Over the 2015–2016 academic year, we have successfully executed new recruitment programs, created additional avenues for prospective students to visit the Lab, and explored various ways to strengthen our community through the MAS Diversity Series. Once again, our success is a group effort. We would achieve very little without the support and dedication of the Lab community as a whole. Thank you for engaging in discussion and working with us toward an environment where all students can thrive.

We have big plans for the next academic year and look forward to what we can all accomplish together.

Sincerely,

Monica Orta
Assistant Director, Diversity & Student Support
Recruitment Efforts

MAS Ambassadors
In Fall 2015, we launched a new recruitment program called MAS Ambassadors. This program aims to leverage current MAS students’ networks and connections. Students can “pitch” a recruitment idea and we then help them execute it. This model extends our reach and allows current students to play a part in shaping future MAS cohorts by providing attendees with a firsthand account of the coursework, research, and culture of the Media Lab. In our first semester piloting this program, we sponsored seven trips:

- Ariel Ekblaw (Viral Communications) & Caroline Jaffe (Social Computing) presented at Yale University
- Niaja Farve (Fluid Interfaces) presented at the University of Maryland Baltimore County and at Morgan State University
- Daniel Fitzgerald (Tangible Media) presented at Worcester Polytechnic Institute
- Juliana Nazare (Lifelong Kindergarten) presented at Olin College
- Miguel Perez (Playful Systems) presented at The Art Institute of Chicago
- Laura Perovich (Object Based Media) presented at Bowdoin College

Because the Media Lab is such a strange (and wonderful!) place, the personal connections that a school visit can provide may be one of the best ways for students to understand the program and imagine how they could fit into it.
– Laura Perovich

Many students do not know the Media Lab exists or where to begin to prepare themselves for applying. A small amount of time from individuals in MAS could drastically impact these students and make the Lab a more diverse and inclusive place.
– Niaja Farve

I wanted to be able to provide a visible, fresh, first-hand account of my experience so far. I especially hoped that my story would be appealing and encouraging to other women who were uncertain about pursuing STEM graduate work.
– Caroline Jaffe
MIT Summer Research Program (MSRP)

MSRP brings undergraduate students from across the US to conduct research at MIT for nine weeks. Interns also learn about applying to and being successful in graduate school. In the summer of 2015, six interns worked in four different research groups at the Lab.

We continue to work to expand the Media Lab’s involvement in MSRP. In the summer of 2016 we will host nine interns, who will work in eight different research groups!
Open House Travel Grants
The Open House is a great way for prospective applicants to learn more about the Lab, meet faculty and graduate students, and determine if this is the best program for them. Travel grants were created last year to expand our reach and applicant pool.

We received 183 applications and awarded 20 grants. We will continue to offer grants for attendees in future years.

SOS (Students Offering Support) Program
In its second year, SOS continues to be an important resource for applicants – pairing them with current students who provide feedback on either their statement of purpose or portfolio. This personal attention goes a long way in demystifying the application process, clarifying what individual research groups are looking for, and strengthening applications.

The stats!
• 19 grad student volunteers, across 14 different groups
• 36 prospective students participated
• 30 applied
• 6 were admitted (20%)

National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE)
As part of the NSBE Conference in March 2016, we hosted two tours for interested students to learn more about our research groups and the overall culture of the Lab. We also spoke on an admissions panel, offering suggestions for a strong application, and shared the various opportunities available for prospective students to engage with the Lab before they apply.
Admissions
In Fall 2016, MAS will welcome 51 new masters and 15 new PhD students. This will be our largest and most diverse cohort ever!

Recruitment Successes

2016 Masters Cohort

Women 43%
Men 57%

2016 PhD Cohort

Women 53%
Men 47%

(as of 6/1/2016)
Women’s Lunch Series
The monthly lunches continue to be a space for women students to connect and build community. Each session features a dynamic speaker who addresses some aspect of professional or personal development.

- *How to Succeed at the Media Lab Without Really Trying: Lessons from an Alum*
  Catherine D’Ignazio, Assistant Professor of Civic Media & Data Visualization at Emerson College
- *Creating Opportunities for Personal Effectiveness (COPE)*
  Lisa Bosley and Marcia Yousik, Mental Health and Counseling
- *Optimizing Crit Day: Giving Feedback, Receiving It and Communicating Effectively*
  Jaime Goldstein, Communication Lab Director
- *Effectively Using Social Media: Personal and Professional*
  Janine Liberty, Digital Media Specialist
- *Standing Up Instead of Standing By*
  Libby Mahaffy, Assistant Director for Conflict Resolution
- *The Circuitous Path: Approaching Experience as a Process & Embracing the Unexpected*
  Helen Elaine Lee, Director for the Program in Women's & Gender Studies
- *#LiberatedThreads: Doing Black Women's History and Surviving the Academy... In Style*
  Tanisha Ford, Assistant Professor of Women, Gender & Sexuality Studies at UMass
MAS Diversity Series
The MAS Diversity Series brings the Media Lab community together to develop skills and explore ideas of diversity and social justice through presentations and discussion.

