MIT Faculty Newsletter

Lobby 7

Sending MIT Students to War with Water Pistols

James H. Williams, Jr.

I AM STROLLING ALONG my wormhole – a hypothetical cylinder from the theory of general relativity that is a topological shortcut between different points in spacetime, say a tunnel that connects the past and the present – intermittently looking toward opposite directions. At one end, it's the 1960s; at the other, it's 2023.

Undergraduate Diversity at MIT – 2023
In the mid-1960s, when I was an MIT undergraduate, the total number of native-born black American undergraduates in the entire student body was ~15. At the MIT Commencement of 1967, I was the only black graduate who had begun four years earlier. Contrast those numbers with the freshman MIT Class of 2027 of approximately 1092 students of which "Black/African Americans" com-

Editorial
Gaza: What Have We Learned from the bin Salman Scandal?

THE WAR IN THE MIDDLE EAST is forcing us to confront the often-silenced dialogue around Israel and Palestine. Regrettably, the world has been forced into this reckoning by two unimaginable events: Hamas's brutal attack on Israel that resulted in nearly 1,200 people being killed and over 200 kidnapped and held without information or access, and Israel's vengeful and indiscriminate slaughter of over 11,000 people, primarily women and children, and wounding over 25,000 while causing more than 1.5 million to be internally displaced within the tiny territory of Gaza – all the while imposing the tightest blockade of all food, water, fuel, medicines and necessary humanitarian supplies. Israel has also launched indiscriminate and widespread attacks on hospitals, ambulances, homes, churches and mosques, and refugee

Editorial
MIT Values and the Protests in Lobby 7

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND SOCIAL protests come in many forms and have different purposes. In the face of a global crisis, one important purpose of protests is to give individuals an opportunity to join together to express a deep moral concern and influence action. Moral integrity demands of us that we express our moral sentiments. In some cases, this can be done individually in prayer or other rituals, but not everyone finds prayer meaningful. And even those who find meaning in individual expressions of grief or rage also find value in connecting with others who share their moral concern, especially when the goal is to influence events. Collective expressions of moral sentiments can be both affirming and healing.

There is a long history of organizing non-violent demonstrations to meet the

contents

Photo Credit: *Page 1:* George Lin.

MIT Values and the Protests in Lobby 7

need for collective expression of moral outrage and bring about social and political change. Sometimes such demonstrations use civil disobedience – violating norms, rules, or laws – to call attention to their message. Given the depth of feeling, it is often difficult to maintain the commitment to entirely civil protest. This is why careful organizing, training, marshals, and observers are involved.

Having spoken to participants, witnesses, marshals, and faculty observers about the demonstration in Lobby 7 on Thursday, November 9, there is compelling evidence that the protesters were engaged in a peaceful demonstration of their values. They created paths where those going about their business could pass unimpeded, and marshals made special effort to be sure that the paths were wide enough for wheelchairs to pass. They had signs and banners, but when asked, put away their amplification devices. Many of them were simply sitting and working on p-sets and talking quietly.

However, there was a disruption in the morning when counter-protesters entered the space and became extremely provocative, shouting and violating the personal space of some of the protesters. When this occurred, organizers made efforts to protect the protesters from the confrontation and to keep violence from erupting. And the efforts were successful. The protesters did not respond to the counter-protesters' provocation in violent ways, in spite of the counter-protesters' aggressive approach.

Nevertheless, the administration has decided unilaterally to punish the protesters. We find this deeply problematic, especially given MIT's values – not just the value of free speech, but also the commitment to fostering integrity and well-being. We not only allow but encourage our students to live lives with moral purpose. Therefore, punishing students for peacefully expressing their moral concern in circumstances of crisis is unacceptable.

We have several more specific questions and objections to the way the administration responded to the protest.

• The administration initially threatened students with suspension from MIT without fully considering the ramifications of this for international students. Such threats are not consistent with MIT's values, and to threaten students in this way without engaging in adequate examination of the potential consequences is highly irresponsible. While the administration later clarified the suspension would be from non-academic activities, the harm done to international students stands. It appears that "suspension from non-academic campus activities" has been imposed on students. Does the president have the authority to impose this discipline on the students unilaterally? Do the students have no right to due process or to defend themselves? What is the MIT policy that describes the grounds for suspension and how they are enforced, and is this decision in conformity with such policy? Who is on the Ad Hoc Response Team, and how are they selected? Is the suspension already in effect, or will it await hearings to provide some due process? None of this is transparent.

• The basis for the "suspension" from non-academic activities has not been given adequate justification.

• Lobby 7 is a public space for the MIT community. The usual protest guidelines do not say that Lobby 7 may not be used for protests. We understand a sudden change of guidelines was emailed to students the day before the protest. There is reason to believe that this change was explicitly prompted by the planned protest, for the organizers had been working with faculty who interfaced with the administration. The new guidelines required permission to protest, and ruled out the use of Lobby 7. However, the email provided no process for requesting permission. And students from other groups

have recently (and historically) used Lobby 7 without complaint. To impose such constraints less than a day before the protest was scheduled, and then punish students for violating constraints that they couldn't realistically meet, is unfair. Because the urgency seemed to be due to the content of the protest, it also appears biased. Further, the new guidelines only allow protests in outdoor spaces, which severely limits protests during the winter months and raises issues of accessibility.

• As indicated above, the protest was peaceful and was not disruptive until the counter-protesters appeared; it continued to be peaceful after the counter-protesters left. The protesters were not the ones to initiate disruptive behavior. Why should the protesters be punished for non-violent resistance to aggressive tactics? Will the counter-protesters also be "suspended"?

• The move to a "suspension" from non-academic activities is confusing, and the motivation is unclear.

• How are "non-academic activities" defined? Of course, eating and sleeping in MIT housing aren't academic activities, but thankfully (unlike at Harvard) students have not been evicted. Is there a clear line between academic and non-academic activities? According to the Graduate Student Union contract, RA and TA activities are categorized as non-academic activities. Was this taken into account when the decision was made that "suspension" would involve being barred from non-academic activities? Will RAs and TAs be allowed to continue their work? Again, it does not seem that the administration is doing adequate preparation in considering the consequences of their decisions.

MIT Values and the Protests in Lobby 7

• How will this general ban be monitored?

• Importantly, isn't MIT trying to educate the whole person? And doesn't this happen outside of the classroom as well?

• The administration seems to be putting in restrictions on academic activities as well as non-academic activities.

• For example, the organizers of the protest had planned an all-day teach-in on Friday, November 10. It was open to the public, included guest speakers, and was not organized only by "suspended" students. The organizers had received permission for this, and had scheduled Room 10-250. However, when students showed up, they found police stationed outside of the room, and were told that the teach-in could not be held there. And yet other groups, opposed to the stance of the protesters, have recently been allowed to hold teach-ins without being policed. Who made this decision and on what basis?

• Blocking students from engaging in planned activities contradicts MIT's commitment to "cherish free expression, debate, and dialogue in pursuit of truth" (from the Values Statement). We spent months last fall discussing the importance of being allowed to share controversial and uncomfortable ideas. It is extremely disturbing how fast the values we agreed to cherish have been so blatantly violated.

• We understand that there are members of the MIT community who have expressed fear and experienced hostility. We agree that MIT should be a community where everyone can work and study without fear. We condemn acts of aggression, hate speech, and intolerance. However, we are concerned that the actions that have been taken to protect students are overly punitive and are not fully justified, that they are biased, and that the process is not transparent or fair.

Our concern is the well-being of all of our students – whether protestors or counter-protestors – as they peacefully exercise their right to express a moral stance about what is happening in their world, and seek to influence it. We believe in our duty as educators to ensure that they are not unduly penalized for expressing their beliefs or acting to change the world – what we at MIT teach them to hold and to cherish. And we believe the administration must also uphold these values, despite the pressures to forsake them; it must treat all students equitably, and with understanding. ■

Editorial Subcommittee

**Gaza: What Have We Learned
from the bin Salman Scandal?**

camps that have caused enormous civilian casualties, which are against modern rules of warfare. This comes on top of decades of occupation and land appropriation by Israel, which is the background against which the current war in the Middle East has erupted.

While many argue that MIT should not try to adjudicate geo-political issues, we must live up to our stated values and commitments and seek to end human suffering. And above all, we must never be complicit with the forces of violence.

Letters from President Kornbluth and the Chair of the Faculty Fuller have affirmed the principle of freedom of speech at MIT. We agree with them that antisemitism and Islamophobia are not free speech (see editorial on MIT Values and protests in Lobby 7 [page 1]). We also recognize that for many of our students and, indeed, our community, the pain and confusion of these events are affecting their physiological and psychological well-being. We are all filled with grief, sorrow, rage, confusion, and fear.

And yet, we must go beyond concerns about free speech and condemnations and ask more challenging questions about the ethical obligations of educators and universities. What Hamas did on October 7th has been rightfully condemned as war crimes by the United Nations. Equally, the disproportionate and vengeful attack by Israel on Palestinians has also been condemned as war crimes, and the specter of genocide has been raised. When students accuse MIT of practicing genocide, what they are asking for is an honest assessment of MIT's complicity in human rights violations with either side.

After the Epstein and bin Salman scandals, MIT established mechanisms to ensure that it would never be involved with or endorse human rights abusers. The same standard should be applied to what's happening in the Middle East. If we use that standard, any objective view based on overwhelming evidence points to grave violations of human rights by Israel and Hamas. As a university, we should never be complicit with institutions and individuals from either side who contribute to occupation and war. A thorough audit of all MIT engagements with human rights abuses and the war machinery of both sides is warranted. The audit should also examine any involvement by academic units, labs, and centers at MIT with any entity, governmental or private, in the United States that contributes to human rights abuses and war crimes in Palestine and Israel to avoid our complicity.

The new review processes established after the Epstein and bin Salman scandals call for attention to risks related to human rights concerns in MIT's transnational engagements. The narrow list of illustrative countries in this process – China, Russia, and Saudi Arabia – is arbitrary and not grounded in objective comparative human rights data. There is no reason why MIT should claim to have a process that addresses human rights risks if it will not apply it to the current situation in the Middle East.

Like all higher education institutions, MIT is entrusted with a fundamental duty to educate the next generation of leaders, innovators, and creators. They look up to us for guidance, and we must show by example to help them navigate our complex, unfair world. What guidance are we providing through our actions, and does it truly uphold our espoused values and principles?

MIT should also ask how it contributes to solutions for the world's biggest challenge illustrated by this latest war in the Middle East – the barriers to the sustained pursuit of peace. The word peace does not appear in any program, unit, or other entity's mission at MIT. What are we to make of that? Shouldn't tackling this challenge be a strategic priority for MIT? A modest first step is to mean what we say: adhere to the new review process, which calls for avoidance of engagement with abusers of human rights.

Editorial Subcommittee

Mary C. Fuller

From The Faculty Chair
A High Bar in Hard Times

THIS COLUMN IS BEING WRITTEN in late November, into a future of several weeks from now that seems especially unpredictable. This has been a chaotic semester, as we've all experienced the ripples here of violence in Israel and Gaza: conflict that has evoked the most primal emotions. As a person and as a scholar, I feel them too.

