Throughout the 2016-2017 academic year, MAS Diversity has taken on some of its most ambitious projects. The success of events such as the No Permission, No Apology conference is a testament to the value of programming that not only brings the community together, but also offers opportunities for growth and discussion. In partnering with other offices, we were able to support new initiatives and encourage Media Lab participation in campus-wide activities, including the Janet Mock event and the White People's Accountability Group workshop.

Next year, we are excited to expand the MAS office to include a professional and career development expert, who will work with students individually, connect them to resources in and out of MIT, and provide large-scale programming.

We are grateful for your continued support and engagement!

Sincerely,

Monica Orta
Assistant Director, Diversity & Student Support
**No Permission, No Apology**

On September 9, 2016, MAS Diversity hosted the *No Permission, No Apology* conference. Over 250 attendees participated in this daylong event with 25 guest speakers leading workshops on a range of topics. The conference strived to provide opportunities to develop the professional and personal skills that can help women navigate spaces that are not necessarily created with them in mind. It was also a chance for men to better understand how to foster inclusiveness, bridge divides, and serve as effective allies.

We partnered with three other institutions – Spelman College, University of Maryland Baltimore County, and Wellesley College – to bring 49 prospective women students to the conference.

Megan Smith kicked off the event with a keynote describing her own professional journey and emphasizing the need for organizations to grapple with implicit bias in order to secure greater innovation. Breakout sessions throughout the day were led by women in various STEAM roles including Noramay Cadena, Founder of Latinas in STEM and Cofounder & Managing Director for Make LA; Caroline Sinders, User Researcher at IBM; Shaundra Daily, Associate Professor at the University of Florida; Francesca Escoto, Founder & CEO of Startups for Social Impact, and many others. These sessions covered everything from startup challenges, to imposter syndrome, to the experiences of women in academia, to name a few. There was also an afternoon panel discussion on *Designing for Other (Than Straight, Rich, White Men)* featuring four women who design for specific populations. Comedian Aparna Nancherla closed out the event.

Participants concluded the day with the ultimate takeaway that they need no permission, no apology to define, plan, and pursue their passions.

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I realized I had a marketable skill as a black woman in tech which I had never cared to explore: versatility. I can view technology through a lens that is truly different from many others in my field. I can be a valuable asset to a team.

– Bettina Arkhurst

Being a Latino woman from a developing country, I constantly find myself being immersed in stigmas and surrounded by a (micro) aggressive world. That’s why I think that this conference was a milestone in our community, because it gave us tools and space to speak up and act differently.

– Nicole L’Huillier

It’s incredibly encouraging and inspiring to see more events and initiatives being supported at an institutional level to foster real conversations across the Lab and inspire the community towards actionable change.

– Amy Yu (M.S. 2014)
Participants collaborate in Libby Mahaffy and Julio Oyola’s breakout session, *But What Do I Do Instead? A workshop to counteract the “bystander dilemma”*.  

MAS students with guest speaker Denise Minor, Senior Partner at MindSpring Metro DC. Pictured from left to right: Sands Fish, Joy Buolamwini, Denise Minor, Sunanda Sharma, and Bianca Datta.

Attendees discuss the morning sessions over lunch on the Media Lab deck.

Attendees review the *No Permission, No Apology* agenda.

MAS students Stefania Druga (left) and Alexandra Rieger talk with Megan Smith after her opening keynote.

Participants listen to Gloria Anglon and Joy Johnson’s workshop, *Grad Catalyst: Prepare, Apply, and Succeed in Grad School*. 
Recruitment Efforts

MIT Summer Research Program (MSRP)
MSRP brings undergraduate students from across the United States to conduct research at MIT for nine weeks over the summer. Interns learn about applying to and succeeding in graduate school. In the summer of 2016, the Lab hosted more MSRP interns than ever before – nine interns worked in eight different research groups at the Lab.

- Daniel Diaz-Etchevehere – Collective Learning
- Luke Gockowski – Mediated Matter
- Ranine Haidous – Fluid Interfaces
- Emmanuel Oquendo Rosa – Viral Communications
- Sebastian Roubert - Biomechatronics
- Susan Seijo Méndez – Object-Based Media
- Jesse Smith – Fluid Interfaces
- José Alfredo Valles Salas – Personal Robots
- Reynis Vazquez-Guzman – Lifelong Kindergarten

SOS (Students Offering Support) Program
We continue to organize SOS, an important resource that pairs applicants with current students who provide feedback on either the applicant’s statement of purpose or portfolio. Because each research group is looking for different skills and weighs each part of the application differently, this individualized attention goes a long way in helping applicants understand what their group of interest is looking for. This year we had the highest number of graduate student volunteers since the program began.

Travel Grants
The MAS Open House is a great way for prospective students to learn more about Lab, meet with faculty and graduate students, and determine if this is the best program for them. In the past, the cost of traveling to Cambridge for the Open House has led to a skewed attendance toward individuals who live close by or can afford to travel here. Grants help alleviate the burden of travel costs and therefore expand our reach and applicant pool.

The stats!
- 23 grad student SOS volunteers, across 16 research groups.
- 6% of SOS participants were admitted.
- 10% of travel grant awardees were admitted.
In Fall 2017, MAS will welcome 47 new masters and 17 new PhD students. This year we saw significant growth in our admission of URM women, historically the smallest demographic at the Lab.
Community Building

Women’s Lunch Series
These monthly lunches continue to be a space for female students to connect and build community. This year we also opened up the lunches to postdoc women. Each session features a dynamic speaker who addresses some aspect of professional or personal development.

