

# The Nomination Process for Faculty Officers and Faculty Committee Membership

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**Our aim in this article is to provide a description** of the work done by the faculty Committee on Nominations in order to increase transparency as well as inform faculty about some changes in the nomination and election process.

## The Committee on Nominations

Since 1907, the MIT faculty have had a committee to nominate faculty officers and members of the standing committees of the faculty. From 1907 to 1950, members of this committee were appointed by the president annually at the April or the May Institute faculty meeting.<sup>[1]</sup> From 1951 to 2020, the president continued to appoint the members, but without the context of a faculty meeting. Each member served a three-year term, with the chair of the committee appointed by the president from among the membership.

In 2020, the faculty voted to change this process. Members of the Committee on Nominations (CoN) are now nominated by the current team of faculty officers and elected by the faculty in the same manner as the other standing committees of the faculty. There are two members from Engineering, two from Science, and one each from SA+P, SHASS, and MIT Sloan. Members continue to serve three-year terms. The chair of CoN is now appointed from the elected membership by the chair of the faculty, as is the practice for the other standing committees of the faculty. An important consequence is that the alternate nominations process (described below) can now apply to CoN.

CoN has two primary tasks each year:

- Nominate the faculty officers: the chair of the faculty, the associate chair, and the secretary. The chair of the faculty is elected in even-numbered years and the other two officers are elected in odd-numbered years.<sup>[2]</sup>
- Nominate faculty to serve on 10 of the 11 standing committees of the faculty (i.e., not CoN) and two faculty achievement award committees.

Each year there are approximately 20 openings on the **standing** committees – typically either two or three faculty step down from each committee each year, thus rotating the membership. In addition, there are four openings every year on each of the two award committees: **Edgerton** and **Killian**; one member of each committee is appointed, by the chair of the faculty, to serve for a second year as chair.

Every fall faculty receive a survey that gives them the opportunity to:

- suggest faculty – including themselves – for service as a faculty officer;

- express interest in service on the **standing** and **special** committees of the faculty; and
- express interest in service on the **standing Institute committees** appointed by the president (formerly known as presidential committees).

The results of the current and previous years' surveys serve as the foundation for the CoN's work: (1) suggestions for faculty officer candidates, and (2) interest expressed in specific standing committees of the faculty and the two faculty achievement award committees.

In the remainder of this article, we will outline the processes followed by CoN for its two primary tasks described above.

## Identification and Recruitment of Faculty Officers

We will describe how this is done by detailing last year's process to identify, recruit, and – ultimately – nominate two faculty officers to serve with the current chair, who would be **[3]** serving as chair of the faculty from 2023-25.

CoN began with the list of all 189 faculty whose names were suggested as potential associate chair/secretary candidates on the preference surveys in fall 2016, 2018, 2020, and 2022. The committee initially removed from consideration:

- faculty from SHASS (since the chair was going to be from SHASS);
- faculty who requested to opt out of service during 2023-24;
- faculty currently in a major service role, e.g., dean, department head, director of a lab, center, or institute; and
- untenured faculty.

There were 104 faculty remaining on the list of suggestions. Committee members reviewed this list for faculty whose names stood out. This was most typically because of previous service, at the department, School, or Institute level. Familiarity with MIT's faculty governance system was also a factor; that did not necessarily mean service on faculty governance committees, but could include, e.g., involvement with educational programs that consulted with faculty governance during their development.

After significant discussion, the committee arrived at a short list of approximately 20 potential candidates. The staff to the committee conducted more in-depth research on these, detailing previous service roles at all levels, awards, and other evidence of outstanding service and experience with faculty across the Institute. CoN members reviewed this information and discussed internally, sometimes consulting with other faculty.

CoN ultimately reached out to eight potential candidates, four of whom were interested in further discussions. Committee members conducted interviews with each of the four, as did the chair-elect. Following the interviews, the committee discussed internally and the chair consulted with the chair-elect. The committee concluded that professors Peko Hosoi (Mechanical Engineering) and Elly Nedivi (Brain and Cognitive Sciences) would be the best suited to serve the faculty with Professor Fuller during her term. Chair Rodrigo Verdi reached out and spoke with these two candidates, and both agreed to be nominated.

A similar identification and recruitment process is used to identify the nominee for chair of the faculty. However, potential nominees are interviewed only by CoN, and not by the current officers.

## Identification and Recruitment of Committee Members

The staff to CoN reviews the current year's rosters to determine whose terms will end the next June and who will be continuing. From this, the staff determines how many openings exist to be filled, which Schools are needed for specific openings, and where there is particular need for women faculty.

The two award committees each have five members, one from each School. The goal is that the standing faculty committees should also have members from each of the five Schools, with the exception of the Committee on Discipline (COD).[4] In addition, since most committees have six members,[5] there are usually a few openings for which faculty from any School would be appropriate. If it is not possible to identify faculty from a particular School for service on a particular committee, CoN consults with the relevant committee to determine best fit otherwise. CoN also considers representation from constituencies underrepresented in the general faculty.

With this information about committee openings, CoN members review:

- current and previous years' lists of committee preferences;
- a list of faculty tenured within the previous four years; and
- a list of tenured faculty who have not served on any of the award committees or the standing faculty and standing Institute committees.[6]

The goal of this review is to identify potential candidates who would be a good fit for each committee opening. CoN members are also encouraged to think of other faculty who they know. The committee discusses potential candidates for open committee slots to ensure that everyone is comfortable with the suggestions.

CoN members then each reach out to specific candidates to explore their interest in being nominated for particular openings, providing information on the relevant committee's charge, approximate time commitment, and (if applicable) standing meeting time.

