

# MIT Faculty Newsletter

<https://fnl.mit.edu>

**in this issue** we offer Chair of the Faculty Mary Fuller’s “Our Public Sphere, or, How to Meet as a Faculty” ([page 4](#)); “Mea Culpa” by Associate Chair of the Faculty Peko Hosoi ([page 7](#)); “Supporting Student Learning” ([page 9](#)); “Timeline that Led to the Suspension of the Coalition Against Apartheid (CAA)” ([page 11](#)); and a student letter relating “Why I Participated in the CAA Rally” ([page 14](#)).



The MIT Dome

## Domicide: The Mass Destruction of Homes Should Be a Crime Against Humanity

Balakrishnan Rajagopal

**THE WIDESPREAD OR SYSTEMATIC** destruction of homes has long been a feature of modern warfare. But what is often lost in the images of rubble and statistics of destroyed buildings is the profound effect of this loss at a human level. For a home is so much more than a structure: It is a repository of past experience and future dreams, of memories of births, deaths, marriages and intimate moments with our loved ones, amid neighbors and a familiar landscape. The idea of home brings comfort and gives meaning to our lives. Its destruction is the denial of a person’s dignity and humanity.

It is for this reason that the systematic and indiscriminate leveling of entire neighborhoods through explosive weapons – as happened in Aleppo, and Mariupol, and Grozny, and towns in Myanmar, or most acutely these days, in

[continued on page 10](#)

## Editorial The Student Protesters and MIT

**THE MASSACRE AND KIDNAPPINGS** in Israel and the ongoing war against Palestinians living in Gaza have revealed deep fault lines within the MIT community. We use the term fault lines because the tensions on the campus have resulted in administrative actions that have cast one segment of our community as people from which the broader community needs to be protected. For those who study Critical Race Theory and Critical Feminist Theory, we are not surprised that the students we are being “protected” from are all students of color and predominantly female. We are, however, dismayed.

On December 1, 2015, the Black Graduate Student Association (BGSA) and the Black Student Union (BSU) [presented a series of recommendations](#) to MIT’s President and Academic Council “. . . advocating for greater transparency

[continued on page 3](#)

## Editorial In Defense of Learning, Research, and Free Inquiry

**SINCE THEIR EMERGENCE IN** medieval times, universities have served as outposts of independent thought, resisting pressures from the Church and State. Following the industrial revolution, universities in France, Great Britain, Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and the United States emerged as leading centers of learning, innovation, and research in the modern world.

The transformative period for American higher education came with significant public investment after World War II, establishing the United States’ dominance in scholarship, science, and technology. This era of free inquiry, a core element of academic freedom, greatly benefited students, postdoctoral fellows, research staff, and faculty, enabling a focus on human, social, economic, and technological challenges,

[continued on page 3](#)

# contents

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	<b>01</b>	<a href="#">Domicide: The Mass Destruction of Homes Should Be a Crime Against Humanity</a>	Balakrishnan Rajagopal
Editorial	<b>01</b>	<a href="#">The Student Protesters and MIT</a>	
Editorial	<b>01</b>	<a href="#">In Defense of Learning, Research, and Free Inquiry</a>	
From The Faculty Chair	<b>04</b>	<a href="#">Our Public Sphere, or, How to Meet as a Faculty</a>	Mary C. Fuller
	<b>07</b>	<a href="#">Mea Culpa</a>	Peko Hosoi
	<b>09</b>	<a href="#">Supporting Student Learning</a>	Raechel N. Soicher
	<b>11</b>	<a href="#">Timeline that Led to the Suspension of the Coalition Against Apartheid (CAA)</a>	Franz-Josef Ulm
	<b>14</b>	<a href="#">Why I Participated in the CAA Rally</a>	Fedaa Alsoufi
MIT Numbers	<b>16</b>	<a href="#">Faculty, Students, and Postdoctoral Scholars</a>	

---

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## In Defense of Learning, Research, and Free Inquiry

continued from page 1

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thereby contributing to improving global living standards.

The prioritization of societal needs within these academic environments fostered an atmosphere where diverse fields of learning and inquiry could thrive. Breakthroughs in molecular biology at UC Berkeley, for instance, occurred alongside and were interconnected with movements such as the Free Speech Movement, the opposition to the Vietnam War, and the Civil Rights Movement.

At MIT, physicists like Vicki Weisskopf, Philip Morrison, Herman Feshbach, and Aaron Bernstein, who became faculty members after the devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, maintained a strong stance against nuclear weapons throughout the Cold War. This intellectual climate also supported advancements in genetic engineering, computer technology, and telecommunications, as well as student activism against the Vietnam War and apartheid in South Africa. Leading figures in the 1969 [Scientists Strike for Peace](#),

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## The Student Protesters and MIT

continued from page 1

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and accountability in the Institute's handling of race-related issues." Five years later, acknowledging the progress that has been made, the BSU and BGSA were [compelled once again to write a letter](#) "... calling on MIT leadership to be proactive in making MIT a place where Black people and POC can exist safely and thrive." After these and other efforts by students of color, it is reasonable to expect that before relying on existing policy and regulation (or making up policies in haste, as things are unfolding), there would be a pause for reflection, an inquiry to understand: Why are these protests happening? Why are the people who are being disciplined all people of color? Amid such ongoing trauma, do we have the appropriate resources and capability to support the students? How do we engage with the fundamental question the students are asking: What does complicity look like in a time of genocide?

Instead of responding to the needs of all students, a different approach was taken. As

Ethan Signer and David Baltimore, were major figures in the development of molecular genetics and cell biology. If this history is any evidence, we should be hesitant to see protest, even direct confrontation, as a barrier to research and learning.

However, the path of progress faced significant obstacles. Industries such as tobacco aggressively sought to undermine research linking carcinogens in cigarette smoke to lung cancer; the lead industry worked hard to suppress the relationship between lead intake and retarded intellectual development. (This included attacks on academic scientists, such as Dr. Herbert Needleman at the University of Pittsburgh.) The Koch brothers financed efforts to suppress teaching about Evolution and Climate Change. Furthermore, the fight against systemic sexism and racism within academia underscored the enduring presence of backward views and entrenched interests among some faculty and administrators, stressing the need for continuous vigilance and action.

We recognize the many valuable contributions, including philanthropic, to scientific and academic advancement made by leaders of commerce and industry. However, recent

illustrated by three articles submitted to the FNL, the impact on the students marked for disciplinary action is profound. Each article offers insight into what is happening to the students who are protesting MIT's unwillingness to address the question of complicity in the face of Palestinian genocide.

