


Listen, Amplify, Sustain: Being a better mentor and ally



Richard Wong

Graduates Achieving Inclusion Now (GAIN) Conference

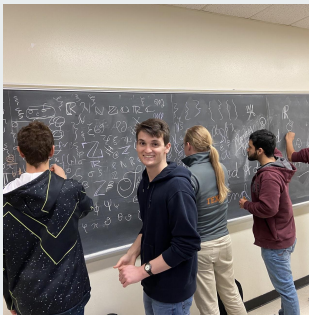
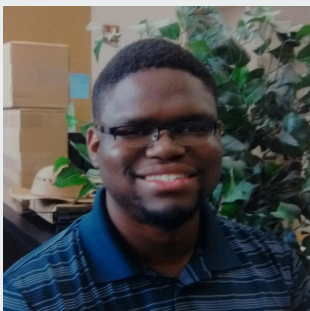
Slides available at math.ucla.edu/~richardwong



People for PMA



[Mathematicians of
Color Alliance of Texas](#)

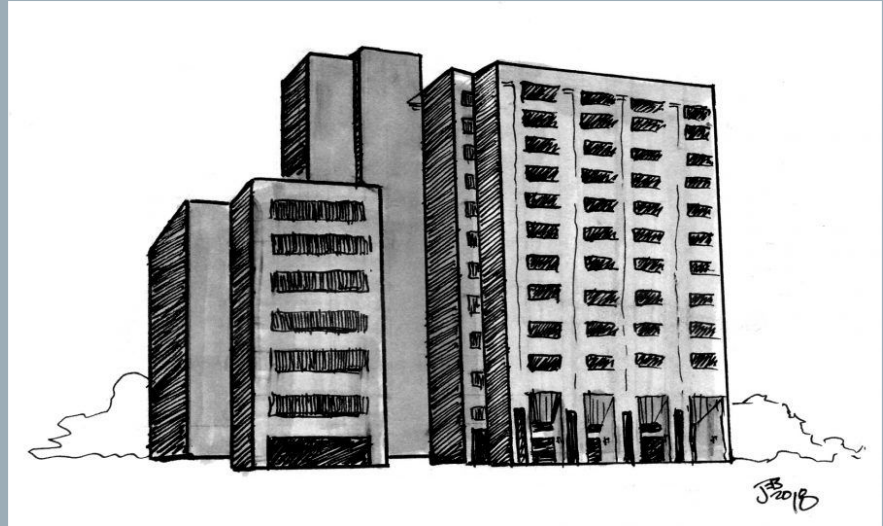



Past and present MOCAT organizers

Listen.



What were
people saying
about the
**Robert Lee
Moore (RLM)
Building?**






“Robert Lee Moore discriminated against students of color. He did not stand for equality. He did not stand for opportunity. He did not stand for a fair and just community. **Until we rename this building, neither do we.**”

“Continuing to name this building after a man who is **antithetical to what we value at the UT community** ... sends a message to us that we value his accomplishments more than we do inclusion in our community ... **We find that unacceptable.**”

“I support (People for PMA) ... the building was named after a well-known, renowned UT professor who was clearly racist, sexist and antisemitic.”

“**We need to make conscious efforts about the things that we memorialize** and the people that we give tribute to on this campus ... I think this is an important place to start.”

“The statues and building names make me feel like the University is telling me, ‘**We will let you come here, but you still do not belong.**’”



Calls to change the name of RLM Hall occurred in 2015 and every year since.

- ❖ An attempt was made in **2016** to change the name of RLM Hall, garnering 100+ signatures on a petition.
- ❖ In **2017**, People for PMA was organized. They held a town hall on October 6th, 2017 which had 80+ attendees and a petition garnering 520+ signatures.
- ❖ In **2018**, the Malcolm Over Moore campaign embraces absurdity by calling for the building to be renamed after Ian Malcolm, a UT mathematician from “Jurassic Park.”
- ❖ In **2020**, a Change.org petition “[Rename the RLM after someone who was not profoundly racist](#)” got 4200+ signatures.
- ❖ By the end of **June 2020**, a Change.org petition “[Have UT Austin Acknowledge its Racist History and Vow to make Reparations](#)” got 18000+ signatures.