Once a faculty member has agreed to be nominated, they receive a confirmation from the CoN chair that also reminds them of the alternate nominations process – in other words, agreement to be nominated does not guarantee election.

## **Identification and Recruitment of CoN Members**

The current faculty officer team recruits CoN members in a similar way – knowing which Schools will be needed, they review in particular the list of faculty who expressed interest in CoN on the current and previous years' preference surveys. They may also consider other faculty they may know who would be a good fit. Important factors can include familiarity with faculty across a candidate's School, as well as an awareness of MIT's system of faculty governance.

Those who agree to be nominated receive the same confirmation from the CoN chair as those agreeing to be nominated to serve on the other standing faculty committees and the two award committees.

## **Information on Nominees**

A link to each nominee's website – for both faculty officer and committee openings – is provided in the slate circulated to the faculty in advance of the March and May faculty meetings.

## **Current Changes being Implemented by the Committee on Nominations**

### *Pilot Regarding the Officers Serving with the Chair*

During the CoN's deliberations in 2022-2023, it was observed that over time the roles of the associate chair and secretary had come to have almost complete overlap in responsibilities. The sense of the committee was that having two associate chairs – instead of an associate chair and a secretary – would enable greater flexibility in assigning duties, as there would be one set of shared responsibilities so the workload could be more evenly balanced. In addition, the role of the chair had expanded considerably in recent years, and sharing the chair's workload where feasible would also be easier to manage with two associate chairs. Former faculty officers also commented to the committee that those bearing the title “associate chair” seemed to have easier and increased access as compared to those with the title “secretary.”

The committee felt it would be appropriate to try a two-year pilot with two associate chairs, instead of an associate chair and a secretary, during Chair-Elect Mary Fuller's term. Professor Verdi discussed this possibility with Professor Fuller, and she supported the committee in bringing a proposal to the current faculty officer team. Chair Lily Tsai, after consulting with associate chair Chris Schuh and secretary Martha Gray, agreed to an exception to *Rules and Regulations of the Faculty*, **Section 1.20 Officers**, to allow this pilot for 2023-2025. There will be an evaluation of the pilot during fall 2024, with a report to the Faculty Policy Committee (FPC). If the faculty officer team and FPC agree that the pilot is a success, then there will be a proposal to the faculty during 2024-2025 to change *Rules and Regulations of the Faculty* to make this new model permanent.

### *Improving the Voting Process*

Longstanding practice has been to vote on one slate comprising all the nominees – both for faculty officer roles and open committee slots – at the May faculty meeting. This year, faculty will instead be provided with the opportunity to vote separately on (1) the nominee for chair of the faculty, and (2) a slate of nominees for committee service. The voting will be conducted electronically, and faculty will be given seven days to vote, ending at 12 pm EDT on the day of the May faculty meeting. [7] The results will then be announced at the meeting. CoN anticipates using a similar process to vote on faculty officers and the slate of nominees for committee service going forward.

We hope that in this way more faculty will have the opportunity to vote, and to be able to express their support (or lack thereof!) for faculty officer nominees separately from those nominated for committee service.

### *Alternate Nominations*

In addition to the processes described above, there is a means for faculty to put forward their own names or the names of willing colleagues for consideration for a position after CoN has conducted its own process and identified nominees. This is called the “alternate nominations” process. This process is not new, having been established in September 1981, but it has been used infrequently, and CoN would like to make the process more visible to those who might wish to make use of it.

Those who would like to pursue this option need to do one of the following:

- Make a motion during the new business section of the April faculty meeting that they or a colleague be considered for a particular committee or officer role. The motion will need to be seconded.
- Submit their desire to be considered, or for a colleague to be considered, for a particular committee or officer role, in writing to the faculty officers at [alternate\\_nominations@mit.edu](mailto:alternate_nominations@mit.edu) by one week following the April meeting. Nominations submitted in writing require the signatures of both the nominator and the seconder.

Consent must be obtained from all nominees put forth in alternate nominations.

When an alternate nomination has been submitted, the relevant position will be extracted from the slate and voted on separately, with both nominees available for faculty to vote on; short bios will be provided.

## To Conclude

We hope that we have accomplished our goals of explaining the work done by the Committee on Nominations and providing transparency about the committee's processes. We would be happy to provide additional clarification on any points. We also welcome suggestions for improvements to any of the processes. Please be in touch at any time.

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[1] From 1907-16, this was done at the April faculty meeting; from 1917-50, this was done at the May faculty meeting.

[2] For example, in spring 2024, the faculty will elect the next chair of the faculty, who will serve as chair-elect during 2024-25 and as chair from 2025-27. The two officers who will work with the next chair (traditionally an associate chair and a secretary) will be elected in spring 2025 to serve with the next chair from 2025-27.

[3] This section describes the process begun in fall 2022 to identify the officers who would serve with Professor Mary Fuller, who was at that time chair-elect and not yet chair. At the time of writing, Professor Fuller is currently serving as chair of the faculty.

[4] Because of the nature of COD's work, factors that are of primary importance are ability to empathize with students and availability for the significant time commitment. CoN members identify potential candidates, who are then interviewed by the COD chair and staff. COD conveys its recommendations to CoN, who reaches out with the official invitation to serve.

[5] The Faculty Policy Committee and the Committee on the Undergraduate Program each has seven elected faculty.

[6] Such faculty may have been involved in (often significant) service at the departmental, School, or Institute levels but have not yet served on one of the standing faculty or standing Institute committees.

[7] Many thanks to Professor Rick Danheiser, current CoN member and former chair of the faculty, for the suggestion!