a retreat.
17. A focused once/year event in June similar to the one we ran on June 10th, 2020, with consideration that the format and the focus topic could shift from year to year.

There were many other ideas in the summary from the Wednesday sessions (which we circulated earlier and is also available on Slack) - we encourage you to read them if you haven't had a chance already - but we felt that most of the others would be better worked on at the level of the Physics Department, and/or would require further study (which could be done by a CTP committee) before we tried to implement them. If there are specific ideas you want to chat more about, beyond the ones on this list, please feel free to bring them up by private email or at the town hall.

Best,
Iain and Tracy