Report: The Black Graduate Celebration 2018

Respectfully submitted by: Michelle Harton, BGC Team Lead

“The Road to 50: Dedication, Perseverance, Excellence”

The Black Graduate Celebration was held on Friday, April 20, 2018 in the Kirsch Auditorium in the Stata Center. There were 178 persons in attendance, including 50+ graduates, 50 Black Admitted students, alumni returning for the BSU 50 Reunion weekend, Faculty, Staff, Administrators and friends.

The Black Graduate Celebration is always an occasion filled with some pomp and circumstance as this event marks a major accomplishment in the lives of our students. But this BGC was even more special because it was the first event in the BSU 50 Reunion weekend.

Therefore, not only were we celebrating graduates but we were celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the Black Students’ Union. Even with all of the festivities, from the very beginning there was a sense of family that was undeniable. I, Michelle Harton, was the Mistress of Ceremonies. The first word I said was “Welcome” and I gave the WaKanda salute. And the audience returned the salute in kind. Thus, “The Road to 50” included a stop by WaKanda. It was as though we entered the door to Wakanda where “Black Dedication, Perseverance, and Excellence” are the accepted norm. This sense of belonging permeated the entire evening. We became a community. A family.

After welcoming the graduates, a special welcome and congratulations were extended to the Black Admitted Students, Potential class of 2022. It was important to recognize their accomplishments and wish them the best in their future endeavors.

Following these recognitions, we had remarks. Robert Love read a letter to the graduates from President Reif congratulating graduates. We were excited to hear from Ms. Whitney Espich, the new CEO of the MIT Alumni Association. We welcome the opportunity to work with her as we continue to work with the MITAA. Then we heard remarks from Vice President Kirk Kolenbrander. All remarks were thoughtful and inspirational. Whether recognizing the 50 years of the Black Students’ Union and the contributions made by the BSU to the Institute or congratulating students and offering words of advice.
For the second year, we asked students to recommend who amongst their peers they would like to hear speak at the celebration.

The undergraduate choice was Bettina Arkhurst, and the graduate choice was Ty Austin. Both spoke to their experiences at the Institute, the challenges and their successes. Indeed, they spoke of their road, their path through MIT. They shared lessons learned and challenged their fellow graduates to continue to make a difference in the world in which they are now entering. These students, representative of their peers, were so very eloquent. Their comments were so genuine, sincere, insightful, hopeful and inspirational. They spoke to what one can do when one cares to act and be involved. Whether an act is small or large, they all can have large impact. We are so proud of them. They have done so many things and are quite accomplished.

After such eloquent addresses, we were further blessed with our Keynote Speaker Dr. Cato Laurencin. Dr. Laurencin has a long and illustrious bio (shared below). Just talking about the things referenced in his bio would have been enough. Yet, Dr. Laurencin spoke of a myriad of things, interweaving presentation of his groundbreaking medical research, with words of wisdom and words to live by. To this, he shared with us parts of his personal life as he shared wisdom learned from his family, the students that he mentors and supports and, even his creation of the Regenerative Engineering Society. With humor and transformative insight, let me not leave out his experiences as being the ring side doctor for fights, he even shared lessons learned from Mike Tyson.

We appreciated all he had to share. At this point in the program I am simply overwhelmed. All the speeches were so heartfelt and thought provoking that for a time I was simply speechless, letting all the knowledge and wisdom sink in. Powerful! But then, again, we were in WaKanda.

**Dr. Cato Laurencin, Keynote Speaker**

Also, after presenting Dr. Cato with a Kente stole, we announced that would be contributing $200.00 to the **Helen I. Moorehead-Laurencin MD Research Fellowship Fund at the University of Connecticut**. This fund was created by Dr. Laurencin and his wife in honor of his mother, Helen. The fund supports UConn School of Medicine students who have demonstrated academic achievement and are involved in conducting summer research projects. The goal is to foster continued mentorship between students and established researchers and/or clinician researchers at the UConn Health Center.

In addition, we recognized and acknowledged those that have been instrumental in supporting this effort. This list is provided below. We, also, recognized Prof. Edmund Bertschinger by presenting him with a Kente stole. He has been so supportive of BAMIT initiatives in his role as the ICEO. As he is stepping down from the post, we wanted to thank him for all of his contributions to BAMIT.