- The first article addresses the vote at the last Institute faculty meeting to move to an executive session for the conversation on Free Speech ([page 7](#)). The reason? A faculty member felt unsafe with the students – namely representatives of CAA – present. This, of course, presupposes that CAA students and others were there to cause problems. This is a common tactic to silence black and brown voices.
- The next article ([page 11](#)) covers a sequence of events that calls into question the notion that CAA flagrantly defied Institute rules when it held an emergency protest on February 12th. The facts presented in the story are up for interpretation. For some, the facts will validate the administration's decisions. For others, the facts indicate

efforts by individuals like [Bill Ackman](#) to intimidate and corral the intellectual and operational dynamics of campuses, notably MIT, pose a major threat to freedom of inquiry, the integrity of research, teaching, and the institution's capacity to solve pressing societal issues. Though Ackman was quoted as initially concerned with alleged plagiarism among the faculty, [his own writings](#) clarify that his real concerns are with any advocacy of Palestinian rights as well as his opposition to diversity, equity, and inclusion goals and programs.

Past experiences with figures such as Mohammed bin Salman and Jeffrey Epstein have shown the importance of resistance to such efforts, in order to clarify the values at stake and protect academic freedom. It is crucial for the academic community at MIT and beyond to draw inspiration from such efforts and remain vocal, courageous, and persistent in defending intellectual and academic life against such destructive influences, especially by ensuring that efforts to undermine teaching, research, and academic freedom are identified early, challenged and rejected. ■

**Editorial Subcommittee**

unfair treatment of CAA. These two interpretations suggest the decision to suspend CAA was based on more than just the facts of the case.

- Finally, personal testimony from a student whose family was caught in Rafah during the bombing provides a broader construct for understanding the need for protest ([page 14](#)). As mentioned in a previous editorial, "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." Why can't we see protest as a reasonable response in the face of such shock and grief?

These extraordinary times call for MIT to embrace the challenge of supporting these students of color through this defining moment in their lives. It is a pivotal moment for testing our commitment to the Institute values. It is a moment for testing our moral courage. ■

**Editorial Subcommittee**

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## From The Faculty Chair Our Public Sphere, or, How to Meet as a Faculty

Mary C. Fuller

**A COLLEAGUE WROTE TO US** early last semester to complain that Institute faculty meetings are boring. Since then, it's probably fair to say that meetings have experienced one of their periodic oscillations back into being energized by controversy and serving as a forum for contestation. I'd like to talk about both those poles of our communal life.

Let's start with boredom. Not just once, but repeatedly over more than half a century, complaints like that one show up in the faculty records.<sup>1</sup> To have "boring Institute faculty meetings with near-unanimous votes" has sometimes been understood as a sign of successful work in

committees, and there's surely some truth to that. Typically, though, complaints that meetings are "perfunctory" (1949), "boring" (1995), or mere "briefing sessions" (1961) come with the sense that things used to be different. Meetings *had been* more engaging, substantive, and vital, but had somehow tended or devolved towards a lower state. Yet if things had steadily gone downhill since the late 1940s there would not be much left to talk about. It seems more likely that the "problem" of the faculty meeting is a somewhat cyclical phenomenon.

One way of thinking about that process would indeed be that "boring" signifies something going right – the right decisions are being made in committee, so that the faculty can safely focus, for the most part, on getting on with our very demanding jobs. On that view, faculty meetings are reenergized only when there is some cause for concern. But as our colleague's email indicates, not everyone is content with that as a status quo. When we received this message we had already spent some months talking among ourselves and with senior leadership about how to make faculty meetings more engaged and a better use of time. Finding that this group shared a common aspiration made us think about the problem a little differently, and observing that it has been a *recurring* problem encouraged more of a systemic view. I'll get back to that, and to some of the interventions we have in mind or have already begun to implement.

Faculty meetings may be revitalized by modest, steady returns on attention and engagement – or they may become ener-

gized through an issue that commands our attention. Sometimes things are quiet on campus. Not much seems to be going on above the level of one's own work, or not in a way where we feel a need to engage. This is not one of those times.

At the November faculty meeting, after planning a full agenda we made a late decision to clear time for an open discussion of events on campus and faculty sentiment, chaired by President Kornbluth; the meeting lasted for two hours. At the February faculty meeting, we modified some technical elements of our hybrid format to ensure speakers on Zoom would not again be interrupted, but a new set of issues arose related to a motion to hold part of the meeting in executive session. (The novelty of this motion, combined with the challenges of managing a hybrid meeting, caught us somewhat unprepared; see Peko Hosoi's piece in this edition, [page 7](#).) Some community members later expressed concerns that they were not able to hear discussion of one agenda item that had already been presented or discussion of the following item. Even voting members may not all have been aware that in executive session, discussion cannot be minuted; we thus lose institutional memory of what was said, which diminishes its lasting impact. If votes or motions had occurred during this part of the meeting, they would also have been unrecorded; none did, as both agenda items were essentially introductory. (More on the agenda below.)

The motion to close the meeting responded to a report that video from the previous meeting had been circulated

[continued on next page](#)

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<sup>1</sup> The 1949 "Lewis Report" comments that "the faculty . . . is . . . a large, unwieldy body" whose "meetings have become perfunctory and ineffective." It reported "considerable comment about the importance of revitalizing the activities of the faculty as a deliberative body" (Warren Lewis et al., Report of the Committee on Educational Survey, 65; <https://facultygovernance.mit.edu/reports>.) Julius Stratton (President 1958-66) commented early in his presidency that he "regretted the rarity of discussion of significant education problems in Faculty Meetings" and that "the meetings of the Administrative, Academic, and Faculty Councils tended to become briefing sessions rather than group discussions" (Minutes of the Institute Faculty meeting, November 16, 1961, Institute Archives). Larry Bacow, during his term as Chair of the Faculty in the early 1990s, wrote (more optimistically) that spirited debate and successful consensus-building in faculty committees could mean that "most interesting questions are resolved . . . well before the issues reach the full faculty for consideration" and thus "presentations at monthly faculty meetings are frequently *pro forma*, and faculty attendance sparse" (Lawrence Bacow, "From the Faculty Chair" (*Faculty Newsletter* 8.1, October '95, 5).

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**Our Public Sphere, or,  
How to Meet as a Faculty**

Fuller, from preceding page

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online. Without going into particulars, a number of people in the MIT community have, in fact, experienced some kind of injury from having their images posted online this year, with posts leading to harassment and threats. Complaints about this practice and its effects have been widespread, and not restricted to any single viewpoint or element of the community. But I have not yet heard anyone volunteer either to stop or to ask for consent.

How do we proceed, then, in our traditionally open faculty meeting?<sup>2</sup> We might consider experimenting with other, voluntary measures that would keep the meeting open without, in effect, making selected parts of it open to an external audience that is unseen and not answerable for its responses.<sup>3</sup> (This too should be a topic of informal discussion as we prepare for the March meeting.) For instance, a once customary request not to record in the meeting might be reinstated. But it may be more appropriate here to articulate some usually unspoken ideas about what we are actually doing when we meet as a faculty.

Faculty meetings are a place where we do regular business and, from time to time, make consequential decisions. They are also a space of actual and symbolic community. Even more than Commencement, where we wear ceremonial robes and engage in formal, mostly gestural actions, faculty meetings are a moment when we act out who we are as a faculty.