Other submissions to this issue may speak to the wider landscape; this column will stay close to home. The effects of the conflict here on campus have been profound, if not experienced universally. Without abandoning our core commitments, we've wrestled with questions about speech and freedom of expression, about policy and its application, about our physical campus, about governance and about the role of the university.

The other faculty officers and I have been immersed in practical problems and urgent conversations, as we seek to keep our eyes on principles and how these can best manifest in concrete decisions and actions. Yet some of our collective needs as members of the campus community have simply been for trustworthy narrative. What happened here today, this week, this month? How should we respond? Writing the history of the present is difficult, though, even at close hand. A coherent, well-sourced, and balanced account of the last few months at MIT would serve us all well, but I know how much work it would take to produce such an account (my own scholarship deals with the challenge posed by divergent first-person narratives). Each time I speak to someone, my knowledge and perspective evolve, and that experience demands epistemological humility.

Even in these conditions of partial knowledge, of course we all continue to talk, write, and post all the time about what we believe is happening around us.

A colleague told some of us a story this week that captured our attention. Before she joined the faculty, she said, she did something in a way that was pragmatic and widely accepted but not by the book; afterwards, she began to follow the rules strictly even though doing so was impractical, because whenever she acted, as a faculty member she was now implicitly representing MIT. As she said, now "I had my MIT hat on."

What would it look like to speak and write with "my MIT hat on" in this contested, painful, and difficult moment? It might look like passionate advocacy, or like the voice of moderation; both are reasonable responses, even necessary ones. What I think about the most, though, is what might be demanded by our identity as an institution based in rigor and standards. Whether we are designing a rocket or composing music, describing the structure of language or inventing a new material, solving problems or embedding equity in our computational tools, we aren't satisfied with the first pass; we hold ourselves to standards of excellence and test our output many, many times. What would it look like to do that with the stories, the conclusions, the images we circulate? We certainly have our MIT hat on

> But ultimately, to be able to work as colleagues, we need to disagree (especially) at room temperature, in our *manner* if not in the content of what we say. It's not a matter of being less passionate, or not having the courage of our convictions; in fact, I believe that disagreeing face to face in *this* way takes considerable courage, and I believe that in part because it is so frequently avoided in favor of louder but more circuitous routes.

when we publish in *Nature* or *Econometrica*. What are we wearing when we post on social media or talk around the water cooler?

Forgive me; I don't mean to preach a sermon to this brilliant audience, nor to lose sight of a bigger picture. Both social media and gossip have powerful affordances that can serve to resist and correct more official narratives. I would like to see us use them well and responsibly. Perhaps we should ask the historian's question about the information we consume: "What do I trust this document to tell me?" About the things we say, perhaps we might ask not, could I get this through peer-review, but would I be willing to say this face to face at normal volume. Some

things need to be shouted, I can almost hear someone say. I'll concede that too – you're right. But ultimately, to be able to work as colleagues, we need to disagree (especially) at room temperature, in our *manner* if not in the content of what we say. It's not a matter of being less passionate, or not having the courage of our convictions; in fact, I believe that disagreeing face to face in *this* way takes considerable courage, and I believe that in part because it is so frequently avoided in favor of louder but more circuitous routes. And it

is not easy to hold onto ourselves when there's conflict. I say that with humility as well. (I'm a small, middle-aged woman, and one time in the dojo someone made me so angry that only prudence held me back from starting an actual fight with him.) Governing speech is even harder. Sometimes it's easier to yell than speak, almost always it's more inviting to talk to many multiples of strangers than to the person we have conflict with down the hall.

But what about it – are we afraid of doing hard things? Do we really not want to hold ourselves to a high standard, or at least aspire towards it? One unexpected treasure of this fall has been discovering

what some of our colleagues can, in fact, rise to. You come to MIT knowing you will meet your intellectual heroes and heroines, but not necessarily expecting to meet people who are also heroes at being human, at carrying the burden of the present with grace, calm, persistence and generosity. Even if it urges us beyond where we're comfortable, that example is welcome: we are not here to do what's easy. Let's frame one of our challenges as how best to be human in this difficult world, and maybe we can also learn how to teach our students *that.* ▪

Mary C. Fuller is a Professor of Literature and Chair of the Faculty *(mcfuller@mit.edu).*

The Academic Well-Being Initiative

John Gabrieli
Pawan Sinha

Dear Faculty Community,

WE INVITE YOU TO BE a part of our mission to cultivate engaged undergraduate students who emphasize their well-being. The Academic Well-Being Initiative (AWI), led by John Gabrieli and Pawan Sinha, seeks faculty and instructors to dedicate a small amount of time during the spring or fall semester for a pivotal research endeavor.

This presents a unique chance to apply and evaluate evidence-based research within real classroom contexts. MIT's leadership, including the Office of the Vice Chancellor, the Division of Student Life, and the Teaching + Learning Lab genuinely hopes for your involvement in this initiative.

As a participant, faculty, or instructor, you will be grouped into one of three categories based on varying pedagogical support levels, following a randomized controlled trial (RCT) approach. We will ensure a balanced distribution of course attributes like content type, class size, and course level. Please be aware that the only change needed in your teaching practices is a revision to your syllabus and our research team will walk you through the process.

Through this endeavor, our aims are:

- To ascertain if certain evidence-driven teaching techniques boost student learning, engagement, motivation, and well-being.

- To determine the extent of support instructors require to adopt these proven practices.

If you would like to participate, please email Rita Sahu (*ritasahu@mit.edu*).

We think there is something special about the MIT culture that can make such a study happen. Thank you for your consideration. ▪

John Gabrieli is the Grover M. Hermann Professor in the Department of Brain and Cognitive Sciences *(gabrieli@mit.edu).*
Pawan Sinha is a Professor in the Department of Brain and Cognitive Sciences *(psinha@mit.edu).*

The MIT Community Responds to Recent Events on Campus Concerning the War in the Middle East

On the following eight pages are unsolicited submissions to the *MIT Faculty Newsletter* from Institute faculty, students, and staff, regarding recent events on the MIT campus. All contributions are the opinion(s) of the author(s), and do not reflect any editorial position of the *Faculty Newsletter*.

It is the general policy of the *Newsletter* to restrict replies to articles appearing in an issue of the *Newsletter* to a subsequent issue, but an exception has been made in this instance. As always, the *Newsletter* welcomes any contribution from an MIT faculty member or emeritus faculty member, and is open to any administrative or student contribution.

Thanking the Protesting Students

An MIT Faculty Member

AS THE ADMINISTRATION HAS repeatedly noted, the MIT Statement on Freedom of Expression and Academic Freedom reserves the right to limit "the time, place, and manner of protected expression, including organized protests . . . so as not to disrupt the essential activities of the Institute."

As a long-time employee and two-time parent of undergrads at MIT, I want to thank the students who chose to peacefully protest in Lobby 7 last week, reminding us that organizing and voicing dissent – even when it is loud or uncomfortable – is in fact one of our "essential activities."

As for the administration's surprise at the fairly predictable response they received when they attempted to preempt the protest (an 11th-hour email "reminder" dictating specific outdoor locations as the only authorized free speech zones), the entire communications misstep could have been avoided by simply looking up the definition of the word "protest" in the dictionary.

This protest was well in line with well-established MIT tradition, continuing a long line of vigils, demonstrations, and other activities over many, many years. To declare Lobby 7 or other central indoor gathering spaces to be "off-limits" to protest is as absurd as declaring Kresge Theater off-limits for *a cappella* or Barker Library off-limits for reading/napping. In the miniature city that is MIT, the Infinite is our Main Street and Lobby 7 is our downtown: these spaces are where we meet, gather, discuss, celebrate, sing, promote, mourn, shout, and in other ways attract attention to the causes and issues that matter to us.

Most impressive of all were those steadfast protesters who remained after the distribution of the administration's hasty memo threatening suspension (apparently improperly: this was subsequently rolled back when senior administration recognized that only the faculty Committee on Discipline has this authority), along with the many supporters who flocked to the lobby in support of the right to protest. All of our students are thoughtful individuals and this cannot have been an easy decision for any of them, weighing conscience and moral right vs. sudden, scary, and disproportionate real-world consequences. In considering any cases called up for disciplinary review, I hope the Committee will discount the charges to compensate for the debt we owe these brave students for pointing out the Institute's multiple mistakes.

Name withheld upon request.

An Open Letter From Faculty & Staff Regarding Freedom of Expression and Student Safety at MIT

November 14, 2023

Dear President Kornbluth,

WE, MIT FACULTY AND STAFF[1] are writing to you to voice our growing concerns about the safety of the MIT community.

We have watched with disappointment and unease over the past five weeks as the Institute has reacted disproportionately to student activists, as it stifled the voices of our student community members, and as the Coalition Against Apartheid's guest posts on the MIT Student Life Instagram page led to the page being shut down within hours, all despite Israeli flags lining the windows of the Engineering Building along Massachusetts Avenue for weeks before they were removed.

We think back on MIT's historic responses to student activists engaged in other human rights protests. On MIT's deployment of the Cambridge Police against students protesting the South African apartheid regime in the 1980s and 1990s. On its deployment of the same police against Vietnam War protestors in the 1960s and 1970s. On its treatment of student activists throughout the Iraq War. And we find the parallels alarming.

We remind the MIT administration per the Faculty's Statement on Freedom of Expression[2] that the Institute values "civil-ity, mutual respect, and uninhibited, wide-open debate," and "even robust disagreements shall not be liable to official censure or disciplinary action." Given the deeply disturbing responses by many universities in the United States and Europe to student groups over the past weeks, including our own, we insist that the Institute administration confirm and support our right, as faculty, students, and staff, to non-violent assembly and to free expression without retribution or threat.

It is striking that the administration felt it necessary to send out an emergency alert regarding the anti-war demonstration that crossed the Mass Ave. Bridge yesterday afternoon, warning the MIT community to "please avoid the area." The use of the emergency alert system for non-emergency situations such as street closures increases the likelihood that members of the MIT community will ignore messages about true emergencies that occur at our institution such as regular chemical spills and other laboratory mishaps. Misusing the emergency alert system to warn the community away from a peaceful protest fosters a culture that fears freedom of speech.

As an educational institution at the forefront of global science and technology, MIT holds a unique position. To quote the MIT Faculty Newsletter, "with 42% of our faculty, 43% of our graduate students, and 65% of our post-docs hailing from countries other than the U.S., and 151 countries represented on our campus, MIT is truly 'of the world.'" It is crucial for our institute to honor the diverse experiences of our students, staff, and faculty, and to equip our future leaders with the ability to navigate a global community. Honoring those experiences requires every member of our community to be empowered to speak out on issues of import, without fear of retribution that may endanger not only their academic careers but their visa status. MIT has an opportunity to serve as a leader for other universities globally on how to treat their students with respect and dignity as they exercise their right to free speech.