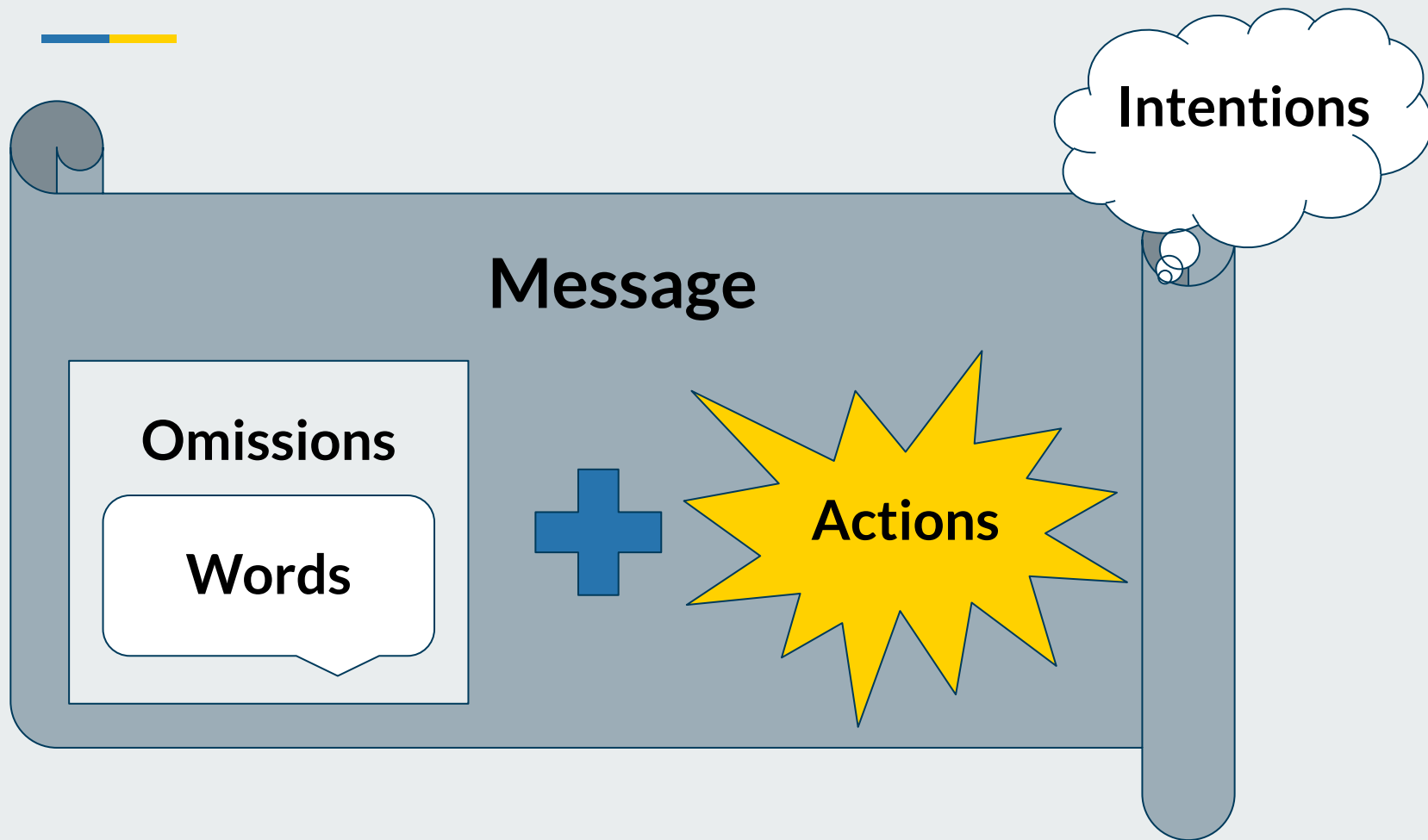
On July 13, 2020, UT Austin Administration committed to renaming the Robert L. Moore Building as the Physics, Math and Astronomy Building.


- ❖ As part of committing to “[A More Diverse and Welcoming Campus](#)”, Interim President Jay Hartzell wrote:

“During the **past month**, I have listened to — and spoken with — scores of students about how The University of Texas at Austin can promote diversity, inclusion and equity and fully support our Black students.

These and similar conversations with alumni, faculty, staff and community members have been challenging, fulfilling and eye-opening all at the same time. I went into them understanding that UT has worked hard in recent decades to become a more diverse and welcoming campus. **I came out of them realizing there is still more work to do.”**

**Listen to understand, not
to respond.**





Following the petition in 2016, “there was an agreement from administration that the building would be renamed during renovations. However, **these renovations have no timeline**, and are contingent on the renovations of Welch Hall taking place first.”

“We recognize that the history conveyed by the names of some buildings and facilities do not always reflect our current values. However, ... the university is not currently engaged in efforts to change or remove other historic names or monuments from the main campus, either building-by-building or collectively.”

Because the university receives funding from the Texas Legislature, administrators have to be careful not to be too “vocal.” “There [are] a lot of things that if they [university officials] were very vocal about, they might jeopardize for UT students, and **that’s ... not a risk that it seems like a lot of them are willing to take.**”



Listen.

If someone or some group is reaching out to you in an official capacity with an open letter, a list of requests/complaints, etc., then **they have already put in several hours of research, work, and effort.**

Be thoughtful with your response, and think carefully about whether your words match your intentions and actions.

Amplify.





Amplifying Resources:

Share one resource (website, book, article, podcast, video, organization, etc.) that focuses on, shares insights about, or discusses an issue of discrimination and systemic inequity.

https://docs.google.com/document/d/166yMoDOUIpA37fBXsba8nIPOhG4pqkyB7EwUsvDFA_0/edit?usp=sharing

About MOCAT:

MOCAT is an organization at UT Austin interested in promoting the mathematical development and achievements of all underrepresented groups, including students of color.

