

WGS. 101 INTRO TO WOMEN'S AND GENDER STUDIES FALL 2014
SESSION #1 - IN-CLASS WRITING

Name _____

WRITE FOR TEN MINUTES. STATE YOUR ARGUMENT AND ADDRESS AT LEAST ONE COUNTERARGUMENT. USE BACK OF FORM, IF NEEDED.

BACKGROUND:

The MIT seal, with the Latin inscription “*Mens et Manus*” (“Mind and Hand”) was first adopted on December 26, 1864. (MIT opened in 1865.) The seal pictures a scholar with a book and a laborer with an anvil; both are male figures. The seal symbolizes the ideal of cooperation between knowledge and research and the mechanical or manual arts. Many see the seal as signifying the necessity for the practical application of knowledge. The seal was modernized during MIT President Howard Johnson’s administration (1966-71). Yet the presence of two male figures on the seal has generated some controversy on campus.

A student diversity rally in spring 2001 called for a new MIT seal that would represent both a male and female figure. The Brass Rat, the MIT ring, has sometimes, within recent years, featured a female figure on the seal shank; students have been quite divided in their reaction to the change. The seal remains a point of contention within the MIT community. Only the Board of Trustees (also called “The Corporation”) can officially change the MIT seal, which appears on stationery, business cards and other Institute documents.

With a female president recently at the helm of MIT and the Institute having celebrated its 150th anniversary, many in the community think that it’s time to address the gender imagery of the seal again.

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By 2014, female students have become 45% of the MIT undergraduate community and 31% of the graduate student population (Fall 2013 enrollment, *MIT Facts 2014*). See <http://web.mit.edu/facts/faqs.html>. In addition, in recent years, increasing numbers of students identify their gender(s) in complex and fluid ways, challenging the gender binary. In the light of these significant transformations, should MIT change its traditional “*Mens et Manus*” seal to become gender-inclusive?

Support your view with evidence from your own experiences as an MIT student. What larger issues may be at stake in the MIT seal controversy? Whatever your point of view, be sure to address at least one **counterargument** to your position.

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