We understand the complexity of the situations you inherited upon assuming your role as president, particularly given the unique tensions of a global institute. We encourage the administration to engage in open communication with the MIT community to find solutions that prioritize the well-being of the students while ensuring that MIT continues to uphold its commitment to free expression and the open exchange of ideas.

Thank you for your time and your willingness to engage productively with the MIT community. ◼

Signed,

101 concerned faculty and staff members

[This is a living letter, to add your name, please complete this form.]

---

[1] We are signing as individuals. Listed affiliation does not constitute an endorsement on behalf of any DLCs.

[2] This statement was originally adopted by MIT faculty in 2022 and officially adopted by the Institute in February 2023.
https://iceo.mit.edu/free-expression/

Engaging Constructively with Israel/Palestine

Daniel Jackson
David Dolev

IN RESPONSE TO: "*Gaza: What Have We Learned from the bin Salman Scandal?*" *(See page 1.)*

Sally Haslanger, Jonathan A. King, Ceasar McDowell, Nasser Rabbat and Balakrishnan Rajagopal note that the war in the Middle East is forcing us to confront the "often-silenced dialogue around Israel and Palestine" and propose a "thorough audit of all MIT engagements with human rights abuses and the war machinery of both sides."

Strangely, they assert that "the word peace does not appear in any program, unit, or other entity's mission at MIT" and on this basis press for their preferred intervention.

And yet there are multiple "peace" projects at MIT. Considering only those programs focused on Israel and Palestine, there is Tech2Peace, a joint Israeli-Palestinian NGO that hosts two-week-long intensive seminars for young Palestinians and Israelis, whose founder

was hosted by CIS as a visiting fellow and to which multiple MIT students have been sent as interns; a summer venture development program with workshops facilitated by MITdesignX and MIT Game Lab with Our Generation Speaks, an entrepreneurial community of leaders committed to shaping a peaceful Israeli-Palestinian future, and with whom our MISTI students work as interns over the summer at MIT and over IAP in Israel; and Digital Tent, a teen program for Bedouin students (a collaboration between MIT, Ben Gurion University, and Siraj, a non-profit dedicated to integrating members of the Bedouin community into Israel's high-tech sector) to which MISTI sends MIT undergraduates as mentors.

Most notably, MEET (Middle East Entrepreneurs of Tomorrow), which was founded at MIT 17 years ago, brings Israeli and Palestinian teenagers together to learn programming and social entrepreneurship. MEET has over 700 alumni of its three-year program, and is one of

MISTI's most popular programs with over 150 MIT students having spent a summer in Jerusalem as instructors. Thirteen MEET alumni have been admitted to MIT as undergraduates. Since the start of the war in the Middle East, MISTI-MEET has received a surge of donations from faculty members looking to contribute positively in the face of so much understandable despair.

Haslanger, et. al note correctly that our students "look up to us for guidance" and that we must show by example how to navigate our complex world. These programs do exactly that. They offer a constructive and empathetic way to engage with the region, and a genuine opportunity to improve the lives of Israelis and Palestinians without demonizing either side. ■

Daniel Jackson is Professor of Computer Science, Associate Director of CSAIL, and Faculty Director of MISTI MEET *(dnj@mit.edu).*
David Dolev is Associate Director of MISTI and current Managing Director of CIS's programs in the Middle East *(ddolev@mit.edu).*

Antisemitism on Campus

MIT Israel Alliance

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS COME IN many forms and have different purposes. Some serve to advance the collective welfare of humanity by bringing us together. Others dehumanize their opposition to advance their own ideologies. In the wake of the recent Hamas terror attack, a movement of the second type began to dominate life on MIT's campus.

On October 7th, Hamas terrorists slaughtered over 1,200 people in Israel – Jews, Muslims, Arabs, and others alike. Hamas raped teenagers, burned babies, and took more than 240 people hostage. Some of the victims of the October 7th attack are directly related to members of our community here at MIT.

In the wake of the largest killing of Jews since the Holocaust and one of the worst terrorist attacks in modern history, Jews and Israelis on campus desperately needed time and space to mourn. Instead, we were met immediately with victim blaming and callous epithets. On October 8th, every undergraduate student at MIT received an email claiming the "Israeli regime" was "responsible for all unfolding violence." One student group helped organize a "Victory is Ours" rally, where protestors from around Cambridge and Boston celebrated the murder and terror carried out in Israel.

This celebration of Hamas, a US government-designated terror organization sworn to eradicating the state of Israel, marked the establishment of a narrative characterizing Israelis and Jews as scapegoats, and paved the way for an increasingly antisemitic dynamic on MIT's campus. When Hamas declared a "Global Day of Jihad", Israelis and Jews were scared to come to campus. We were scared to wear our Star of David necklaces and our kippahs. We were scared to tell people that we were going to Shabbat dinners. We felt it was unsafe to be publicly Jewish and to speak freely about our support for the continued existence and safety of the State of Israel. As Jewish students were kicked out of study groups, called "Nazis" for supporting Israel, and bombarded with hateful dormspam, MIT faculty and IDHR and DEI officers dismissed Jewish students' fears and even told some Israeli students to go back to Israel. The MIT administration repeatedly allowed anti-Israel hate groups on campus in violation of MIT policies, who invited outside protestors to espouse violent rhetoric on campus.

Day by day, Jews and Israelis have been academically and socially isolated on campus. Students were kicked out of study groups, classes were interrupted, Jewish and Israeli staff members' offices were stormed, and students were bullied into leaving their departmental lounges. Suspected supporters of Israel were intimidated and targeted (privately and publicly) by members of the MIT community. Unfortunately, it is not just students who are bullying and ostracizing Jews and Israelis on campus. At a public campus event, the MIT Interfaith Chaplain reportedly diverted the group discussion four times to assert that Palestinians are "wrongfully subjugated and oppressed by racist white European colonizers," and then made any student who keeps kosher raise their hand so they could get a kosher meal. The DEI chair of the Department of Urban Studies and Planning (DUSP) publicly endorsed statements calling Israel a genocidal apartheid state. A Brain and Cognitive Sciences (BCS) postdoc repeatedly and publicly called Zionism (belief in the right of Jews to self-determination in their ancestral homeland of Israel, a tenet at the core of our religious and ethnic identity for 3,000 years) a "mental illness"; made the slanderous false claim that Jewish Israelis want to "enslave the world in a global apartheid system"; called the "average Israeli" a Nazi; and spread a dangerous libel that Israelis use Palestinians for organ harvesting. When this was reported to the BCS DEI officer and MIT administrators, the DEI officer called the organ harvesting conspiracy theory a "confirmed report," and dismissed the complaint.

With this context, it is easy to understand why many Jewish and Israeli students do not feel safe on campus. We express our fears to those who are tasked with keeping us safe and providing us with a healthy learning environment, and are met with gaslighting and lip service. As shown by their actions and words (such as violent calls to "raise up your two fists and sacrifice everything for Palestine" on the steps of Lobby 7), radicalized student groups and the outsiders they invite to campus pose a real threat to all students' safety, especially Jews and Israelis. *Jews and Israelis on campus don't just 'feel' unsafe, we are unsafe.*

This is unbearable. As the MIT community, we need to begin constructive dialogue and ensure the safety of all our community members. We must not let the hate and tokenization spreading around the world infect our campus. MIT should be a place for open-mindedness, open dialogue, free speech, and free expression. It should not be a place for hate or discrimination. Nobody should feel unsafe because they wear a hijab or a yarmulke, or because they speak their mother tongue in the hallways.

Therefore, we call on faculty and all members of the MIT community to cease sowing hate and division on campus, and begin instead to work towards healing for all parties. ■

With love and respect,
The Executive Board
of the MIT Israel Alliance

The MIT Israel Alliance can be reached at *(mitia-exec@mit.edu).*

What I Learned

Yossi Sheffi

I WAS ASKED BY A GROUP of students to provide a response to the FNL "Editorial Subcommittee" article titled "What Have We Learned . . . ." (See page 1.) The article paints a slanted equivalence between the Hamas atrocities and Israel's response. To start with, one notices that while the article mentions Hamas's atrocities in general, it goes into great detail to describe the suffering in Gaza. The text is full of biased descriptions and outright errors. To wit:

- In the first paragraph the Hamas actions are depicted as "killings" while Israel is responsible for "slaughter." I urge the members of the "Editorial Subcommittee" to watch the GoPro footage celebrating gleefully the sadistic rape, torture, and cold blooded murder at point blank of children, elderly, concert goers, and others, atrocities not seen since the holocaust. A perfunctory sentence decrying "killing" is fake equivalence.

- "Israel has also launched indiscriminate and widespread attacks." This is patently biased and wrong; for years, and especially during the last few weeks, Hamas has launched an indiscriminate barrage of missiles and kamikaze drones on civilian targets in Israel: communities, hospitals, schools, and synagogues. Tens of thousands of missiles were launched. So, any discussion of "indiscriminate" sounds hollow when applied to Israel's actions.[1]

- The lip service to the Hamas atrocities does not go into details, unlike the (wrong) description of the Israeli operations. There is no mention of beheading babies (mentioned by President Biden, not Israeli sources), raping women, mutilating bodies, taking elderly and babies hostage, murdering hostages, and sexually assaulting Israeli bodies while carrying them in the street of North Gaza with huge crowds cheering and hollering. Many of these were documented by Hamas's bodycams. The latter by satellites and drones.

- The main fallacy in this article is that of "moral equivalence" based in part on what it argues to be a disproportionate response. I ask what would be a proportionate response? Should Israel have gone into Gaza, kill a few thousand Palestinians, rape a few women, behead a few babies in front of their mothers, take elderly, women, and toddlers hostage, murder some of them in captivity, and then send gleeful messages to their own families on WhatsApp announcing "Hurray – I killed 10 Palestinians today . . ." No country and no people had to deal with these murderous barbarians and their complicit societies.

- Israel attacks Hamas's targets. Unfortunately, Hamas chose to position itself among the civilian citizenry in hospitals and Mosques.[2] Knowing this, the Israeli military operations, which in the past have been characterized by lightning speed, have been slow and methodical to minimize civilian casualties to the extent possible. For urban warfare, and given Hamas's tactics, the civilian casualties, which we all regret, have been *relatively* small. When the Israeli military entered the Al-Shifa hospital, they brought a large amount of medical supplies with them and distributed them to the Palestinian medical workers. They also documented the Hamas operations in the hospital. So, while the Israeli military did go into Al-Shifa, the hospital was not bombed. Israeli soldiers entered the hospital to find Hamas's terrorists without shelling or air support, taking huge risks (and casualties) and NOT bombing the hospital to the ground.[3]

[1] To understand what "indiscriminate" attacks actually look like, consider, for example, the German blitz of London, the firebombing of Dresden and Tokyo, not to mention the nuclear bombs. More recent examples are the Russian attacks on Ukraine's civilian targets, the Syrian regime's slaughtering of its own citizens, and, as mentioned above, the barrage of missiles raining on the Israeli civilian population. These are a far cry from the Israeli operation in Gaza, which is meticulously conducted according to the rules of war *(jus in bello)*. (See, for example, https://lawliberty.org/no-good-deed-goes-unpunished/?mod=djemMER_h).