Killing Me Softly: Microaggressions
Sumun Pendakur, PhD
Associate Dean for Institutional Diversity,
Harvey Mudd College

Microaggressions are subtle and fleeting verbal and non-verbal acts, often unintended. And yet, the small cuts add up, leading to bigger questions: How do you address microaggressions in an unequal power dynamic? What are strategies you can use if you are being microaggressed, if you committed the microaggression, or if you are a bystander? Attendees learned how to recognize different types of microaggressions, the multilevel impact they can have, and what to do when it happens to them.

Implicit Bias Workshop
Kate Ratliff, PhD
Assistant Professor, University of Florida
Executive Director, Project Implicit

Attendees learned how perceptions, thoughts, and actions are shaped by mental activity that occurs outside of conscious awareness or control; reviewed examples of how much our mind depends on unconscious processes to navigate the world and see how these same processes are at play in our social behavior; and developed practical steps for managing implicit bias.

Transforming the Language of Disability
Sands Fish, Civic Media
& Viktoria Modesta, Media Lab Director’s Fellow

The language around disability has historically been tinged with pity and uncertainty; but now, we are seeing a cultural shift that is bringing discussions about disabilities, technologies, and design to the forefront. Sands and Viktoria want to explore how new technologies combine with evolving social views to change the way bionic individuals interact with and impact society. Attendees learned about Sands and Viktoria’s preliminary research and Viktoria’s personal experience as a bionic woman.
Community Building

Live Through This
To recognize National Suicide Prevention Month in September, we ordered t-shirts from the Live Through This (LTT) project. LTT aims to show that everyone is susceptible to depression and suicidal thoughts by highlighting portraits and stories of attempt survivors. These t-shirts were created to spark conversation and raise awareness around suicide and suicide prevention. Over 70 people at the Lab requested a shirt to show support throughout our community.

MAS Town Halls
MAS town hall meetings create a safe space for students to voice their concerns, share their ideas, and ask questions about things that are happening in and around the Lab and the academic program. We hosted two Town Halls over the past year: All Things Space with Jessica Tsymbal, Director of Facilities; and Hacking the Director’s Fellows Program with Claudia Robaina & Lorrie LeJeune, Director’s Fellows Program Managers.

As a result of our town hall meetings, we began hosting Quiet Space. Twice a month, we book a conference room for half a day to provide a quiet work space for students who need a place to concentrate in silence. Given its popularity, we will continue to host Quiet Space next year.

Diversity Committee
The Diversity Committee, comprised of students, staff, and faculty, meets once a month to discuss recruitment and retention efforts to increase the racial, ethnic, and gender diversity of the MAS Program. These meetings consist of brainstorming sessions, recruitment and admissions updates, and presentations by individuals working to improve diversity through programming at the Lab and in the larger MIT community. This year the Diversity Committee:

- Discussed how to improve community wellness
- Supported students in bringing attention to, and hopefully eliminating, inappropriate interactions with member companies
- Explored the SA&P diversity committee’s ideas for improving representation School-wide
- Learned about Topper Carew’s Code(2)b team and their work with high school students
- Brainstormed workshops and speakers for the women in tech conference that MAS will host in the fall

Graduate Student Appreciation Week
MIT celebrated graduate student appreciation week April 11 - 15, 2016. To kick-off the week, MAS provided dinner for students at the Lab to celebrate their hard work and dedication. This dinner was wildly successful, particularly since it fell on the eve of the Spring Members’ Event. As such, MAS will host a dinner the night before each Members’ Event moving forward.
Random Acts of Kindness (RAK) Week
As part of the Mind, Hand, Heart Initiative, Random Acts of Kindness (RAK) Week took place across MIT March 28 - April 1, 2016. MAS Diversity supplemented the Institute-wide events with our own RAK Week activities.

Tuesday 3/29
Be Kind to Your Body: Food as Fuel Workshop
MAS students learned how to plan their meals to eat for energy and avoid the late afternoon crash with MIT Recreation dietitian Kelsea Gusk.

Wednesday 3/30
Be Kind to Others: Ball Pit & Shout-Outs
Members of the Media Lab community submitted “shout outs” to acknowledge those who have impacted their time here. We received over 150 messages that were displayed in the 3rd floor atrium. A surprise ball pit was set-up to promote conversation and connection throughout the day.

Thursday 3/31
Be Kind to Your Mind: Coloring Day
Coloring cards and colored pencils were distributed to each research group and staff office suite. Everyone was encouraged to take a break during the day and enjoy the relaxing benefits of coloring.

Friday 4/1
Be Kind to the New Students: MAS Preview Day
On Preview Day we asked current students to connect with our newly admitted students, share their experiences, and help them decide if MAS was the best program for them. RAK week culminated with an Institute-wide Open Mic Event in the atrium.