Dr. Edmund Bertschinger, ICEO
Next, we were at the part of the program for which all were waiting. It was time to recognize our graduates. Before we did this, we had to call down to the floor those persons that would help us to pass out the stoles. We call these persons “Waymakers”, persons that have made and continue to make significant contributions to our community. This year, stoles were passed out by: Robert Love, BAMIT Vice Chair, Elaine Harris, Former BAMIT Chairperson, Ernie Cohen, BAMIT founder and has earned a red jacket, graduating in 1964, Dr. Cato Laurencin, Keynote Speaker, Dr. Wesley Harris, I know this name is already in use but Wes is “our Rock”, Ms. Dionetta Jones-Crayton, Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education and Director of the Office of Minority Education, and Dean Blanche Staton, Senior Associate Dean for Graduate Education. As each student received their stole the torch was being passed on to them to make a difference in the lives of others.

And finally, the students were left with a charge. They were reminded of the 50 years of shoulders upon which they stand. In a time when one does not know what happens from day to day our students were challenged to stand up and step out. They were reminded that they live in the time of WaKanda. Black dedication, Black perseverance, Black integrity, Black honor, Black intelligence, Black innovation and Black commitment to Excellence are all front and center for the whole world to see. They were challenged to live the excellence that must be a STANDARD for our graduates. For now, the world knows what we have known all along, Wakanda is not only forever, Wakanda is for real.

In closing, it was a grand time. Alums were there that I hadn’t seen in years. It was truly a family gathering. Wakanda style. We got so many requests for additional stoles. We ran out. Next year we will increase the number of stoles ordered from 50 to 75. The event was so popular.

Pictures can be found at: [https://www.dropbox.com/sh/4zce32lfdrm7ger/AAATjMVvClaze7jmw1aunw8xa?dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/sh/4zce32lfdrm7ger/AAATjMVvClaze7jmw1aunw8xa?dl=0)
Acknowledgements

MIT Alumni Association - special thanks to Moana Bentin, our MITAA liaison

Prof. Edmund Bertschinger, CEO, Course VIII

Jessica Ch’ng, Assistant Director of Admissions, MIT Admissions Office

DiOnetta Jones Crayton, Associate Dean of Undergraduate Education MIT Office of Minority Education

Whitney Espich, CEO, MIT Alumni Association

Dr. Marie Harton, SB ’10 Course VII - created the revolving slide show with graduating student information

Elaine Harris, SB ’78 Course X - pitched in for whatever needed working on – life saver

Quinnton Harris, SB ’11 Course II-A – updated the program with information from the 2018 class ring.

Dr. Kirk Kolenbrander, Vice President of the Institute, Course III MIT Office of the President