[2] This was admitted by Hamas, has been known for years, and was affirmed by US officials last week (see for example, https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/press-briefings/2023/11/14/press-gaggle-by-press-secretary-karine-jean-pierre-and-nsc-coordinator-for-strategic-communications-john-kirby-en-route-san-francisco-ca/, and https://www.commentary.org/jonathan-schanzer/the-real-gaza-hospital-crisis/?mod=djemMER_h).

[3] The only hospital that was "bombed" was the Al-Ahli Baptist Hospital in Gaza, where

What I Learned
Sheffi, from preceding page

- The talk about genocide, which the article mentions, is also misdirected. The cries "Palestine from the river to the sea" are, in fact, calls for genocide. The Israeli military is fighting and taking casualties in Gaza (while missiles are still being launched indiscriminately at civilian Israeli targets). This is war (which, like every other Arab-Israeli war, Israel did not initiate). This is neither "vengeful" nor "indiscriminate" killing. When an Israeli politician mentioned recently that the nuclear option was not off the table, he was stripped of his job and punished. No politician in Israel is calling for the killing or even expulsion of Palestinians. Of course, the opposite is an everyday occurrence in the Arab world and Iran. Furthermore, Hamas's platform calls for the destruction of Israel, not peace or two-state co-existence.

- Finally, to the Lobby 7 demonstration. While the Jewish students were singing "Oseh Shalom B'mromav . . ." (translation: "He who makes peace above will also bring peace onto earth"), there were no cries for peace among the demonstrators. The main Palestinian supporters still refuse to enter into a dialogue with the Jewish students on campus.

Hamas reported 500 dead. The world media (Al Jazira, CNN, NPR, NYT, BBC, The Guardian, as well as aid agencies and governments around the world) were quick to repeat the reports breathtakingly and condemn Israel. They were much slower to report that this was an Islamic Jihad/Hamas missile and a weapons cache that blew up the hospital, causing about two dozen casualties (according to American intelligence). So, the Western press and aid agencies took the words of a terrorist organization and reported them as facts without any check or verification.

There is no desire for war or innocent killing among the Israeli population or the Jewish and Israeli members of our community. I grew up in Israel, and many of my friends were and still are Arabs. I am back from a recent visit to Jordan, where I have many former students, colleagues, and friends. And even though I was a soldier in 1967 when Israel fought Jordan, we all got over it and looked to the future. (Israel and Jordan signed a peace treaty in 1994.) While in Amman, I even had a very open and respectful conversation with a former member of the Jordanian Armed Forces, who was also involved in the 1967 six-day war on the other side. Both of us lost friends. I can assure everybody: nobody hates war more than soldiers.

Let me add that most of MIT's strength and moral voice is tied to its contributions to improving humankind through science and technology. I understand the desire to create a better world through research and teaching on the Arab/Israeli conflict. (By the way, why did this not take place following the Russian atrocities in Ukraine or the Syrian uncivil war?) While individual faculty members can research whatever they want and teach what they desire (subject to some approval processes), the FNL article seems to call for central resources when discussing "MIT" rather than individual faculty activities. Doing this has several pitfalls: (i) Geopolitical issues are not the main strength of MIT. Contributions to mitigating global warming or the impact of generative AI are much more in our wheelhouse. Furthermore, the impact of the latter is likely much more significant. (ii) The "data" for such studies depends on the source. Recall that "the first casualty of war is the truth." Like Republicans and Democrats in the US, each side gets its data from its own echo chamber. (iii) The issues are emotional and are likely to increase the divisiveness on campus. The biased and one-sided Subcommittee article is by itself proof that such endeavor should not be undertaken by MIT. If we

want our students to listen to slanted and biased analysis and opinions, we can direct them to certain media outlets.

As an aside, note that it is not clear what the "Editorial Subcommittee" is. By sending the piece around as the "Editorial Subcommittee" article, it gets a veneer of a voice of the faculty. It is not and should not be labeled as such.

Finally, another fatal flaw in the Editorial Subcommittee article, beyond its slanted descriptions, is that it ignores the immediate and pressing challenge in front of us: lowering the temperature on campus and allowing our community to go back to "Job 1": learning and enveloping new knowledge. While this may require strong moral actions – for example, pointing out the non-equivalency between the behavior of the various groups on campus – which the administration has yet to take, I am glad to see that several colleagues, on both sides, are taking positive steps in this direction. ■

Yossi Sheffi is a Professor of Civil and Environmental Engineering and Engineering Systems, and Director of the Center for Transportation and Logistics *(sheffi@mit.edu).*

Standing Together Against Hate:
From the River to the Sea, From Gaza to MIT

Michel DeGraff

FIRST THINGS FIRST: Thanks to the students at MIT's Coalition for Palestine (MIT C4P), especially MIT's Coalition Against Apartheid (MIT CAA), for the courage and moral clarity in their protests for Palestinian liberation and against the genocide in Gaza, in spite of intimidation near and far, including doxxing by MIT senior faculty.

The steadfast humanism that I've observed in MIT students' anti-genocide vigils and protests – starting on October 13, 2023, with the most recent one on November 9 – have given me hope for the future. I've even taken my family, including my five-year-old daughter Èzili, to these protests. She too needs to understand that Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" speech is not an abstract prayer from the past. We too can work to leave the world in a better place than what we were born into.

Though these students have not been perfect in their advocacy (how could students be perfect if we faculty are so far from perfect?), they have risen to this occasion, doing their best to make the world a safer place for *all*, "from the river to the sea" and "from Gaza to MIT," as they chant in their rallies. True, some of these chants are controversial, having been linked to "past antisemitic horrors or violent attacks on Israelis." But, in the specific context of the students' protests, they are meant as a plea for universal freedom and equal rights in historic Palestine, for Palestinians and Israelis alike.

Many students and faculty have written me supportive messages about the aggression against me by faculty colleagues at the MIT Institute faculty meeting of November 15, 2023, when I was expressing my concerns about the MIT administration's silence about the genocide in Gaza and the impact thereof on our community. I was contrasting the ongoing bombing (that is, war crimes) against hospitals in Gaza with President Kornbluth's announcement, the day before, of a committee for "Standing together against hate" with a near-exclusive focus on antisemitism, as if MIT were immune to the hatred related to the genocide in

Gaza. That's when I was suddenly interrupted by a faculty member yelling "Enough! Enough lies! . . . Shut up!" Other colleagues wrote invectives on the Zoom chat: "Shame on you," "I leave with disgust," "We should not be listening to fake news read by faculty" . . . .

These verbal attacks are *nano* when compared to the deadly attacks against civilians over decades in Israel and Palestine – and, even, recent attacks in the US against a Palestinian child in Chicago and Palestinian college students in Vermont. Yet the physical aggression by pro-Israel counter-protesters against the MIT CAA students and their allies constitutes violations of MIT policy, if not criminal offenses. In my analysis, these patterns of aggression among MIT faculty and students are part of a larger war on truth, morality and international law, as orchestrated by a powerful propaganda machine in support of Israel's genocide against Palestinians.

I'm sorry that the casualties of this "war on truth" at MIT have now included these students who, because they truly believe that #AllLivesMatter, including Palestinian lives, are now having to deal with the pain and anguish caused by the campaign against their C4P. In one heart-wrenching email I received one day after this embarrassing faculty meeting, one MIT CAA student asked:

"How can I sit in lectures and take my professors' words to be true when I know that they cannot even behave themselves with decorum? How can I bring unexpected results and odd data points to my research supervisors when I have witnessed them reject unpopular ideas as 'disgusting'? How can I finish manuscripts on [my scientific] research when I know that my university leaders would rather that I ignore the bombardment and starvation of Al-Shifa hospital?" [hyperlinks added]

Here's some of what I wrote back:

"I'm sorry you have to deal with such pain and anguish. But please note that the MIT faculty, like any other human grouping, have never been homogeneous in our moral beliefs and pedagogical practices. That much was

evident at the faculty meeting last Wednesday, November 15, 2023. Consider the bullying and insults there in contrast with faculty's voices in support of truth and justice [including the role of history and our understanding of intergenerational trauma in our teaching]."

And there are certainly faculty who deplore the genocide in Gaza, and who wish our administration would stop ignoring the Palestinians in our "Standing together against hate." The November 15, 2023, responses from the Editorial Board of the *MIT Faculty Newsletter*, alongside the November 14, 2023, "Open Letter From Faculty & Staff Regarding Freedom of Expression and Student Safety at MIT," and the November 21, 2023, letter to MIT faculty titled "Wiser and more compassionate together," give me hope that MIT can still do a better job on the right side of this war on truth.

We should also remember that MIT CAA, which is now targeted by the administration, fought against apartheid in South Africa in the 1980s. Sadly, we recently lost two MIT heroes in that struggle: Prof. Willard Johnson and Prof. Mel King. Together with Prof. Ruth Perry and other faculty, staff, and students, they were steadfast supporters of MIT CAA in successfully pushing MIT to divest from financial holdings in South Africa.

Back then, as now, social justice at MIT was undermined by an administration that's too often more concerned with the bottom line than with moral rectitude. Back then, the bottom line was investment in South Africa stocks. Today it's geo-political domination, fossil fuels in the Middle East, financial support from mega donors, etc. I think the administration, as well, can learn from MIT CAA's history – which, perhaps, can help restore MIT's moral compass toward an #MITBetterWorld where human lives are not valued according to a warped sense of history or the size of donations to universities.

The same MIT CAA student who emailed me to express distress at the bullying at the

Standing Together Against Hate
DeGraff, from preceding page

MIT faculty meeting on November 15, 2023, also made this remark:

"…it does not escape me that you were one of the very few individuals of color to speak at today's meeting, and unfortunately, a hypothesis that racism and bias played a hand in the hostility directed towards you would be very consistent with my prior experiences with this MIT administration.

To which, I responded:

"Like Arab and Muslim faculty and students who have noticed the administration's biases against them, we faculty of color at MIT keep noticing, both directly and indirectly, anti-Black racism on the part of the administration as well. So, often, Black faculty, like Arab and Muslim faculty, choose whose walls to bang our heads on. Faculty meetings might be one of those walls that are best avoided."

In light of recent news of censorship and other attacks on freedom of speech, what happened at that MIT faculty meeting, alongside the events and statements around it, points to the complicity of much of Academia in Israel's genocide in Palestine!

Language matters, so I use the word "genocide" cautiously. The fact is that even experts at the UN and Israeli scholars consider Palestinians at risk of genocide. At the very least, there's genocidal intent whose roots go back decades – in this so called "land without people for a people without a land" – and are now well documented, even in mainstream media like the *New York Times*.