That “who we are,” as we act it out in real-time, can’t be very polished. Few of us are experts on the rules. Some of us never feel at ease going up to the microphone to

speak. We disagree, we change our minds, we behave badly, we are eloquent, we tell wonderful stories and propose great ideas. We should be in the process of making up our minds, and in the process of sharpening or revising our ideas and our language. We should be willing to afford each other the latitude we’d give any rough draft. And we are also performing our roles as members of the faculty (with speaking and voting privileges) in front of an audience of students and staff colleagues. Maybe I can remind that audience that the meeting is inherently a work

Faculty meetings are a place where we do regular business and, from time to time, make consequential decisions. They are also a space of actual and symbolic community.

in progress. A meeting made up of perfectly rehearsed presentations is predictable, but doesn’t call on our energies. In a good meeting, we engage without perfect knowledge of what others will say or do, much less perfect control. Over time, a series of perturbations and adjustments translate into a sense of where we are moving.

To me, one baseline is the background deference that we all owe to each other as members of the MIT community. Whoever we are as individuals, we show up in 10-250 or on Zoom as members of the faculty, as students, as staff – that is, in roles that identify us in relation to a common whole. Those roles merit a kind of regard whatever we think of the individual person or people occupying them at a given moment. When I respond or react to X, wrapped around the details of X’s discourse or behavior are “X is a faculty or staff *colleague*” or “X is a *student*” at MIT. (Needless to say, this applies for students in attendance as well, both those with and without speaking privileges.) My disagreement or displeasure, when they occur, have to be filtered through acknowledgement of those roles (and my own), and of our common membership in the very institution that

allows us to occupy these roles and act in this forum. (This year, there should be additional tenderness in the knowledge that some members of our community have suffered terrible loss.) While we go to meetings to work through an agenda, in doing so we are continually recreating and defining the community to which we belong, as the kind of community to which we want to belong.

MIT confers on us an important part of our identity and, reciprocally, we are an important part of what makes MIT, MIT. Much of that making goes on in labs,

offices, and classrooms, but it goes on visibly, publicly and officially in the faculty meeting. That is where we model decision-making and debate as well as formal and informal norms around the kinds of discourse or action we accept as reasonable or tolerable. Sometimes the sense of the group becomes visible in speech or conduct that we all admire and appreciate, and sometimes the limits become visible when we push against or cross them. There are things we can do: we can recur to articulating some expectations and to having a parliamentarian on call, and we can continue refining the ways we use and manage Zoom – or consider abandoning it. But Robert’s Rules and the affordances of technical tools can only do so much in creating conditions that “encourage inclusive and open dialogue.”<sup>4</sup> Procedure is important for a sense of trust and order, but the rest of this community-making (and certainly the dialogue) has to come from our voluntary effort. Let us be vocal, respectful and flexible in considering the kind of meeting we want to make.

[continued on next page](#)

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<sup>2</sup> Faculty meetings were closed prior to April 1969, when the faculty approved a pilot of open meetings; open meetings were approved annually until 1983, when the faculty voted to revise *Rules and Regulations* 1.32 to make this a standard practice and no longer require an annual vote.

<sup>3</sup> Such as, for instance, adopting the [Chatham House Rule](#).

<sup>4</sup> Cited from <https://www.chathamhouse.org/about-us/chatham-house-rule>.

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**Our Public Sphere, or,  
How to Meet as a Faculty**

Fuller, from preceding page

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A sense of emergency may energize our participation and heighten our awareness, but if we rely on emergencies to set us in action, we may not be ready when they come. Thus it is also important to look for interventions that can make meetings matter in ordinary times. One type of intervention, probably the most meaningful one, is to bring topics that faculty care about at a stage when debate can have a meaningful imprint on decision-making. The pulse survey we administered appears to confirm that many faculty felt the principle of institutional neutrality briefly introduced for discussion in February by President Kornbluth should indeed be a topic for ongoing consideration, precisely because it was brought to the faculty as an open question.<sup>5</sup> The co-chairs of the Committee on Academic Freedom and Campus Expression anticipate returning to the faculty meeting repeatedly as they shape their recommendations for next steps. The co-chairs of the new Task Force on the Undergraduate Academic Program, charged with a broad review of the GIRs and undergraduate education as a whole, will also visit at least one upcoming meeting this spring to begin discussion of their work and make public a plan for community engagement.<sup>6</sup>

Including agenda items that either engage faculty experience and expertise,

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<sup>5</sup> Useful information on the University of Chicago's Kalven Report and a recorded talk about the report by Professor Malick Ghachem (History) were attached to the call for the February meeting. We hope to give these and related materials a more permanent landing place to help inform future discussion by the MIT community.

<sup>6</sup> The Task Force was one of the recommendations emerging from Task Force 2021 and Beyond (see below); its charge and membership can be found [here](#). Both research and prior experience led us to charge a relatively small group. This design anticipates that the Task Force will both build on existing reports and create a plan to solicit engagement and concrete input from colleagues whose expertise can play a role in informing their work.

or respond to faculty concerns, may be the most important thing we can do. We have proposed two other best practices in the agenda-setting group. One is to shorten the time devoted to information delivery on items that don't call for discussion; the second, to provide pre-reading that can inform richer discussions.

**Information.** Often items are proposed for our agenda as, in effect, public service announcements. Members of the community want to inform or remind faculty of an event or opportunity, and the faculty meeting is one channel for doing so. We've sought to shift such items towards being, simply, announcements; other such information will show up in emailed invitations to faculty social events or in the weekly faculty pulse survey.<sup>7</sup> The faculty meeting offers itself as an attractive place for announcements because there are few alternative means to gain the attention of the faculty as a whole.<sup>8</sup> But we need a different and better solution to that problem.

Some other agenda items are mandatory reports, and these can devolve into what appears to be *pro forma* on the part of speaker and audience alike. Typically, the request for regular reports to the faculty originated from a sense that we needed to keep our eye on trends, or that the faculty needed to be engaged to some degree with activities delegated to some part of the governance structure or the administration. We don't always retain in our collective memory the reasons for these reports to the faculty on faculty composition and hiring, undergraduate tuition and financial aid, or cases reported to the Committee on Discipline. Yet

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<sup>7</sup> Governance [office hours](#), the [faculty pulse survey](#), and [dates](#) for monthly faculty breakfasts at the MIT Museum and for regular coffee hours in 10-100 are posted on the faculty governance website. Emeritus faculty, lecturers and senior lecturers are warmly invited to breakfast and coffee.

<sup>8</sup> *Tech Talk*, a hard-copy publication, served this purpose until 2009 when it was replaced by MIT News online, but its functions as an outlet for community-focused news remain unreplicated. Since the pandemic, the student-run *The Tech* appears less frequently and is no longer distributed around campus in a visible and tangible form.

apparently routine topics were important in the past and can become critical again in unanticipated ways. Such information should continue to be delivered, and we should remind ourselves to pay attention.

