

THE DEBATE OVER GENDER REPRESENTATION ON THE MIT SEAL**WRITE FOR ABOUT TEN MINUTES ON A BLANK SHEET OF PAPER****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 with an all-male student body.) The seal design was approved in 1863 by The Committee on the Seal (President William B. Rogers and Institute Treasurer Charles Dalton). The committee minutes only indicate that the committee chose a seal; the deliberations around the seal’s design were not recorded.

The seal highlights 1861, the year MIT was incorporated by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The seal pictures a scholar with a book and a laborer with an anvil; both appear to be male. The seal symbolizes MIT’s ideal of cooperation between knowledge and research and the mechanical or manual arts. Many see the seal as signifying the ideal of the practical application of scientific and technical knowledge. The seal was modernized during MIT President Howard Johnson’s administration (1966-71), but the figures remained male. The presence of these two male figures on the seal has generated some controversy for over 20 years.

A student diversity rally in spring 2001 called for a new seal representing both males and females. The Brass Rat, the MIT ring, has sometimes, in recent years (e.g., class of 2017), featured a female on the seal shank; students have been divided in opinion about the change. The seal remains a point of contention within MIT. Only the Board of Trustees (“The Corporation”) can officially change the MIT seal, which appears on diplomas, certificates and other Institute documents. Within the last sixteen years at MIT, we have had two female Presidents and the Institute celebrated its 150th anniversary. The class of 2026 profile is 43% female, 44% male and 3% of other gender identities; 10% did not share gender identity (MIT Admissions).

THE QUESTION:

In the light of the above transformations at MIT, public protest over symbols of injustice and exclusion, and MIT’s stated ideals of gender equality and diversity, should the Institute change its seal now to be more gender-inclusive?

As you write your own opinion, think about what larger issues may be at stake in the MIT seal controversy. Whatever your point of view, be sure to address at least one major **counterargument** to your position. (Remember: the seal does not necessarily have to include human figures.)

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