It is with this history in mind that we need to analyze a certain incongruence between, on the one hand, the Jewish students who report feeling threatened by antisemitism and, on the other hand, the Jewish professors who disrupted an Institute-wide faculty meeting to verbally harass a senior faculty colleague on November 15, 2023, and the Israeli counter-protesters who physically harassed their fellow students on November 9, 2023, in Lobby 7. In both cases, the objective was to silence voices protesting the genocide in Gaza and asking MIT to honor the humanity of Palestinians on a par with that of Jews and everyone else.

When a group of MIT faculty met with President Sally Kornbluth on October 24,

2023, to discuss the tragedy in Palestine, we also raised the question why harassment against Arabs and Muslims gets underreported – as compared to harassment against Jews. Judging from President Kornbluth's remarks back then, it seems that the Jewish community has lines of communication with her (a Jewish president) that the Arab and Muslim communities don't. Yet, at the faculty meeting on November 15, when I asked President Kornbluth why such a primary focus on anti-semitism as part of an agenda "against hate," and why not consider anti-Arab and anti-Muslim hate on a par with antisemitism, President Kornbluth evoked her personal experience as a Jewish person who has received antisemitic messages and a 10-to-1 ratio of reports of antisemitism vs. Islamophobia. In Kornbluth's justification, her own experience is among the reasons why MIT's "Standing together against hate" agenda is primarily to combat antisemitism. Yet, in the same response, she also mentioned some of the reasons why Islamophobia goes unreported.

The problem here is that, if MIT's "Standing together against hate" says nothing about the slaughter of thousands of Palestinians or the impact of this slaughter among Arabs and Muslims, then what message is being sent to Arabs and Muslims here?

On October 10, 2023, in her very first statement after Hamas's attack on Israel, President Kornbluth appropriately denounced Hamas's war crimes: "The brutality perpetrated on innocent civilians in Israel by terrorists from Hamas is horrifying." But, if the brutality of Hamas's war crimes against some 1,200 Israeli soldiers and civilians is "horrifying," then how can the same Sally Kornbluth remain silent about the record-breaking bombing of Palestinian civilians (11,000+ as of now, including 5,000+ children!), bombing of hospitals, schools, mosques, etc. (another horrifying series of war crimes).

One remembers the denunciation by MIT President Rafael Reif on February 27, 2022, of Russia's war crimes in Ukraine. US President Biden even raised the "genocide" alert in Ukraine where fatalities over two years are of the same order as in Gaza in only one month. Yet, Kornbluth's statements, like Biden's, have remained silent about genocide in Gaza, insisting she's "not taking sides." But how can one

NOT take sides vis-à-vis genocide, no matter how complex the history leading to it. Here, "not taking sides," in effect, is on the side of genocide.

At this rate, should we ask if Arab and Muslim lives matter as much as Ukrainian, Jewish, and Israeli lives? Is there racism at play here? Aren't such questions related to why Islamophobia goes underreported, due to mistrust of authorities who show less care for Arabs and Muslims than they do for other groups?

Now consider the flip side of this coin, namely the widespread preference for Israel and Jewish students (for example, Claudine Gay's "Harvard has [their] back"), with US unconditional support for Israel in spite of recurrent violations of human rights, international law and agreements. These double standards make it even more difficult for Arabs and Muslims to trust that authorities will ever care for their wellbeing as much as they care for Jews.

Despite all of the above, I was heartened by President Kornbluth's response to my question at the faculty meeting when she stated:

"I have condemned what's happening in Gaza. I think it's awful that we are seeing the suffering of innocent children, of innocent people."

That statement alone showed more courage than what we've seen at most elite universities in the US to date – even at Harvard where President Claudine Gay once spoke of the importance of "courage."

Yes, antisemitism is real and causing great pain to our Jewish students and colleagues, even more so after the horrific attack of October 7, especially in light of Hamas's agenda for the annihilation of Israel. *And we should ALSO recognize that Arab and Muslim communities are under attack and in great pain as well.* So we need President Kornbluth to counteract this disregard for Palestinian lives – a global disregard that, unfortunately, is all too familiar and has come at inordinate cost to Palestinians in the past few decades.

The time is now for we at MIT to live up to our "Mens et Manus et Cor" mission to make the world better. Meanwhile MIT's Coalition for Palestine inspires us to honor the humanity of us all – from the river to the sea, from Gaza to MIT . . . .

Michel DeGraff is a Professor of Linguistics *(degraff@mit.edu)*.

The Nomination Process for Faculty Officers and Faculty Committee Membership

Rodrigo Verdi
Tami Kaplan

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.[1] 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:

1. 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.[2]

2. 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;

---

[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.

- 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]

---

[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.

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 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. ◼

Rodrigo Verdi is a Professor in the Sloan School of Management; Chair, Committee on Nominations *(rverdi@mit.edu).*
Dr. Tami Kaplan is Faculty Governance Administrator, Office of the President; Staff, Committee on Nominations *(tkaplan@mit.edu).*

---

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

A Third Update on Research Administration

Anne White

OVER THE COURSE OF several progress reports in these pages, most recently in fall 2022, the Institute's research administration leadership has outlined the ongoing transformation of our research and sponsored activity enterprise.

This third update continues in the same vein, offering a lens on current activities and next steps, especially as we embark on the next phase of change.

As announced in September, pending the appointment of a Senior Vice Provost for Research, much of the portfolio overseen by the Vice President for Research (VPR) for the past decade will return to the auspices of the Provost's Office. Organizationally, Research Administration Services is currently with Research Development, Research Administration Systems and Support, and other units under the Vice President for Research (VPR), whereas OSATT Core, the Technology Licensing Office (TLO), and Corporate Relations are under the provost. The new senior vice provost for research will bring them all together, among other changes. This is a good thing.

The purpose of the research administration enterprise is to support the faculty's vision. That is, it exists to enable research programs as varied, collaborative, and creative as the quest for knowledge itself. Since 2019, research administration teams have been thoroughly reorienting all aspects of their operations to better serve the needs of today's researchers, amid a dynamic funding and policy environment. Strategic hiring, the creation of RAS and OSATT Core, process improvements, and

robust training and mentoring programs have fostered a team culture that is agile, knowledgeable, focused on the principal investigator (PI), and committed to achieving seamless coordination.

Two new offices working together

Launched in spring 2020, Research Administration Services (RAS) serves as the central administrative office for submitting proposals and accepting and managing awards on behalf of MIT, for sponsors of all types – federal and non-federal, including industry. Three major functions of the RAS office are supported by a team structure:

- Contract and grant administrators, the main point of contact for PIs and DLCIs, are responsible for the review, submission, negotiation, receipt, and management of all externally funded sponsored research proposals and awards.

- The subawards team is responsible for the issuance of third-party contractual agreements, including sponsor vetting, flow-down of sponsor terms and conditions, and negotiations.

- The data services team reviews and maintains all proposal and award information, including terms and conditions, budgets, and all project activity.

The other new office, formally launched in summer 2022, is OSATT Core; it is one of the three offices that now

compose OSATT, the others being the Technology Licensing Office (TLO) and Corporate Relations. With special expertise in industry engagement, OSATT Core is the primary negotiator of industry-sponsored research agreements, working closely with RAS and the TLO. Within OSATT Core:

- Catalysts provide an initial point of contact for PIs and industry research sponsors, helping to develop and refine project ideas and expectations toward a mutually beneficial engagement.

- The strategic transactions team drafts, reviews, and negotiates non-federal sponsored research and collaboration agreements, as well as non-disclosure, data use, material transfer and other research-related agreements.

- Alliance managers connect PIs with the appropriate information and resources they need to facilitate their commitments under existing agreements with industry research sponsors and collaborators.

The operations of RAS and OSATT Core are broadly familiar to most DLCIs, after a year of concerted outreach (and I hope this update helps increase awareness); feedback from PIs and administrators has supported continuous improvement of communication approaches and operations. RAS and VPR have made significant staffing changes to keep pace with MIT's growing research

A Third Update on Research Administration
White, from preceding page

portfolio, the complexity of international collaborations, and federal research compliance requirements. OSATT Core has implemented an improved workflow, with better technical support via a contract management tool, for all industry-sponsored research agreements and other agreements that require the office's assistance, input, or negotiation support. In these ways and countless others, we're taking steps to address the systems and processes that can be made to work better.

A word about coordination
Sponsor requirements and policies are extremely complex. This interactive online resource explaining the full life cycle of a sponsored research award shows how many offices and teams work together to bring an idea to life. To keep everything moving efficiently through each phase, handoffs for necessary reviews and other processes ought to be streamlined, reliable, and transparent.

It is nontrivial to measure the full life cycle of an award from start to finish – pre-award and post-award, from proposal preparation to award closeout. But one interesting metric that we have been looking at is the turnaround time during the pre-award phase. MIT requires that complete and final proposals be submitted to RAS five business days in advance of the sponsor deadline date. However, MIT does allow for incomplete and non-final proposals to be submitted to RAS. This presents an opportunity to use the turnaround time – defined as the time between submission to RAS and submission to the sponsor – to identify parts of the processes at MIT that might be running less smoothly than desired.

Here's what we found. There were over 3,400 proposals in fiscal year 2023. The average turnaround time for all proposals, including non-final proposals, was only 6.9 days. (Publicly available data suggest two weeks may be more typical at other universities.) Significant outliers raised the average turnaround time above the

median, and we are examining those cases by hand. We can see that a need for under-recovery funding, international engagement or export control reviews, and special PI status requests appear to be correlated with longer-than-average turnaround times. Looking ahead, the new approach to funding under-recovery on

sponsored research (see below) should alleviate one cause of delay, and we are working to reduce, or at least help PIs anticipate, others.

Continuous improvement
Having attended many group meetings, faculty meetings, and council meetings this year, I want you to know that the time you spend telling us about your challenges and priorities is time well spent. Together, we have made progress on several initiatives of note:

Expanding the Research@MIT app: The research administration app for PIs and DLCI admins, first launched just over a year ago, continues to do more with each successive update. Non-sponsored accounts (gifts, discretionary accounts, and faculty startup funding) are now visible alongside sponsored awards, with drill-down views into categories of expenses incurred to date. The TLO, part of OSATT, has also moved its invention disclosure form into Research@MIT with a streamlined new interface.

Removing a bottleneck in background intellectual property (IP): Until recently, RAS, TLO, and OSATT Core conducted an intensive, manual review of background IP (existing MIT inventions, software, or copyrights) as a matter of routine for

every proposal entered into Kuali Coeus, following legacy processes from the era of the old Office of Sponsored Programs. Going forward, the teams have developed a faster and more streamlined approach that especially leverages the role of OSATT Core in engaging with prospective industry sponsors: a review for back-

> *Having attended many group meetings, faculty meetings, and council meetings this year, I want you to know that the time you spend telling us about your challenges and priorities is time well spent. Together, we have made progress on several initiatives of note . . . .*

ground IP may now only be necessary in a limited set of circumstances, informed by discussions with the PI and sponsor at the earliest stages of project development.