**Preparation.** Ideally, we all would come to the faculty meeting ready to engage on key topics because we have had a chance to examine data or proposals in advance. This, too, is challenging. Our time and attention are always under siege from competing demands. Some customs and norms may be at work on the delivery side, too. I wonder whether less time on polished slide decks might enable readier circulation of pre-reading. In order to make earlier information and preparation a norm, some changes of habits or redeployment of resources may need to happen.

Sometimes circumstances line up, and the materials are already available. In March, we expect to have on the agenda a required update on the progress of Task Force 2021 and Beyond. This Task Force – co-chaired by Rick Danheiser and Sanjay Sarma – began during the pandemic and represented a major investment of time, effort, data collection and focus over several years, as more than 200 members of MIT's faculty, administration and staff worked on "blueprints for building a better MIT." In a second phase, 16 Refinement and Implementation Committees focused on topics ranging from graduate student advising and mentoring, career support for instructional staff, to under-recovery and the shape of the undergraduate program. Progress on these topics is tracked on a frequently updated [dashboard](#); some of the work is in progress, some is completed, and other areas are in various stages of implementation. There are some extremely meaty topics that may take more than one meeting to dig into, but we invite you to review the current state of progress on what emerged from the Task Force's study as deserving attention and improvement. Getting your questions and suggestions for coverage will help make our March discussion of these topics more focused,

[continued on next page](#)

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**Our Public Sphere, or,  
How to Meet as a Faculty**

Fuller, from preceding page

detailed, and pertinent to faculty concerns. We invite you to send these to: [tf2021progress@mit.edu](mailto:tf2021progress@mit.edu).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> We would like to receive input by March 11<sup>th</sup>; while we will monitor this address for your input until the day of the faculty meeting, having early notice will help the Provost to organize information and, if necessary, schedule additional speakers.

There are many more topics on our institutional agenda than I can cover here. Among the internal matters we want to open conversations about later this year will be the shape and process of faculty governance. Many of us came into this academic year with growing concerns about the future of higher education. There is also no shortage of matters with arguably existential stakes – beyond the crisis in Israel and Gaza that continues to

cause pain to so many of us. We are concerned about the future of civil society; the future of humans in an age of AI; the future of the planet. The world needs MIT, more than ever, and MIT needs us. I hope to see some of you at the March faculty meeting. ■

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

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## Mea Culpa

Peko Hosoi

**I MADE A MISTAKE.** And I would like to apologize to everyone who was at the Institute faculty meeting of February 21, 2024. During that meeting I forgot to call for “no” votes on a motion to move to an executive session.

I know there are many people who (justifiably!) felt confused during the meeting and disenfranchised afterwards. I would have felt the same.

Following the rules of order is essential for the smooth functioning of a faculty meeting and I am mortified that I threw a spanner in the works. I sincerely apologize to my colleagues who were deprived of their right to vote; this is unacceptable, and I am deeply sorry that I was the cause of that injustice.

While I can't change what happened at the meeting, I can try to ensure that this

doesn't happen again. For starters, I will work with the Chair of the Faculty to propose a set of guidelines to safeguard our parliamentary procedures (e.g., having a parliamentarian at the meeting could enable us to correct procedural errors in real-time). In addition, I have learned that it was difficult for the people on Zoom to understand what was happening in 10-250, which in turn made it difficult for them to participate in the discussion. Given these and other challenges we have faced with the hybrid meeting format, I hope that we as a faculty will have a serious discussion about whether the current format of the faculty meeting is best serving our needs.

Regardless of whether these steps turn out to be helpful, I deeply regret my mistake and I apologize to everyone who was in attendance at the meeting.

Second, I would like to send a special message to the students who were there. Your actions will be judged differently by different members of our community, but from my point of view at the podium, you showed respect for our rules of order. You observed the speaking privilege rules of the meeting; you followed the rules of the executive session; and you carried yourselves with dignity and decorum when you left the room. I saw and appreciated the care with which you treated our protocols and, by following the rules to a T, you evoked the sympathy of many people.

The rest of this letter is less important than the apology; however, for those of you who are willing to indulge me a bit longer, there are two questions that continue to haunt me: The first is about

[continued on next page](#)

**Mea Culpa**

Hosoi, from preceding page

freedom of expression and the second is a math question. As many of you know, I am co-chairing the ad hoc Committee on Academic Freedom and Free Expression (CAFCE). The primary reason I agreed to do this, is that I am concerned by surveys that suggest people do not feel comfortable speaking up on the MIT campus. My concern has now grown into alarm. How can it be – given the egregious nature of my mistake at the faculty meeting – that not a single faculty member made a Point of Order to correct my error on the spot? There are many plausible explanations for why this might happen, but I worry that, for many years at MIT, we have allowed a climate to persist where people do not want to speak up in public. There is an enormous amount of wisdom in our faculty and a climate of silence makes that wisdom hard to access. I don't know how to fix this, but let me start by saying that, as a Faculty Officer, I welcome your dissent. I am genuinely interested in your opinion. (And anyone who saves me from making another boneheaded blunder like the one I made on February 21 will have my eternal gratitude!)

Finally, I'd like to end on a question which has been the subject of much speculation: Would the outcome have been different if I had remembered to call for the no votes? To be clear, the answer to this question in no way mitigates my error. Voting is a form of expression regardless of the outcome, and all faculty have the right to express themselves through their vote at the faculty meeting. Nonetheless, given the interest around this question, and as one more form of atonement, let me share all the data I have managed to collect and offer a brief analysis. In the following I will provide an excess of data in case someone would like to perform their own analysis with different assumptions.

When we called for a quorum at the beginning of the meeting, there were 23 faculty in 10-250 and 24 faculty on Zoom who raised their hands. At the time of the vote, the number of faculty on Zoom was

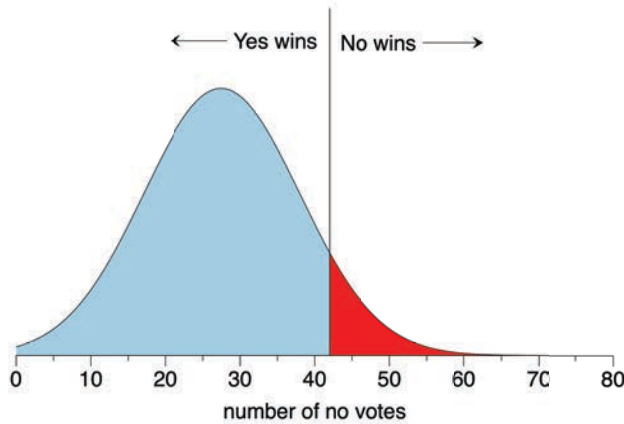
46. These numbers are not speculative or approximate. They have been taken directly from the Zoom meeting log.<sup>1</sup> The number of yes votes in 10-250 was 22 and the number of yes votes on Zoom was 20 for a total of 42 yes votes. In addition, we know that throughout the meeting, 66

to use the mean number of people voting in recent meetings. In that case, the expected number of no votes would be:

$$\# \text{ no votes} = \text{mean}(\# \text{ total votes}) - \# \text{ yes votes} = 69.5 - 42 = 27.5$$

which would not have been sufficient to overturn the yes vote.