Our goal is to create a community of undergraduate and graduate math students to **recruit, retain, support, and empower** underrepresented students within the field of math.



MATHEMATICAL ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA

MAA

PROGRAMS

Tensor SUMMA

Tensor Strengthening Underrepresented
Minority Mathematics Achievement



MOCAT's events include:

- [Distinguished Mathematicians of Color Colloquium Series](#)
 - Promotes the work of leading mathematicians of color.
- ["What Is..." Series](#)
 - Expository talks for undergraduate students.
- Graduate Student Office Hours
- [Existence and Uniqueness Book Club](#)
 - To learn about diversity, inclusion, and identity in mathematics.
- Social Events
- Outreach Events
 - [REU Panel](#)
 - [Math PhD Program Recruitment Events](#)

Distinguished Mathematicians of Color Colloquium Series



Fall 2020,
Wilfrid Gangbo

- ~35 attendees; undergrads, grads, faculty.
- Hosted introductory “Pizza Seminars”

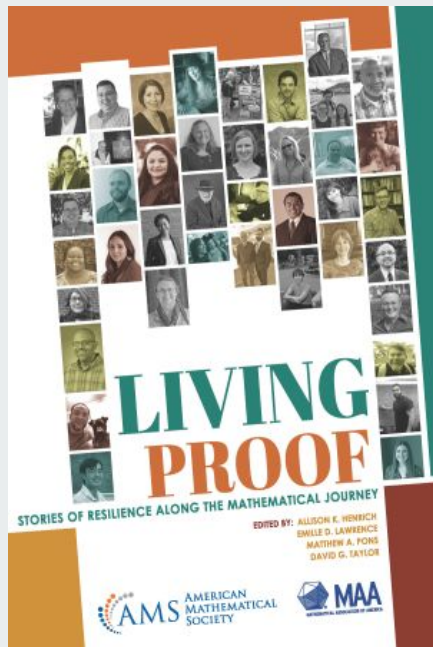
Questions we’re considering:

- How can we make this more accessible to undergraduates?
- How can we use this lecture series to **uplift** (younger) mathematicians of color?
- Should we invite mathematicians that work in areas that aren’t studied at UT Austin?



Spring 2021,
Anthony Várilly-Alvarado

Existence and Uniqueness Book Club & Pod Squad

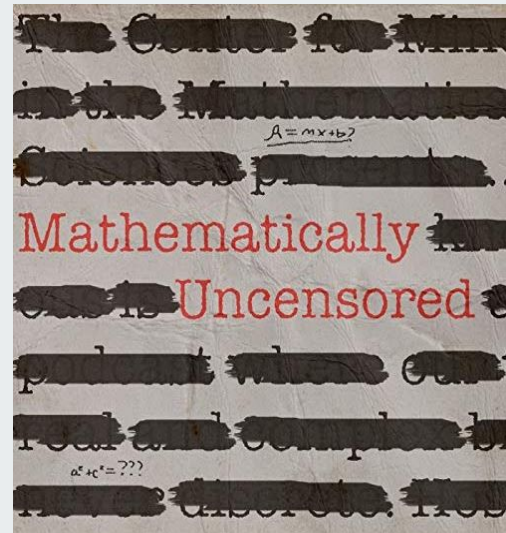


Spring 2021: [Living Proof](#)

- Recurring event, designed to be our “regular meetings”.
- Prepared questions to guide the discussion.
- Chose episodic readings to encourage people to attend without commitment.

Questions we’re considering:

- How do we reach a wider audience?
- How do we avoid “[siloing equity](#)” and other “Equity Traps and Tropes”?



Summer 2021: [Mathematically Uncensored](#)




Questions for you to consider:

- ❖ How can you advocate for people in your department/area?
- ❖ How can you support underrepresented groups in your department?
- ❖ How can you avoid implicit bias in hiring, in giving awards, and in inviting speakers?
 - The MAA offers [some advice](#) and [guidelines](#).
- ❖ How could you make space for new and diverse voices?
- ❖ Are you amplifying others, or are you burdening them?
 - Are you holding yourself accountable, or are you passing off responsibility?

Sustain.



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- ❖ EDI work is challenging, and often physically, mentally, and emotionally draining.
 - ❖ Existing in an unfriendly or hostile environment is also physically, mentally, and emotionally draining.
 - ❖ Doing both is *uniquely* challenging.

As allies, it is our duty to **take up the cause as our own**, and to sustain and support our peers, especially when they are facing adversity.



“We can let the name stand as a symbol of where the politics of the University are, and if as a student body we collectively rename it, that sends a powerful message in and of itself.”

“It may have taken a national uprising to bring this about, but I have no doubt that our efforts made this renaming possible. Because of this group, department chairs and the dean of CNS and countless students were already saying PMA. Because of our grassroots renaming, professors and teaching assistants had another name to put on their syllabi. Because of our allies in student government and on the Natural Sciences Council, our movement started to spread beyond the physics, math, and astronomy departments. Because of the work we did, it was impossible for the new administration to ignore what needed to be done in this moment.”



Thanks for listening!