Demystifying proposal-writing: The Research Development office in VPR, which seeks to increase MIT's competitiveness for research funding, has created reference guides in response to faculty requests. The first is a quick guide to finding funding, which may be of particular use to early-career faculty. The second is a guide to writing a PIER plan – an appendix newly required in most proposals to the Department of Energy, in which the PI describes the project's commitment to promoting inclusive and equitable research (PIER). The Research Development team is also heeding a request from faculty to provide more substantive feedback on proposals that are not selected to move forward in limited-submission competitions.

Supporting access to clinical data: Feedback from faculty is driving development of new resources to support the use of clinical data in research, such as a new guide to securing third-party protected health information when MIT is the recipient of such data for research purposes (Touchstone login required).

A Third Update on Research Administration
White, from preceding page

Empowering DLCIs to manage under-recovery: A longstanding challenge, the under-recovery of facilities and administrative (F&A) costs from some research sponsors has historically required PIs to seek additional funding from sources among the DLCI, School/College, and/or VPR to make ends meet. A new approach announced in October distributes up-front central funding to each DLCI so that department heads can make quicker, local decisions about most funding requests. In late 2023 and spring 2024, functionality within Research@MIT is being built to provide a dashboard and workflow to help PIs and DLCIs request, review, approve, and track under-recovery funding.

On the horizon: greater collaboration and communication
There is more work to do. As I wrote to DLCI leaders and administrators in August, it is clear that some common challenges persist – for example: uneven staffing across units to support research administration; a shortage of research-relevant financial planning tools; and gaps in informational resources, whether for employee onboarding or daily administrative tasks.

The nature of research administration is that it crosses numerous functional areas and depends on collaboration across many central administration and DLCI teams. Collaboration among VPR and the Provost's Office, the Office of Foundation Relations, the Office of the Vice President for Finance, Information Systems and Technology, the Office of the General Counsel, the Schools/College/DLCIs, and

> Faculty should also expect greater communication and guidance to help plan for and navigate the complexities of research administration, such as financial management, research compliance, and so on.

many others has been crucial to achieving progress on tough challenges, and that will continue to be the case. Led by the Executive Vice President and Treasurer (EVPT) organization, teams across MIT are already engaged in early planning for the next-generation enterprise resource planning (ERP) system, a multi-year project that aims to modernize our core applications, streamline operational processes, and improve the quality of our data for better informed business decisions. Similarly, it was a cross-functional working group that took on the challenge of under-recovery this year. By convening working groups in this manner, we can continue to tackle a range of difficult issues together.

Faculty should also expect greater communication and guidance to help plan for and navigate the complexities of research administration, such as financial management, research compliance, and so on. This includes ongoing efforts to streamline and modernize the RAS website (among others in the VPR umbrella) and to build out the new OSATT website for all three offices: OSATT Core, TLO, and Corporate Relations. It also includes, for example, the development of more robust onboarding and training resources for research administration staff in the DLCIs.

With your advice and close engagement, staff throughout the research administration will continue to prioritize coordination, collaboration, and communication – enhancing efficiency and freeing up more time for that most-valued pursuit, creativity. ■

Anne White is Vice Provost and Associate Vice President for Research Adminnistration *(whitea@mit.edu).*

prise 15%; that is, a current lot of ~164 students, many of whom are surely going to war with a water pistol.

On June 29, 2023, the US Supreme Court held that college admissions policies enhanced by affirmative action were unconstitutional, legally ending the practice. The High Court's affirmative action ruling was right-wing, and right-on: concluding that university affirmative action programs violate the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment of the US Constitution.

I support the Supreme Court's decision – at least, concerning MIT – because I have felt for decades that, by admitting more native-born black American undergraduates than MIT is willing to educate to an *academically elite level*, affirmative action admissions have undermined the psychological and intellectual growth of technologically capable black undergraduates and, by extension, have failed to develop some of the most gifted high-tech youth in all of American society.

A Request of MIT's Executive Administration

To MIT's new executive administration, in the midst of its first fall semester, I ask: Do you have plans to *educate* and *care* for this newly arrived group of black undergraduates? Have you examined the academic progress, graduation rates, subsequent admissions to outstanding graduate programs, and resultant careers of black undergraduates of recent decades to inform your current and forthcoming admissions decisions? If not, why not?

During the past several decades, by *recruiting* the arguably most technologically capable collection of black American college undergraduates, MIT has failed to live up to its commitment to them. MIT has devised virtually no successful plans to educate them to an *academically elite level*. If MIT had not recruited them, they could have attended the nominal "Big State University" or one of the historically black colleges or universities, become

highly successful and valued graduates of those programs, and gained admissions to the best graduate and professional degree programs in the US and beyond.

Hence, we might argue that for nothing more than its own egotistical ambitions, MIT has robbed black American society of the presumed leadership of some of its most gifted young people. Let's be clear. Greater fault lies in the recruiter than in the recruited; especially if the recruited ultimately obtains a marginally adequate bachelor's degree or no degree at all.

Concerning the quality of the academic success of black undergraduates at and after MIT, I have looked informally and I have been *immensely* concerned by what I've seen. However, my offhand investigations, though significant and revealing, cannot qualify as thorough examinations of the data, which are likely to be substantially available only to the executive administration of MIT.

Thus, the dillydallying by the MIT administrative leadership on this important academic task of evaluation should cease: Damage to the dozens is rapidly becoming damage to the hundreds. If you are able to show (or know) that our students graduate at a level that is equal to a comparable academic level (or higher) at which they entered, that would be terrific. If that is not so, you should know that, too.

Out of respect for the Institute I cherish, I shall not offer here many of the questions I have compiled and the corresponding quantitative data I have consolidated. The data are personal and can be identifiably associated directly with individuals within our community. Nevertheless, the data supporting my position are compelling! And my primary question is: Why? Why has MIT dumped black students into *soil* in which so many of them cannot thrive or even grow?

Affirmative Action

The term "affirmative action" was first widely used in the United States in the early 1960s. President John F. Kennedy used affirmative action in an executive

order to promote non-discriminatory pay and employment, with deliberate neutrality regarding race, religion, or gender. Qualifications to perform were assumed to be met by all applicants. Thus, affirmative action was designed to ensure equal employment opportunity, not to create diversity in the workplace or universities.

With its overseeing Corporation of more than six dozen individuals, a daily functioning administration of hundreds, and its Office of General Counsel comprised of more than a dozen attorneys and staff, MIT – after adopting a policy toward social and political admissions – should have long since addressed the educational benefits of diversity without reference to affirmative action, and ultimately defining diversity in whatever heterogeneity goals it sought.

Thus, the likelihood of the Supreme Court affirmative action decision announced last June should have been foreseen and the potential legal consequences eliminated decades ago. Nonetheless, as observed in several post-decision analyses, the opinion of Chief Justice John Roberts in this case provides adequate leeway through appraisals of each applicant's life experiences for satisfying diversity goals of MIT.

Psychological Effects of Affirmative Action on Blacks

In several ways, black students at MIT are frequently told that affirmative action is partly, or even wholly, responsible for their presence here. Through Institute media, a major offender in this practice at MIT is the central administration. I believe untold damage has been done to MIT black undergraduates for decades by telling them from the outset that they are intellectually inferior, thus in need of affirmative action after they arrive on campus. What could be more telling than an Office of Minority Education along MIT's Infinite Corridor?

I have been told by MIT black undergraduates that they have been assailed by the jealous chatter of high school mates, hometown neighbors, and the public at-

large who cite affirmative action as a substantial basis for their admissions into MIT.

Affirmative action has benefitted several groups, especially women, though black students have carried a disproportionate share of the political and psychological load.

Additionally, I presently sense greater emotional distance between black undergraduates and black faculty than I can ever recall. Where is the joy we used to feel when black undergraduates were far fewer and more cohesive, when we collaborated academically and celebrated socially? There was a time when black student and black faculty interactions seemed less corporate and more personal than they do today. I believe black undergraduates need to feel in a visceral way that black faculty are an understanding resource who know and value them.

I cannot recall the number of times – even when I was the only native-born black American professor in the combined School of Engineering and School of Science at MIT – that I have been called an "affirmative action case." Clearly there have been and may continue to exist significant numbers of whites who believe that no black person should be a faculty member at MIT. In this matter, as related to me by my decades-long mentors, instead of considering my engineering accomplishments, individuals on award committees found interests in that part of my personal life that sold popular magazines and especially my unwillingness to be one of their Uncle Toms.

My MIT Student Years
As 1 of ~ 4 black American freshmen, I entered MIT in 1963, a few days after Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. I was in the midst of my apprenticeship as a machinist and mechanical designer at the Newport News Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Company in my hometown in Virginia. Both Shipyard

and local news print media would continue to cite my apprenticeship performance for decades, into the 21st century.

Notwithstanding my endeavors to the contrary, I had no MIT friendships, and when multi-person partnerships were required in my lab subjects, other students had to be coaxed by the professor to include me. Within my first semester, I became aware that many students had the benefit of *MIT Bibles*: compiled files of subject homework problems and solutions, copies of former course quizzes and their solutions, and recycled manuscripts of humanities papers. I had no access to those resources, notably for graded homework assignments, or the study groups that used them for a range of assignments and exam preparations. The North was as racially isolating as the South – and more isolating professionally.

For recreation and relaxation, I drove my Corvette into Boston, notably to the Rainbow Lounge and Big Jim's for camaraderie, jazz, and occasionally sitting in; and to several other businesses for soul food, a haircut, a manicure, or whatever else I needed. Typically, once or twice per semester, following a late lunch at the F&T Restaurant, I would drive overnight to Newport News to enjoy my mother's crab cakes and, if the trip included a weekday at home, consult at the Shipyard where my desk was maintained for my use – a unique degree of professional respect for me that was preserved throughout my academic leave. During the spring term, on the last weekend of April, I would cut Friday classes and stop over in Philadelphia for an afternoon with local buddies at the Penn Relays, moist eyes and all. On those occasions, my mother would have our two-story house fully lit both inside and outside, with warm edibles in the oven, in anticipation of her son's arrival around midnight.

The quality of the MIT classroom instruction, especially in the Institute Requirements, was regularly poor-to-mixed, not always comprehensible, and often incompatible with subsequent quizzes and examinations. When performing homework, I would discover

intrinsic analytical steps that had been omitted during the lecturer's notes-to-chalkboard presentations, thus denying each student the potential insight of the generalization of solution structures. During such subjects, if I sought after-lecture clarifications, I was typically blown-off sufficiently rudely by the lecturer – both faculty and non-faculty teachers – that I stopped asking questions. Interestingly, I detested but sloughed off such crudeness without hurt feelings: I was at MIT to learn, not to feel; and certainly not to create trouble.

Within the first few lectures of each subject, I decided the grade I would earn, which I generally achieved. Based on (a) my interests in the syllabus, (b) the quality of the instruction, (c) the homework demands on my time, (d) whether there was assigned correlated reading, and (e) the anticipated burden of competing against inaccessible bibles and closed student study groups, I chose to carefully manage my time. Besides, no one – friends, family, sponsors – ever asked me about the grades I earned.