However, I would argue that this is not quite the right question to ask. A better question is what is the probability that the no votes would prevail? Suppose we model the total number of votes as a



unique faculty were on Zoom at some point, albeit not all at the same time.

The next set of numbers can be estimated from historical data. In recent history, the number of faculty who attend each meeting lies roughly between 95 and 105. Both the Faculty Governance Administrator and I independently estimated the number of faculty in 10-250 to be approximately  $40 \pm 10$ . This estimate is also consistent with the historical data:  $66$  (faculty on Zoom) +  $40$  (faculty in 10-250) =  $106$  which is in-line with historical attendance numbers.

The final set of data I received from the Faculty Governance Administrator is the total number of people who voted in each of the last 10 votes at the faculty meeting: 63, 64, 64, 57, 61, 65, 69, 86, 83, 83. This yields a mean number of people voting of 69.5 and a standard deviation of 10.54.

Given that the total number of faculty at the meeting of February 21 was consistent with the number of faculty at recent meetings, one plausible way to estimate what the total number of votes would have been had the no vote been called, is

normally distributed random variable with the same mean and standard deviation as the measured data; then the distribution of no votes is the same but shifted to the left by 42 (i.e., we remove the known number of yes votes from the total). That distribution is shown in the figure. The area under the curve above 42 no votes (shown in red) represents the fraction of the time the no votes win if we replayed this scenario many times. The area under the curve below 42 no votes (shown in blue) similarly represents the fraction of the time the yeses would prevail. Integrating both areas and taking the ratio of the blue area to the total area, we find that there is a 92% chance that the yes votes would have won had we executed the vote properly.

So although it is not probable that the outcome would have changed had I remembered to call for the no vote, it is certainly possible. Which is of course why it is essential to count the votes. And why my mistake was so egregious.

Mea Culpa. ■

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<sup>1</sup> There has been some speculation that there were 95 faculty on Zoom at the time of the vote. This is incorrect. There may have been 95 *people* on Zoom but only 46 were faculty with voting privileges.



## Supporting Student Learning

Raechel N. Soicher

“The bottom line is that our teaching can not only engage with our students, but by doing so, we can improve the effectiveness of our teaching.” – Richard de Neufville, Jan-April 2023 issue of the *MIT Faculty Newsletter*

**IN THE LAST YEAR, EVERY** issue of the *MIT Faculty Newsletter* (FNL) has included at least one article (if not more) addressing student learning and engagement. Often, these articles [lament the lack of student engagement](#) or call on faculty to [transform their teaching](#) to better support students. Students themselves have sent letters to the FNL, sharing [their perspectives](#) on student engagement and course structure. To support faculty and instructors as they grapple with how to best engage and support their students’ learning, the Teaching + Learning Lab (TLL) is offering a new service, the *Midcourse Formative Review* (MFR).

The MFR is “a consultation method developed to collect midsemester feedback from students using structured small and large group conversations (Diamond, 2004)” (Hurney et al., 2023, p. 3). At the request of an instructor, a consultant – in this case, a TLL team member – will conduct small focus group discussions with students in their class. In these focus groups, students discuss the following questions:

1. What helps your learning in this course?
2. What hinders your learning in this course?
3. What suggestions do you have to improve your learning in this course?
4. What are you doing that helps or hinders your learning in this course?
5. What could you be doing to improve your learning in this course?

After helping students to write down, verbalize, and discuss their reactions, the consultant synthesizes the student feedback and shares the feedback with the instructor. Lastly, the consultant also provides guidance on how to make immediate course corrections and communicate about these changes with students.

In her commentary in the [May/June 2023 issue of the FNL](#), Lauren Carethers noted “If . . . student engagement is a real issue, why not take the time to interview and engage with the students involved . . . ?” The MFR provides a direct process for answering this question, one that is formative in nature and completely confidential.

### Why participate in the MFR?

- Conducting the MFR helps faculty and instructors to align their teaching with [MIT’s core values](#) of student centeredness, community, inclusion, collaboration, and innovation.
- The results of the MFR help faculty to identify common barriers to students’ learning and gain knowledge of alternative instructional techniques to meet their goals (Diamond, 2004).
- The MFR process asks students to metacognitively reflect on their own behaviors and how these affect their experience in the course.
- The MFR strengthens the relationship between instructors and their students by enhancing communication and transparency.
- The feedback from the MFR is incredibly detailed, providing more context than traditional end-of-semester teaching evaluations.

### How does the MFR differ from standard teaching evaluations?

- The MFR “digs into course assessments and policies, while also exploring time [students] spent in class and out of class, and ways the students prepare or don’t prepare for class.” (Hurney et al., 2023, p. 5).
- The discussion between consultant and instructor has been shown to lead to better student ratings of teaching (Finelli et al., 2008; Kulik, 2001; Piccinin, 1999).
- Participating in the MFR improves students’ motivation for the course in which it was conducted (Clark & Redmond, 1982).

The MFR is a confidential, formative feedback experience that creates opportunities for innovation and transformation of teaching that are beneficial to both instructors and students. If you’d

like to learn more about the MFR, please contact the Teaching + Learning Lab ([tll@mit.edu](mailto:tll@mit.edu)). We look forward to hearing from you!

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**Domicide: The Mass Destruction of Homes Should Be a Crime Against Humanity**

Rajagopal, from page 1

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Gaza – should be considered a crime against humanity. A growing number of legal and other types of scholars agree.

It's called domicile.

Scholars have used the concept of domicile in the context of dam projects that displaced people in Canada and warfare in Syria, and it has been used to call attention to the systematic demolition of Palestinians' homes and the denial of permits to build new ones in the West Bank by Israel.

As an independent expert tasked by the United Nations with promoting and protecting the right to adequate housing, I believe the crime of domicile should be enshrined in international humanitarian and criminal law so that governments and armed groups can be held to account. In an increasingly urbanized world, where densely populated cities are becoming common battlegrounds, the need for such action is all the more urgent.

We all understand that killing can be a murder, a war crime, a crime against humanity or an act of genocide, depending on the gravity and intention of the act. The same should apply for the destruction of homes.

In Gaza, we are witnessing destruction that is overwhelming in terms of its scale and impact, and far worse than what we saw in Dresden and Rotterdam during World War II, where about 25,000 homes were destroyed in each city. In Gaza, [more than 70,000 housing units](#) have been destroyed and more than 290,000 partially damaged. Recent conflicts are all proving to be equally destructive: In parts of Aleppo, [up to 65 percent](#) of structures were damaged or destroyed in five years of conflict, while in Mariupol, approximately [32 percent](#) of the structures were damaged or destroyed in a year over 2021 and 2022. In about three months of conflict, a shocking 60 percent to 70 percent of structures in Gaza, and [up to 84 percent](#) of structures in parts of northern Gaza, have been damaged or destroyed.