- **Bad Feminist**  
  Roxane Gay, Professor, Writer, and Feminist
- **Bitcoin and Cryptocurrencies: The Future of Money**  
  Neha Narula, Director of Research, Digital Currency Initiative
- **Building Your CV / Resume**  
  Diana Chien, Instructor/Manager, BE Communications Lab
- **Journey to the Media Lab**  
  Cynthia Breazeal, Principal Investigator, Personal Robots Group
- **My Path to the Media Lab**  
  Pattie Maes, MAS Academic Head and Principal Investigator, Fluid Interfaces
- **The Road Less Traveled: Where the Left and Right Brain Meet**  
  Rhonda Jordan, Energy Specialist, World Bank
- **Women’s Health: More Than Fertility**  
  Liz Klinger, Co-Founder and CEO of Lioness
- **Hack Your Potential: Using a Growth Mindset to Succeed**  
  Lourdes Alemán, Research Scientist, MIT’s Office of Digital Learning and Biology Department
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.

Bad Feminist
Roxane Gay
Professor, Writer, and Feminist

Roxane Gay led a discussion with our women grad students as our guest speaker at the September women’s lunch. Following the lunch, Roxane hosted a reading and book signing for the MIT community. She read passages from her book *Bad Feminist* and engaged with the audience on topics such as searching for your own identity, accepting your own flaws, considering the notion of privilege, and being a woman in academia.

Native Representatives, Pop Culture, and Cultural Resistance in Cyberspace
Adrienne Keene
Assistant Professor, American Studies and Ethnic Studies, Brown University

This presentation delved into the concepts of stereotypes and cultural appropriation, and looked at the ways Native peoples are represented throughout popular culture—from Hollywood to the fashion industry. Participants discussed the ways that Native peoples are pushing back on misrepresentation through social and new media. Attendees left equipped with the tools to talk about the harms of cultural appropriation, while also learning the best ways to incorporate Native fashion and Native media respectfully.

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:

- Learned about MAS graduate student Joy Buolamwini’s Code4Rights project to unmask algorithmic bias.
- Met MIT’s new Diversity and Inclusion Officer, JJ Jackson.
- Discussed potential workshops to run at the Lab around implicit bias and bystander training.
- Found out about ways for students to be involved in the larger MIT graduate community from Gloria Anglon, Assistant Director of Diversity Initiatives and the MIT Summer Research Program in the ODGE.
- Met Kwadwo Poku, new Manager of Diversity Recruitment and Initiatives for SA&P.
- Explored ideas for Media Lab participation in MIT’s Day of Action.
- Learned about the Title XI office’s new plan to create a Bias Response Team for the next academic year.
Film Screenings
This past academic year, we organized three movie viewings to share films centered around diverse issues. In September, we screened *Zootopia*, which addresses themes of discrimination and stereotypes through a family-friendly story about a female rabbit who follows her dream of becoming a city police officer. In February, we organized a Lab outing to the Boston Common theater for a private screening of *Hidden Figures*, a true story about the African American female mathematicians who worked at NASA during the Space Race and only recently began to earn the credit they deserve. To close out the academic year, we hosted an outdoor screening of *Moana*. This Disney movie tells the story of a strong-willed Polynesian girl as she journeys to save her village.

In addition, as part of the Women Take the Reel film festival, MAS Diversity co-sponsored a screening of the movie *13th*, followed by a Q&A discussion with Melina Abdullah, Professor and Chair of Pan-African Studies at California State University, Los Angeles, organizer with Black Lives Matter, and an interviewee from the film. *13th* brings light to the issues of race, justice, and mass incarceration in the U.S.

These screenings sparked conversations within the community to better help us look at diverse topics from new perspectives. We plan to continue hosting movie events that analyze important social, cultural, and political issues.

Trick-or-Treating
We organized an afternoon of trick-or-treating on Halloween. Research groups gave out candy and dog treats in their space. MAS provided trick-or-treat bags, decorations, and other snacks in the 3rd floor atrium. Participants joined the fun by showing off their costumes and visiting the different groups around the Lab.

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 three Town Halls over the past year:

- *Navigating Members’ Events* – Ryan McCarthy, Program Manager for Member Relations
- *Revising the Student Survey* – Bianca Datta, Juliana Nazaré, and Martin Saveski, MAS students
- *Collaborating with ML Communications* – Jennifer MacDonald, Director of ML Communications & Janine Liberty, Digital Media Specialist
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 6 - 10, 2017. MAS Diversity again supplemented the Institute-wide events with our own RAK Week activities.

Monday 3/6
Behavioral Interviewing
At this session, led by Assistant Director for Career Counseling and Training at MIT GECD Lily Zhang, students learned strategies for successful interviewing. Lily presented on how to prepare for job interviews and then led attendees in activities to practice sample behavioral interview questions.

Tuesday 3/7
The Book Nook
Members of the Media Lab community were invited to come check out the new community bookshelf! The shelves were stacked with books sorted by genre, including a special section for guest speakers who have presented at the Lab. The book nook is an ever-changing space at the Lab for all students, staff, and faculty to take books they’re interested in and leave books they want to share with others.

Wednesday 3/8
LGBTQ Takeover
Students teamed up with the MIT Rainbow Lounge to spread LGBTQ visibility by taking over the 3rd floor atrium. Guests passing through were invited to stop for a snack, play a game, and chat about LGBTQ resources.

Thursday 3/9
Ball Pit & Shout Outs
Undoubtedly the favorite event of our 2016 RAK Week, we brought back the ball pit (with an additional pit) and shout outs to acknowledge peers and colleagues. Shout outs were submitted in the weeks leading up to RAK Week to celebrate those who have made an impact. This year we received over 200 messages that were displayed in the 3rd floor atrium throughout the day.

Friday 3/10
Open Mic Night
MIT RAK Week concluded with an open mic night at the Lab. Attendees were invited to use this safe space to share their thoughts, struggles, and inspiration with one another.