In my sophomore year, within the Department of Mechanical Engineering (MechE), I encountered a faculty of pioneering academics, consulting engineers, and personally generous professors whose legacies continue to be reflected in many aspects of the Department, including the current faculty. More than any other mechanical engineering faculty on the planet, they were the men who defined the fundamentals and the formulations of the modern mechanical engineering curriculum, now being contemporized through computation, artificial and biomechanical intelligence, and innovative scientific collaborations.

As I began to take engineering subjects in my primary interests of theoretical and applied mechanics, following lectures I would pursue clarifications and amplifications with professors for depth and extension. I sensed at the time and learned for sure in later years that those professors, several of whom became my professorial mentors, had respected the expanse

**Sending MIT Students to War
with Water Pistols**
Williams, Jr., from preceding page

and quality of my interests, questions, and knowledge beyond the curriculum. As an undergraduate, I was encouraged to take the graduate elasticity subject offered by the Mathematics Department. To the exclusion of my undergraduate subjects, each week I spent hours in the Barker Engineering Library reading, but not fully comprehending, graduate-level textbooks and contemporary technical journals in applied mechanics. And later as a graduate student, in the MechE graduate subject of applied elasticity, I earned the top grade on every quiz and the final exam; facts which I was surprised to learn in later years had been known and repeated among the mechanics faculty, and which they thoughtfully communicated to my oncoming Cambridge University research professor.

During the week preceding the 1967 MIT Commencement, one of my MechE professors discovered that I was about to leave MIT, headed west to graduate school. Through a series of impromptu meetings initiated and organized by several MechE professors over a couple of days, and without my submitting a graduate school application or a funding request, I was fully financially supported and began my Master's degree program in Mechanical Engineering on the Monday following Commencement.

Having satisfied all the academic requirements for my SM degree by late 1967, in March 1968 at the *personal appeal* of the executive management of the Shipyard, I moved to Newport News to conduct the design stress and dynamical analyses of the power and propulsion shafting and several other major structural systems on the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier USS Nimitz – to become the lead ship of America's new class of super-carriers – whose keel I would witness being laid down in June.

In September 1968, I was off for my doctorate at Cambridge University, where I would arrive with the gift of a reputation communicated by my former MIT MechE

professors and where I would become the beneficiary of an additional set of extraordinarily affable professional relationships with several renowned faculty.

**Affirmative Action Admissions:
MIT 1970-Style**
In the late 1960s, MIT's executive administration chose to join the collegiate affirmative action admissions fraternity. (I cannot discuss the "whys" because I do not know them as I was a graduate student in England at the time, but I can discuss the "whats" because I would soon become involved.)

In an MIT freshman class of about 1100 students, MIT decided to increase the number of black students from ~ 4 per year to ~ 40 per year. Where would these students with MIT admissions credentials be found? Then, in a moment of *arrogance* followed by years of delusion, the MIT administration decided to create these students during the summer between high school and MIT.

The pre-freshman Interphase Program – variously described by MIT administrative literature as "a rigorous seven-week pre-freshman summer program to instill subject mastery of calculus, physics, and chemistry" – was created to perform the proposed transformation.

In 1970, my reception as an assistant professor onto the MIT Mechanical Engineering faculty was immensely cordial, both personally and professionally, just as it had been during my undergraduate and graduate years. The willingness of my senior colleagues to *intensely* debate me privately while simultaneously supporting me publicly established lifelong intimate friendships. The racism toward me that they repeatedly encountered, fought, and *revealed* to me in their efforts to honor me beyond the confines of MIT seemed to hurt them – occasionally divulged with moisture in their eyes, which deeply touched me – but led to more intense intimacy and trust between us, as they reassured me that I was seeing only the tip of the racism they were observing. I have honored their trust by never revealing names they cited.

During my first year on the faculty, I was asked by the MIT administration to lead Interphase. Despite the advice of my senior faculty mentors and the MechE Department Head to the contrary, for several years I taught or variously advised Interphase beginning in the summer of 1971, unwisely risking my own career by delaying the writing of several of my publications and funding proposals. (Fortunately for me, my mentors never learned that during that period I was simultaneously involved in a middle-school math tutoring program conducted in the basement of a Roxbury church.)

I immediately sensed that many of those Interphase students possessed neither an inquisitive mindset and goals nor the academic preparation to thrive in the intense culture of MIT's world-class academics. Interphase was simply not enough to ensure the students' successful transition into MIT. I was astonished to learn that a few of them had barely heard of MIT. In response, I devoted a portion of my introductory calculus and physics lectures to the culture, intensity, and history of MIT. Directly following Interphase, without advising words of wisdom or a system of solacing support, those students were released into the MIT undergraduate culture which I had recently experienced.

By late September in the freshman years of the students whom I had taught each previous summer, I made concerted efforts to interact with them. (Confronting the environment that I had faced – no access to bibles, sometimes no lab partners, and no invitations to join student study groups – those students were in for rough, humiliating rides.) When I sensed academic difficulties, I suggested Saturday morning chats in my office. Those chats quickly became free-flowing elementary calculus and physics tutorials, often occupying available classrooms when my tiny office became overcrowded. My unconfirmed hope was that those Saturday morning tutorials would make, at least, a little difference. However, the personal acts of my caring likely made a greater impact than my math and science tutorials.

**Sending MIT Students to War
with Water Pistols**
Williams, Jr., from preceding page

I felt annoyed, frustrated, and saddened by my unvoiced prognosis that many of those former Interphase students would not succeed at MIT. And, indeed, many of them left MIT, ashamed, bewildered, and without a degree. This was an annual heartbreaking humiliation for black undergraduates at MIT, and it went on year after year.

Task Force on Minority Student Achievement
Toward the end of last century, notwithstanding a measure of beneficial academic support for MIT black undergraduates that had emerged over the years, my concerns for the *academic, cultural,* and *psychological* health of a meaningful number of black students were aggravating me. I concluded that the academic performance of black undergraduates deserved administrative evaluation, which might suggest an initial line of action for an improved MIT environment for black undergraduates.

In winter 2000, during one of my private crab fests with MIT President Charles M. Vest, in addition to guiding him through the distinguishing textures and tastes of Dungeness, Blue, and Rock Crab, I shared my concerns for the academic underperformance of black undergraduates. In June 2000, President Vest devised the *Task Force on Minority Student Achievement,* which was charged with "assessing and reviewing whether gaps exist between predicted and actual academic performance of MIT minority students and, if so, to identifying the reasons for the gaps and recommending strategies to address the issue(s)." I was one of about a dozen members of the faculty and administrative staff publicly appointed to the Task Force in September 2000.

In spring 2001, during a meeting of the Task Force, attended by President Vest and his administrative assistant as invited guests, I took the unrequested initiative to make a two-point presentation.

I endorse the US Supreme Court's June 29, 2023 ruling to disallow the use of affirmative action in the undergraduate admissions of MIT. My endorsement is based on my belief that MIT affirmative action policies during the past half-century have been academically, psychologically, and economically damaging to native-born black American undergraduates and by extension to black American society.

1. I presented two graphs of black undergraduate academic performance that I had produced – constructed from data files available to all members of the Task Force – that revealed the validity of my concerns regarding the academic underperformance of black undergraduates.

2. I argued that although we – faculty and staff – should invariably devote our best efforts to support every resident student, we often spend time and resources sustaining students whom we should never have admitted. We should admit fewer, the most talented, students and develop them to a superb level at which they will be genuinely welcomed into the best graduate programs and, later, competed for as faculty at elite universities and as leaders at corporations as well as other prestigious institutions.

The resulting intense and garishly boisterous reactions from one or two Task Force members were jolting and no doubt shocking to most of the individuals in attendance. Moreover and subsequently, no one had the decency or the guts to inform me that I had been ejected from the Task Force; I simply stopped receiving announcements of ensuing meetings.

Report of the Task Force on Minority Student Achievement
The Task Force on Minority Student Achievement wrote a report during the winter of 2002. In March 2002, I wrote a five-page commentary entitled "It's Official! MIT Minority Students Are Inferior," in which I characterized a number of the points in the Task Force Report, as well as offered my own Task Force conclusions. I have chosen not to publish my commentary; however, I gave a copy to President Vest, including the two graphs of black undergraduate academic performance that I presented during his spring 2001 Task Force visit, all with no restrictions by me on his use of them. I shall hereby summarize the most disquieting recommendations in the Task Force Report that I read.

The Task Force Report advocated that black undergraduates who had been admitted to MIT – arguably one of the most intellectually endowed black undergraduate populations in the United States – were so unprepared that they should be brought to MIT for *remediation* (their word, my emphasis) and racially-based academic support, perhaps throughout their entire undergraduate years at MIT. Moreover, the recommended racially-based academic support would be supervised by the *MIT administration, not the faculty* (their words, my emphasis). Depending on the substance and implementation of the proposed programs of remediation and racially-based academic support, I found the Task Force's meetings and recommendations to be chained to an insulting and sickening mindset which regards blacks not only as inferior, but as permanently so.

**Sending MIT Students to War
with Water Pistols**
Williams, Jr., from preceding page

Summarizing My Primary Goals

I endorse the US Supreme Court's June 29, 2023 ruling to disallow the use of affirmative action in the undergraduate admissions of MIT. My endorsement is based on my belief that MIT affirmative action policies during the past half-century have been academically, psychologically, and economically damaging to native-born black American undergraduates and by extension to black American society. Much of the data to challenge the bases of my endorsement and to assess my hypothesis are available to the central administration of MIT and should be compared with models of equivalent pre-college student(s).

During my time as a faculty member and housemaster at MIT, I have taken several hundred undergraduates of numerous ethnicities, ideologies, and persuasions to lunch. In addition to my academic advisees and students in my classes, numerous other undergraduates and postgraduates would stop by my office, tell me that they had heard of me, and then ask me to take them, and perhaps a friend or two, to lunch.

MIT undergraduates are intellectually sharp. Many of them are aware of the drift within the freshman Institute Requirements although they have personally witnessed only a small portion of that drift. They convinced me that the poor quality of the Institute Requirements was the primary reason for several changes in the first-year undergraduate experience, including the Pass/No Record grading system and a loss of class unification. They enjoy academic topics that are challenging, but they despise being confused by sloppy instruction.

An outstanding, important, and continuing example of the Institute's ability to respond over a long-term and in a major manner is the improvement of the universal discipline of teaching. Obvious examples abound in classroom teaching, but undergraduate teaching in all its facets has greatly improved since my undergraduate years. These improvements have been diligently sought, notably cited, and encouraged by the substantial number of Institute accolades, distinctions, medals, plaques, prizes, and trophies: all distinctively residing alongside the incomparable student-controlled *Everett Moore Baker Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching* and the central administration's most-prized *Margaret MacVicar Faculty Fellowships*.

Nevertheless, there are specific *means and modes* – which I shall not explore here – whereby these teaching and learning improvements have not penetrated and thus have not benefitted all student communities at MIT.