The ferocity of the attacks is unprecedented: Israel is reported to have already dropped the explosive equivalent of the nuclear bomb dropped on Hiroshima almost [twice over](#). Much of the infrastructure in Gaza that makes it possible and worthwhile to live in homes there – water and sanitation, education, electricity and health systems, and cultural infrastructure like mosques, churches, and public and historic buildings – have been damaged or destroyed. This crushing of Gaza as a place erases the past, present and future of many Palestinians.

Indeed, what has happened to homes and lives in Gaza is a stand-alone crime: domicile. It may not be an exaggeration to say that much of Gaza has been made uninhabitable, as South Africa's complaint accusing Israel of genocide at the International Court of Justice alleges and which Israel denies. The court, in a preliminary ruling on Friday, called on Israel to take action to prevent genocide in Gaza and avoid the infliction of conditions that result in physical destruction in whole or in part.

I drew the same conclusion about domicile following the Russian bombing of Ukrainian cities in [my report](#) to the U.N. General Assembly in 2022. But right now, the accusation of domicile is largely a moral judgment. The preciousness of home, unlike the preciousness of life, has little recognition under international humanitarian or criminal law.

Some may ask whether the destruction by Hamas militants of Israeli towns and kibbutzim on Oct. 7 also amounts to domicile. While such attacks may constitute human rights violations and war crimes, the destruction of homes was not systematic or widespread enough to be comparable to the examples cited here.

Though attacks on individual homes, schools and hospitals can be crimes under humanitarian law, which applies to all international armed conflicts under the Geneva Conventions, the widespread or systematic destruction of homes is not by itself considered a crime in either international or noninternational armed conflicts. It is not mentioned in the Geneva

Conventions or in the definition of crimes against humanity according to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court or in the U.N. draft articles on the prevention and punishment of crimes against humanity.

We should act to update these treaties to include domicile.

There is precedent for updating what we legally define as international crimes. The Rome Statute proscribed starvation as a weapon of war, and under a 2019 amendment, the proscription was extended to cover crimes in noninternational armed conflicts.

Accountability for domicile in Gaza cannot stop with potential criminal prosecutions or declaratory judgments by courts someday in the future. The enormous cost of rebuilding Gaza and the rest of the Palestinian territories, where homes have been destroyed for decades during occupation, should be borne by Israel and the countries that contributed to this destruction, including the United States, through its supply of weapons and political support.

That rebuilding will be hard work. The restoration of destroyed cities after World War II, such as Rotterdam, took more than two decades and cost billions of dollars, funded by [the Marshall Plan](#). Ukraine's recovery needs after just one year of conflict were estimated at [\\$411 billion](#), with housing contributing to 37 percent of the cost. Mariupol's reconstruction alone is expected to cost [more than \\$14 billion](#) and take up to 10 years.

And even if Gaza is physically rebuilt, the trauma of losing homes – the shattered lives, erased landscape and obliterated memories – will last for decades. Enshrining domicile in law may make countries think twice about inflicting such trauma in the future. ■

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\*This article first appeared in the January 29, 2024 edition of *The New York Times*.

## Timeline that Led to the Suspension of the Coalition Against Apartheid (CAA)

Franz-Josef Ulm

**SINCE OCTOBER 7, 2023, TENSION** has been rising between maintaining an orderly and civil campus environment within a set of rules and the need on matters of moral urgency to be somewhat flexible in applying those rules. We now have reached a breaking point, and failure to resolve this tension will lead to disillusionment and disengagement within the student and grad-worker body, instill and solidify the fear of retribution and a deep sense of intimidation among faculty, and will ultimately increase – not decrease – polarization, precisely the opposite of what should be happening in an educational institute of higher learning, and especially at MIT.

On February 13, 2024, the Coalition Against Apartheid (CAA), an ASA-recognized (Association of Student Activities) student organization on the MIT campus, was suspended for holding a rally on February 12, 2024, from approximately 5-6 pm on the steps of the Stratton Student Center followed by an approximately 30 minute temporary banner display vigil in Lobby 7. This suspension and associated sanctions were announced via a triple communication route: (1) a suspension letter sent by the Division of Student Life (DSL) to CAA as a group; (2) a sanction letter sent by DSL to 13 executive members of CAA temporarily banning students from all leadership roles in all student groups at MIT under the threat of permanent suspension; and (3) the public announcement of the suspension of CAA by President Kornbluth on a publicly accessible YouTube video. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first time that an MIT-*internal* disciplinary measure

against a student organization was the focus of a public statement by the MIT administration [1]. The public statement has brought an ongoing MIT internal disciplinary investigation into the public sphere. Adjudicated in social media, it has exposed the student leadership of CAA to doxing and other forms of harassment.

It is therefore important that we, faculty, not rush to judgment, but first know the facts. Our purpose here is not to take sides or adjudicate this case, but present facts, timelines, and probable causalities, rather than opinions. We also made the deliberate choice to avoid, where possible, a contextualization of the events in the ongoing tragedy in Gaza. This is not out of lack of empathy, but for the purpose of focusing the attention on MIT, its core values and the MIT community of which CAA is part. For this purpose, we have relied on publicly available sources, emails, letters, and text messages with clear time stamps. Our intention is to leave the interpretation to the reader.

**Context:** The events organized by CAA on November 2, 2023 (protest at the offices of MIT’s International Science and Technology Initiatives, MISTI) and November 9, 2023 (sit-in in Lobby 7), led to an investigation by MIT’s Institute Discrimination & Harassment Response Office (IDHR). In contrast to its mission at MIT to “respond to reports of harmful actions and behaviors, prevent recurrence, and remedy the effects by providing impartial investigations, resources, and accommodations” [2], IDHR’s involvement in “MIT’s disciplinary process handling incidents related to campus tensions stemming from the Israel-Hamas war” [3]

appears to be somewhat different. According to its website, IDHR triages such incidents in consultation “with other relevant units, including the Division of Student Life (DSL), Human Resources (HR), and the Office of General Counsel,” and investigates “the facts of any cases alleging discrimination or discriminatory harassment,” while “the faculty-led Committee on Discipline (COD) is responsible for reviewing and resolving the case” [3]. There are no doubt different ways of reading IDHR’s public statement of the roles of IDHR and COD (and other relevant units) in choosing to hear, investigate, and adjudicate cases. De facto, it puts IDHR in the role of the prosecutor, while attributing to COD the role of the judiciary within the Institute. The IDHR investigation of CAA as a group started in mid-November 2023, extending to individual CAA members in January 2024, the day after Harvard’s President, Dr. Claudine Gay, resigned. During the month of January, extensive interrogations of students took place of up to three hours duration. During this process, a faculty advisor was present without speaking rights. Ruled by strict confidentiality, “[t]o protect the confidentiality of cases and individuals” [2], we will never know what happened in these IDHR interrogations. There is, however, evidence of traumatic psychological and physical distress caused by the process among the investigated students. To protest the style and form of this investigation within the bounds of strict confidentiality, a group of approximately 20 student supporters read MLK’s “Letter

