

March 31, 2008

To our friends and classmates at MIT Sloan,

Last semester, on December 10th, the club officers of the MIT Sloan Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Club (LGBT) sent an email to the entire Sloan community (via a Student Master's announcement) inviting any and all Sloan community members to an end-of-semester lunchtime meeting. An hour later, we received the following reply from a fellow student. Note that the author's nationality has been redacted.

"I don't care what you do among yourselves, and I am not going to teach you how to live. But I feel seek when you are trying to promote it or offer to join your events. It is not a dancing club or something that I can just like or not. You may not know that but in [redacted] beating gays is encouraged by vast majority of people because they insult society and nature. Your email implies that I might be interested in your perversions, and such idea to me is one of most insulting things that I can ever hear. I didn't get used to enduring insults, though.

"Therefore, LISTEN TO ME: If you fucking fags send me something like that once again or contact me in any other way, I swear you won't be able to study at Sloan for some time because you will spend it at resuscitation department. If this is what you want, go ahead."

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The officers immediately forwarded this message on to the administration, who contacted police. Our club meeting proceeded with a police presence outside. Because this message contained an explicit threat of violence against us, a detective was dispatched to interrogate the student who sent this message. The student was not deemed a threat and was allowed to remain on campus for the final two weeks of the semester but given restricted access within Sloan.

After the immediate threat was assessed, proceedings began both at MIT and in the Cambridge Court system, and a longer assessment was done by the administration and mental health experts. The Cambridge Courts opted not to pursue further action. After consulting with MIT LGBT officers, MIT prosecuted the case through its Committee on Discipline, an institute-wide body that is granted authority over such matters. A hearing body was convened in early February, after the January break. In the interim, the student in question met with the administration, classmates, and other LGBT students.

MIT ultimately decided to allow the student to remain at MIT Sloan without immediate removal from Sloan through suspension or expulsion. The full details of the case and punishment are confidential.

Collectively, as club officers, we are not of one mind as to how to feel. All of us deeply respect the MIT administrators involved and appreciate the sensitivity they have shown throughout this process, though some feel profoundly let down by this outcome. Some believe that it was appropriate to allow this process to continue fully and privately in the hands of MIT. Others feel that we should have made this message immediately known to the entire student body the day it was received. Some believe that this student is extremely sincere in his remorse; others feel that such remorse is to be expected and not credible. Some suggest that in light of the murders at Virginia Tech and Northern Illinois, colleges as a whole are uniquely incapable of detecting threats in their student body, and as such should dismiss students like this at even the slightest hint of instability. All feel that this attack is not just against the LGBT community, but every minority community within the university. Some feel that as such any punishment must be not rehabilitative, but punitive, in order to discourage these kinds of threats in the future. Some feel that this email was spontaneous, and that the author never seriously meant the threats implied. Some feel this was a cultural misunderstanding wrought by a failure of the MIT enculturation and orientation process; others feel that no rational person would ever believe threats were culturally acceptable. Some never believed that anything could be done, and that MIT's only interest was to bury this issue the whole time. Some believe the extensive consideration shown by MIT as they weighed this case demonstrates their concern for this issue, others feel that the outcome is evidence that MIT's concern is only lip-service. Some have advised us to seek our own legal counsel and pursue this issue independently through the court system. Some believe we should mount some kind of protest, others believe such action would cause far more harm than good.

Ultimately there is no easy answer about how to go forward, and the LGBT students have not come to any consensus. Many of us are still in shock and profoundly hurt that a member of the MIT Sloan community could ever possibly send this kind of email in today's world. Where the club officers agree is the need to share with our community what has happened, in full detail, to drive home the fact that these kinds of issues still exist even in the privileged world in which we live.

All of us at MIT Sloan will enter the workforce, and it is almost assured you will work with LGBT coworkers and others in recognized minority groups, whether you know it, like it or not. While we are divided as to

