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Reversing into Meritocracy: Shifting the Culture of Physics

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Culture is the dark energy of our lives: it is an invisible force that shapes our environment for work and life. Physics culture often includes the assumption that people have equal access to resources and opportunities regardless of gender, race, or any other demographic characteristic. Numerous studies show this is false, yet the invisible force of meritocracy shapes many departments, and its passive acceptance can foster inequitable working environments. Department chairs and other leaders play a key role in shifting institutional culture to leverage the power of diversity, improve student and employee success, and enhance the quality of life for everyone. I will describe steps taken at MIT to shift our cultural direction so that we are not driving in reverse on the highway of meritocracy.