[continued on next page](#)

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**Timeline that Led to the Suspension of  
the Coalition Against Apartheid (CAA)**  
 Ulm, from preceding page
 

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from Birmingham Jail” [4] in front of the offices of IDHR on January 24, 2024, documented on video. In a letter dated January 25, 2024, DSL considered this action as potentially harassing or retaliatory behavior directed toward IDHR in violation of MIT’s non-retaliation policy [5] and put three individually identified CAA members under a “no contact order.” In a follow-up letter dated January 29, 2024, DSL announced to CAA the implementation of “interim actions to prevent future problems.” These interim actions extended the no contact order to all CAA members and severely restricted confidential, unmediated, and equal access of the students, “in their individual capacity” and “in good faith,” to IDHR assistance in cases of “any behavior that (. . .) violates MIT policies” (including, for instance, Gender-Based Discrimination, Sexual Harassment, Sexual Misconduct, Intimate Partner Violence, or Stalking [2]). To the best of our knowledge, as of today the no contact order and the restricted access to IDHR assistance are still in place. Moreover, the interim actions prohibited CAA (and potential substitute organizations) “from organizing any events, including demonstrations and protests, on the MIT campus until [CAA] meet with Institute officials to discuss MIT’s requirements for protests and demonstrations.” Finally, DSL (as part of the executive branch of the Institute) informed CAA that it would share this information with COD (the judiciary branch of the Institute), insisting that “failure to follow [DSL’s] guidelines may result in a new COD case or be an aggravating factor in the COD’s consideration of CAA’s conduct.” This occurred while COD was still in the process or in preparation of adjudicating two separate cases: CAA as a group and CAA executives as individuals. The letter had its effect: it brought a month of heightened activism to a halt one week before the semester started.

The welcome-back-to-campus message came promptly on January 31,

2024, in the form of “reasonable ‘time, place, and manner’ restrictions dictated by the Institute” announced by email to the MIT community at large by Provost Barnhart and Chancellor Noble [6]. There are two notable key restrictions of relevance for the sequence of events: (i) A three-day rule for registration of vigils, protests, or demonstrations organized by any Institute group [7], which requires “the sponsoring groups [to] meet with SOLE [Office of Student Organizations, Leadership and Engagement [8], a subdivision of DSL] at least three days in advance of the gathering”; and (ii) MIT’s administration’s right to impose interim measures, which – akin to an emergency ordinance – involves “immediate action in order to protect the health, safety, wellbeing, or educational or working experience of students, employees, or the broader MIT community” [9], “while the COD takes time to formally review a complaint” [6]. MIT is a private university. But had these ‘time, place, and manner’ restrictions been dictated by the government, a 1989 Supreme Court ruling would have required (1) “[t]he regulation [to] be content-neutral, (2) (. . .) narrowly tailored to serve a significant governmental [i.e., MIT’s] interest, [and] (3) “to leave open ample alternative channels for communicating the speaker’s [i.e., CAA’s] message” [10]. Moreover, we have reviewed 50 years of free expression events at MIT but could not find the three-day rule as an overriding rule in the books. This does not mean that it did not exist before October 7, 2023, and subsequent updates of the “MIT Guidelines for Free Expression at Campus Events, Vigils, Protests, and Demonstrations,” last on January 31, 2024 [7]. We could neither confirm nor falsify its existence and enforcement in the past. Finally, we also reviewed rules regarding gatherings in Lobby 7 and its seasoned history as a locus of protest at MIT (from the Vietnam War protests in 1969, to the 2016 Trump Muslim Ban Rally of the MIT community and the 2020 Black Lives Matter Rally). The list of dedicated “preferred locations that may be approved for demonstra-

tions” at MIT posted by DSL on November 8, 2023 [11] ahead of CAA’s November 9, 2023 rally, does not include Lobby 7. To the best of our knowledge, however, it does not exclude Lobby 7 from student protests [12].

**February 2-6, 2024:** Two meetings of CAA with Institute officials of DSL and SOLE took place on February 2 and 6, 2024 to discuss the new protest guidelines. In compliance with DSL’s interim actions of January 29, 2024, these meetings carry some weight to understand the sequel. First, in these meetings the CAA students affirmed their right to protest. They did not agree to the three-day rule for registering protests, on the basis that it excludes consideration of emergency actions and that the approval process itself would dilute the power of protest if restrictions were laid down. Second, CAA agreed to provide in a timely fashion essential information to DSL and SOLE about future protests, including expected size, expected audience, and resources (such as a sound amplification system). Evidence of the mutual agreement of both parties can be found in an email from DSL to CAA on February 9, 2024: “Given these conversations, CAA is no longer prohibited from organizing events, including demonstrations and protests, on the MIT campus.” That is, not only did these meetings open the communication between CAA and the administration, but CAA acknowledged in these meetings the broad spirit of regulations and communication requirements for protests. While there are no detailed notes from these meetings, an understanding was reached that the started communication addressing emergency situations would continue, and that if such emergency situations arose, CAA would communicate and coordinate as early as possible with SOLE and DSL.

**February 12, 2024:** Such an emergency arose, in the eyes of CAA, in the night of February 11 to 12, 2024, in form of the aerial bombing of Rafah in Gaza. The consideration by CAA of the events as emergency was amplified by the fact that

[continued on next page](#)

**Timeline that Led to the Suspension of the Coalition Against Apartheid (CAA)**  
Ulm, from preceding page

the families of several MIT students affiliated with CAA reside in or have been displaced from their homes to Rafah. The following sequence of events is based solely on timelines of email communications, social media postings, and text messages:

Timestamp	Event	REF
	Overnight Decision by CAA to hold an Emergency Rally at 5 pm.	(A)
11:16 am	CAA posts announcement of Emergency Rally on CAA-Instagram page.	(B)
11:40 am	CAA is informed by COD that it is placed on probation.	(C)
Noon	First unsuccessful attempt by CAA to meet with SOLE to communicate emergency situation and coordinate Emergency Rally.	(D)
12:54 pm	Second successful attempt by CAA to communicate and coordinate Emergency Rally. - SOLE offers sound amplification system for rally. - CAA executives check among each other whether “conversation is sufficient in terms of communication w. admin” (text messages)	(E)
1:11 pm	CAA posts official invitation for Emergency Rally to MIT community via “dormspam”	(F)
1:58 pm	CAA informs DSL leadership about Emergency Rally, and meeting with SOLE.	(G)
3:12 pm	CAA obtains sound amplification system from SOLE.	(H)
3:48 pm	DSL informs CAA that DSL does not approve rally, “given that [CAA] ha[d] not notified the office within three days of holding it”.	(I)
5:00 pm	Start of Rally in front of the Stratton Student Center.	(J)