Early in my faculty career, student praise of my teaching was the only benefit I could see from my numerous curricula *uphill battles*, during which I combated the remarks of resentful engineering and non-engineering colleagues who mocked my style and challenged each innovation in my presentations. Every lecture I gave throughout my MIT career was delivered in suit or sport coat and tie. I used no hand-held lecture notes, which reassured students but was portrayed as "theatric" by some colleagues. When my annually published teaching rankings for undergraduate and graduate subjects were consistently among the top few of all MIT professors, I was accused by my contemporaneous junior faculty of "spoon feeding." Then, when a common final exam was adopted to cover multiple undergraduate recitation sections, and my students repeatedly earned a disproportionately high fraction of the A-grades, those same teaching colleagues began to characterize my teaching as "showing off." And, when I integrated corresponding historical developments into my mathematical presentations, my teaching was declared to be "diversionary." I could not discern which part of my colleagues' foolishness was jealousy and which part of their foolishness was racism, so I left it all on the scrap heap where it belonged.

My self-confidence and intellectual autonomy – born in my intensely loving and supportive family, please and thank you, use of the proper fork, and no deferential bowing to *anyone;* conformed in my racially segregated youth; and hardened in my laidback independence of early adulthood – led me to choose my path as I designed and pursued it. My primary commitment to myself was to engage the world with elegance, excellence, and unequivocal verve. Whatever strengths my words and style contained were more powerful because students knew that my message was meant for them, all of them; and that I lived by that philosophy, without fear of failure or repercussions. Students saw and embraced this; and I was amused that insecure adults and social climbers showed themselves as baffled and begrudging of my taste, lifestyle, and frequent appearances in popular media!

Almost daily, I gratefully reflect on the emotional and intellectual care my senior colleagues and mentors at MIT showered upon me as a student and junior colleague. Moreover, throughout my career I have asked staff of arbitrary race and ethnicity, in every imaginable service and support activity, their names because I wanted to hear their names, to hear them speak. And though we rarely engaged in extended conversation, we respected our different journeys and recognized the intercultural and interracial engagements we seemed to enjoy at the intersections of our daily crossroads involving servicing, working, and living at MIT.

All the same, in many corners the racism at MIT today is as deep as the outright bigotry I encountered here during the 1960s, except that the current racism is concealed in counterfeit social and professional demeanor. I call this "whispering racism." I continue to applaud former MIT President L. Rafael Reif for his bold statement: "Addressing Systemic Racism at MIT," email, July 1, 2020. Unfortunately, to avoid counter claims of oversensitivity, the best that one can do in response to the whispers is to disregard the chatter until one moves on, the gossip-mongers move on, or the situation quietly explodes.

**Sending MIT Students to War
with Water Pistols**
Williams, Jr., from preceding page

More recently, the August 4, 2023 MIT search announcement for a vice president for equity and inclusion is a *potentially* important undertaking of unification. But, unification of what? (By "what," I am asking whether there is an unarticulated vision of opportunity or prospective achievement in this and many of these other passive hirings.) And whom will this new vice president for equity and inclusion represent?

Whereas the Institute Community and Equity Office has been fortunate in recent years to have had a superb *Special Advisor,* a duplication of other recently departed Institute Community and Equity personnel would be a shameful disaster, ripping constantly at the weak and disgracefully timid fabric of MIT's minority community. I have reasons, unstated here, to fear and strongly detest duplication by some potential candidates and administrative wannabes. There is a widespread perception that many minority hires at MIT have been more concerned with currying favor with their administrative superiors than with offering the blunt advice and discordant assessments that are, at times, sorely needed. MIT leadership must not hire a replacement without consulting *all* MIT black faculty, without thereby seeking out and promoting new and challenging voices.

Even so, my primary concern here is the ~164 black MIT freshmen and their so-called "remediation," perhaps conducted through the "MIT administration, not the faculty," as prescribed by the 2001 MIT Task Force on Minority Achievement.

Considering the demanding academics through which MIT puts many of its undergraduates, some MIT faculty and administrators are surprisingly dismissive of our baccalaureate students and degrees. I considered citing the low percentages – sometimes zero – of MIT senior leadership, academic council, academic deans, department heads, faculty, and supervisory administrators who hold an MIT SB

degree. Thus, one may argue that many MIT faculty and administrators in some significant respects do not have a broad sense of, or respect for, the MIT undergraduate experience.

These are a few of the worthwhile educational issues challenging the vision, philosophy, and competence of President Sally A. Kornbluth. I am delighted to see that, for someone with little or no formal MIT experience of her own, she has recently appeared to expand her very tight circle of advisement. Even if she appoints 10 vice presidents for equity and inclusion, however, she cannot achieve a successful MIT presidency if she does not address the issues of the admissions and education of black undergraduates, which have been the focus of this article.

Hopefully, the court that has coalesced itself around her will help her to understand and to grapple with the courageous and fundamental educational tasks I have articulated. If her current advisers are unable to define these issues in explicit terms, she should find others who can. The challenges are great and the rewards are monumental, though a clear vision of the issues, the desires to understand them, and the pathways to address them do not appear to have pierced the current bubble around her.

I encourage President Kornbluth to better understand and substantively evaluate the consequences of MIT's admissions and education of black undergraduates during the past half century. Is it logical or even honest to advertise the number of diversity-driven incoming black undergraduates, while virtually never offering information about their graduation rates, subsequent educational progress, and resultant careers, including nominal bases of comparisons? These shortcomings, having been exposed, can no longer be ignored by pretending that they do not exist. Regarding *diversity,* I believe President Kornbluth owes the MIT diaspora a statement of philosophy, goals, programs, and results – including periodic updates – buttressed by quantitative data.
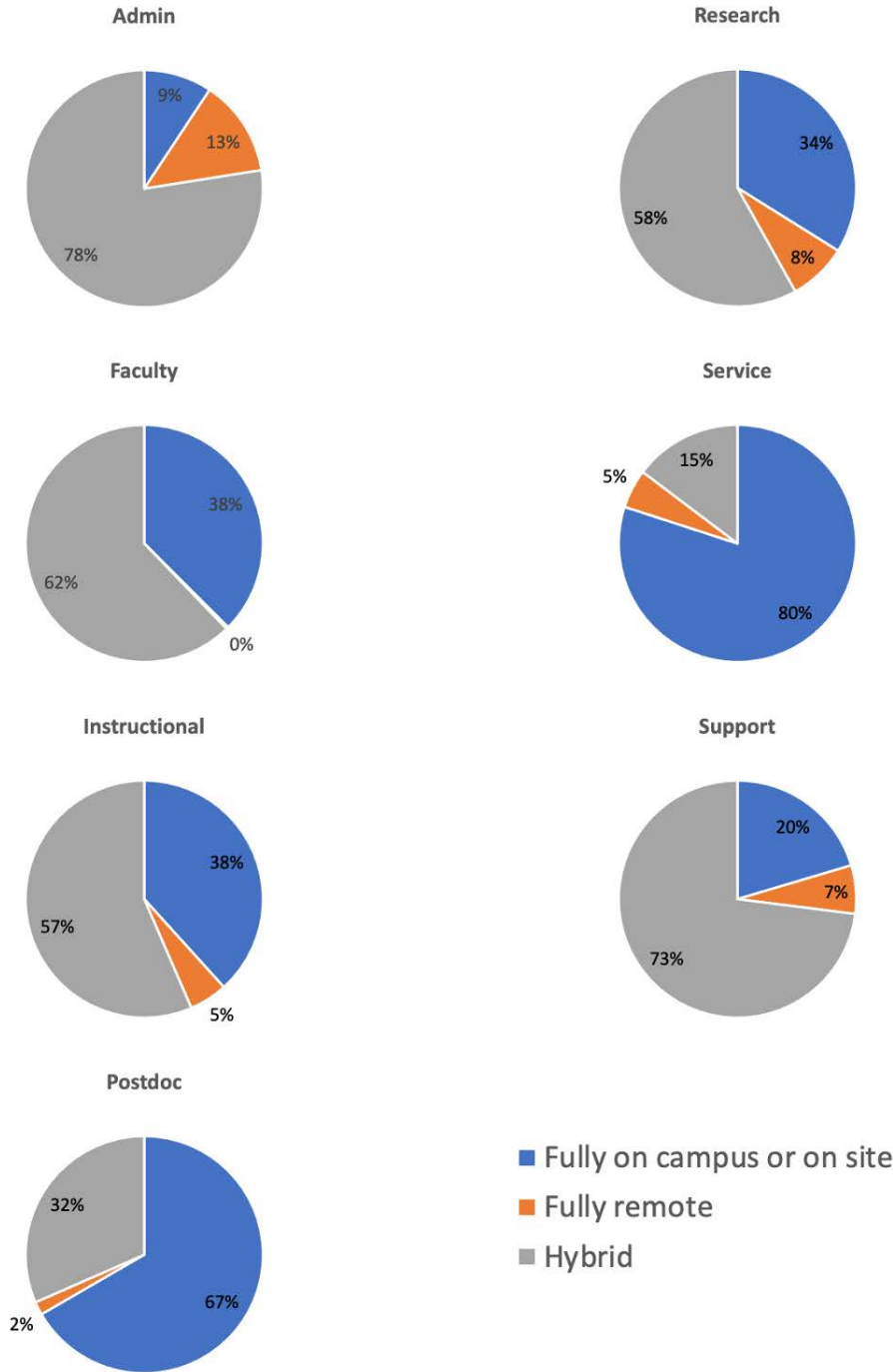
In summary, I am disgusted by the expansion of this demeaning trend involving black undergraduates at MIT. By recruiting an annually increasing number of black students who will fail or limp toward graduation as future scientists and engineers with meager competence (likely risking physical harm to others) and low self-esteem (likely risking their own self-respect), MIT will destroy or immensely weaken their prospects for future leadership. We, the faculty and administration, can no longer embrace the luxury of ignorance regarding the future prospects and responsibilities of our students. When I allow myself to reflect deeply on what MIT is doing to a significant fraction of the black undergraduates – academically, culturally, and psychologically – I become physically nauseated.

Hence, my primary goals in writing this article are (1) to recommend a thorough study and analysis of MIT's historical use of affirmative action and diversity policies in black undergraduate admissions; and (2) to argue that if the Institute chooses to continue to enlist black undergraduates in pursuit of its future diversity goals, MIT should establish a gigantic commitment to ensure a massively improved scholarly and empathetic environment that achieves the development of an *academically elite* and a *psychologically healthy* black undergraduate community. ◼

James H. Williams, Jr. is a Professor in the Department of Mechanical Engineering *(jhwill@mit.edu).*

MIT Numbers
from the 2023 MIT "How's It Working?" Survey

Generally, how would you characterize your work location?

Admin

9%
13%
78%

Research

34%
8%
58%

Faculty

38%
0%
62%

Service

15%
5%
80%

Instructional

38%
5%
57%

Support

20%
7%
73%

Postdoc

67%
2%
32%

■ Fully on campus or on site
■ Fully remote
■ Hybrid

Source: Office of the Provost/Institutional Research