

From The Faculty Chair**Is There a Place for Community at MIT?**

Lotte Bailyn

Creativity, Community, Civility: a story of and a plea for the 3 Cs. MIT has always valued *creativity* – it has been its mainstay, the basis of its reputation, the criteria by which people are judged. It is the core attribute of its faculty, and the ability we try to select for and create in our students. Nothing we do should undermine this core value. It is MIT.

Now the Task Force on Student Life and Learning comes along and asks

for instance, that an interdepartmental research project was born at one of its tables – the best sign possible of a creative intellectual community.

And yet. During a session last year on faculty development, there was discussion of the lunch room, with many junior faculty saying that it served their development well. In it they not only met faculty from other departments, but were able in a more informal atmosphere to be “mentored”

inclusive of many different kinds of people.

An even more upsetting episode has recently come to my attention. Some of you may have seen a description of this incident. An assistant professor, young and not a member of the dominant white male category, entered the lunch room. With her were members of her research group. As they were getting their food a man sitting near the buffet confronted them, demanding to know if any of them were faculty or staff. When told that she was a member of the faculty, he demanded to know who her guests were and indicated that this was no place to bring guests. What an unpleasant, embarrassing, and demoralizing experience for an assistant professor bringing her research group to share a lunch. Here’s the message: If you’re not one of the majority, don’t come alone, but also don’t come and bring guests. In other words, don’t come. What a way to celebrate community.

And this brings me to the third C: *civility*. Community without civility is self-defeating. And given the fact that we are no longer a homogeneous group (indeed, there is continuous effort to increase the diversity of our faculty) civility must be inclusive. It must extend to all those we have invited to join us. They share the core creativity that represents MIT or they wouldn’t be here. Let’s add civility to community, and community to creativity. What a nice vision, or am I only dreaming?✦

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us to add *community* to this core competence. They urge us to combine creativity with community, both with students and with members of other research groups, even other departments and schools. One of the nicest manifestations of this attempt to create community has been the Faculty Lunch Room, started by Joel Moses. In ways even more than the old Faculty Club, perhaps because of its informality, it has allowed faculty to come together in easy conversation. I understand,

by their senior colleagues. But there came a discordant voice. One young woman professor indicated that she felt completely out of place in the lunch room and had stopped going there. She didn’t feel comfortable sitting at one of the communal tables, and felt conspicuous sitting alone. So is our lunch room fostering a community of the old (and new) boys’ network? If so, it is not serving the goals of community for an MIT that is, and is trying to become even more so,