Corban Swain Photography

BAMIT Committee

Michelle Harton, BAMIT TEAM LEAD

K’Andrea Bickerstaff

Dr. Kelvin Frazier

Robert Love
Keynote Speaker
Dr. Cato Laurencin, MD, PhD

Cato T. Laurencin, M.D., Ph.D. is Professor of Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering, Professor of Materials Science and Engineering, and Professor of Biomedical Engineering at the University of Connecticut. He is the 8th designated Albert and Wilda Van Dusen Distinguished Endowed Professor of Orthopaedic Surgery. Dr. Laurencin is a University Professor at UCONN. Dr. Laurencin earned his B.S.E. in Chemical Engineering from Princeton University and his Ph.D. in Biochemical Engineering/Biotechnology from the MIT where he was named a Hugh Hampton Young Fellow. Dr. Laurencin earned his M.D., Magna Cum Laude, from the Harvard Medical School. Named one of the 100 Engineers of the Modern Era by the American Institute of Chemical Engineers, Dr. Laurencin is a Fellow of the American Chemical Society, the Biomedical Engineering Society, the Materials Research Society, and an International Fellow in Biomaterials Science and Engineering, as well as a Fellow of the American Institute of Chemical Engineers and the American Institute for Medical and Biological Engineering. He has been awarded the Percy Julian Medal by the National Organization of Black Chemists and Chemical Engineers (NOBCChe). Dr. Laurencin is a member of the editorial boards of 25 journals, and is the Editor-in-Chief of *Regenerative Engineering and Translational Medicine*. Dr. Laurencin is the recipient of two Emerging Frontiers in Research and Innovation Awards from NSF. He has received the NIH Director’s Pioneer Award for his transformative work in Regenerative Engineering. Dr. Laurencin has been honored by the White House on three occasions. He received the Presidential Faculty Fellow Award from President Bill Clinton for his work bridging engineering and medicine. He received the Presidential Award for Excellence in Engineering, Science and Math Mentoring from President Barack Obama. More recently, he received the National Medal of Technology and Innovation from President Barack Obama. Dr. Laurencin has two awards named in his honor: The Cato T. Laurencin, M.D., Ph.D. Travel Fellowship Award and The Cato T. Laurencin Lifetime Research Achievement Award. Dr. Laurencin is an elected member of both the U.S. National Academy of Engineering, and the U.S. National Academy of Medicine. Internationally, he is an elected Fellow (Associate) of the African Academy of Sciences, an elected Fellow (Foreign) of the India National Academy of Engineering and the India National Academy of Sciences and he is a Fellow of The World Academy of Sciences. Dr. Laurencin is an Academician and Member (Foreign) of the Chinese Academy of Engineering.

Gradsuates

Chantal Acacio SB, Mechanical Engineering, Management Sciences

Pelkins Ajanoh SB, Robotics

Sarah Aladetan BS Humanities & Engineering

Samantha Amey-Gonzalez SB, Biology

Bettina Arkhurst SB, Mechanical Engineering

Kosi Aroh Ph.D., Chemical Engineering

Ty Austin SM, Architecture

Emmanual Azuh BASc, Electrical Engineering & Computer Science

Isaiah Borne SB, Chemical Engineering
Oluwatosin Bosede MBA, Sloan School of Management
Nichole Clarke SB, Electrical Engineering & Computer Science, Mechanical Engineering
Yoeal Efrem BASc, Electrical Engineering & Computer Science, Material Science and Engineering
Ekow Essel MBA, Sloan School of Management
Nana-Efua Essuman SB, Electrical Engineering & Computer Science, Biology
Brook Eyob SB, Chemical Engineering
Ayomide Fatunde SB, Chemical Engineering
Michael Feffer SB, Computer Science and Engineering
Tiffany Ferguson SM, City Planning
Fabrice Fils-Aime SB, Nuclear Science & Engineering
Danielle Finney BS/SB, Electrical Engineering & Computer Science, Biology
Selam Gano SB, Robotics
Chloe Garden BASc, Electrical Engineering & Computer Science, Material Science and Engineering
Elizabeth Gaylord SB, Electrical Engineering & Computer Science, Mechanical Engineering
Shawn Goodin MBA, Sloan School of Management
Tsehai Grell Ph.D., Chemistry
Kristina Hill SB, Brain and Cognitive Sciences
Solan Israel-Megerssa SB, Aerospace Engineering
Kelly Jackson MBA, Sloan School of Management
Michael Kitcher SB, Material Science & Engineering
Jonathan Lovett MBA, Sloan School of Management
Chanell Madison SB, Mechanical Engineering
Amaka Nneji MBA, Sloan School of Management
Nitah Onsongo SB Computer Science & Mathematics
Oghenefejiro Oruerio SB, Mechanical Engineering
Ade Samuel BS, Chemical Engineering
Alexandra Shade SB, Robotics
Rex Shepherd SB, Aerospace Engineering
Emily Stanford BASc, Electrical Engineering & Computer Science, Material Science and Engineering
Isaiah Udotong SB, Robotics
Faye-Marie Vassel Ph.D., Biology
Doreen Mashu MBA, Sloan School of Management
Douglas McPherson SM, City Planning
Tia Vice SM, City Planning
Colin Webb SB, Electrical Engineering & Computer Science, Robotics
Kristopher Wiggins BS, Chemical Engineering
Solomon Ope MBA, Sloan School of Management
Robert Zabala BS, Chemical Engineering