We could not find evidence for a causality between CAA’s Instagram posting (at 11:16 am) and COD’s letter of probation (at 11:40 am). The time sequence only suggests that CAA was not organizing the rally intentionally in defiance of COD’s decision. In contrast, the repeated outreach (noon, 12:54 pm) of CAA to SOLE suggests that CAA followed their understanding of the outcome of the February 2-6, 2024 meetings. There is strong evidence of reciprocity of this understanding from SOLE, such as the offering of the sound system by SOLE four hours before the rally’s start and CAA receiving the sound amplification system from SOLE at 3:12 pm, i.e., 36 minutes before DSL prohibited the emergency rally by email at 3:48 pm. While CAA had informed its followers via Instagram at 11:16 am, CAA only informed the MIT community at large via “dormspam” [13] at 1:11 pm, i.e., concurrent to the meeting with SOLE. While we still lack an understanding of the mismatch between SOLE’s accommodation and DSL leadership’s

rejection of CAA’s emergency rally, there is no doubt that until 3:48 pm on Monday February 12, 2024, i.e., until one hour before the start of the rally, CAA acted within the (perceived or real) bounds set forth by the meetings of February 2 and 6, 2024.

CAA was suspended on February 13, 2024. MIT took immediate action “to

protect the intellectual integrity, health, safety, wellbeing, or educational or working experience of the campus community.” It suspended CAA on the grounds of being in violation of the “time, place, and manner” restrictions set forth on January 31, 2024 [6], use of an “unapproved location” (Lobby 7), and this “on the same day that the Committee on Discipline (COD) notified CAA that it was placed on probation.”

In summary, on the reading of the sequence of events the broad spirit of the regulations was indeed respected by the CAA but the rigidity of the regulations and their applications in the moment of high moral imperative has caused this rift, with the students themselves being punished and placed at personal and professional risk. We need to do better, think harder with mind and heart. Here at MIT.

February 22, 2024

**Addendum:** After submission of this article, we were informed that on February

29, 2024, i.e., one month after it had been issued (January 25 and 29, 2024), the no contact order had been partially lifted, allowing students to reach out to IDHR without the mediation of DSL (for instances in cases of Title IX violations).

**Acknowledgement:** An earlier draft of this timeline article was shared for fact checking with the leadership/executives of both the Division of Student Life and CAA. The author is grateful for comments and corrections received from the many faculty reviewing earlier drafts. The author is solely responsible for putting the facts together.

**References**

[1] In the past, MIT has issued public statements on ongoing external investigations; see for instance the Star Simpson Case and the 2007 Manning–Winston faculty Resolution, which requested that “the MIT administration refrain from making public statements that characterize or otherwise interpret – through news office releases, legal agents, or any other means – the behavior and motives of members of the MIT community whose actions are the subject (real or potential) of pending criminal investigation. We offer this resolution to foster mutual trust within the MIT community and to promote due process for all” [Avoiding a Rush to Judgement: Implications of the Star Simpson Affair (mit.edu)].

[2] [Annual Reports | MIT Institute Discrimination and Harassment Response Office](#): IDHR’s 2022-2023 Annual report evokes 155 cases at MIT that involve Gender-Based Discrimination, Sexual Harassment, Sexual Misconduct, Intimate Partner Violence, or Stalking. [IDHR Annual Report 22-23 FINAL.pdf (mit.edu)]

[3] [MIT’s Disciplinary Process for Incidents Related to Israel-Hamas War | MIT Institute Discrimination and Harassment Response Office](#)

[continued on next page](#)

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**Timeline that Led to the Suspension of the Coalition Against Apartheid (CAA)**  
Ulm, from preceding page

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[4] The “Letter from Birmingham Jail” by Martin Luther King Jr. written on April 16, 1963 is considered as one of the most important texts of the civil rights movement in the United States, not least for its proclamation that “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”

[5] [9.7 Non-Retaliation | Policies \(mit.edu\)](#): “No one shall be retaliated against for, in good faith, raising a complaint of a violation of an MIT policy, participating in the Institute’s complaint resolution process (whether as a complainant, a witness, an investigator, or in any other capacity), or opposing a violation of an MIT policy.”

[6] C. Barnhart, M. Nobles, [Ground rules for our community \(mjt.lu\)](#), email 1/31/2024.

[7] [MIT Guidelines for Free Expression at Campus Events, Vigils, Protests, and Demonstrations – MIT Resources](#), updated January 31, 2024.

[8] [Student Organizations, Leadership and Engagement | Division of Student Life \(mit.edu\)](#)

[9] [III. Interim, Administrative, and Supportive Measures | Committee on Discipline](#)

[10] In the public domain, such “time, place, and manner” restrictions have been considered compatible with the First Amendment provided they satisfy “a three-prong test outlined by the Supreme Court in *Ward v. Rock Against Racism*: (1) The regulation must be content neutral; (2) It must be narrowly tailored to serve a significant governmental interest; and (3) It must leave open ample alternative channels for communicating

the speaker’s message; cited from [Time, Place and Manner Restrictions - The Free Speech Center \(mtsu.edu\)](#).

[11] [Campus safety and policies around protests, postering and free expression | MIT Organization Chart](#) (November 8, 2023).

[12] [MIT Values and the Protests in Lobby 7 - MIT Faculty Newsletter](#)

[13] [How to send dormspam | how-to-dormspam \(mit.edu\)](#): “Dormspam is the act of emailing the social lists of MIT dorms and the IFC, and is used for advertising events, club announcements, surveys, and more. (. . .) dormspam reaches most MIT undergraduates and anyone else subscribed (which can include dorms’ House Teams, and even some MIT faculty and staff). ■

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## Why I Participated in the CAA Rally

Fedaa Alsoufi

*Editor’s Note: On occasion, the Faculty Newsletter feels it appropriate to publish letters from students. This is one of those occasions.*

### TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN,

My name is Fedaa Alsoufi. I am a second-year student from Gaza, Rafah, Palestine. I am the second oldest in a family of 11 children. My 10 siblings and my parents live in Rafah. I’m the only one who is not

home. On the night of February 12, after the relentless bombing of my city, Rafah, I was up all night, trying to reach my family to make sure they were still alive and not targeted. I was checking the news second by second. My face was glued to my phone, trying to see where the bombing was and whether it was close to my family or not. My family’s survival was the most important thing to me that night. I was directly and personally affected by the aftermath of the invasion of my city. On

the news, I saw the names of two of my high school friends killed in the bombing that night.

While I was up all night, trying to get a hold of my family to ensure their survival, I heard from my CAA friends that a rally was being discussed to demand the stop of the attacks and the ground invasion of Rafah. I was still worried about my parents and my siblings, and the least that I could do was bring their voices to our

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### Why I Participated in the CAA Rally

Alsoufi, from preceding page

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campus and make sure that everyone was aware of the tragedies and the humanitarian crisis that was going on in Palestine, the only home that I have in this world. The day after, on Monday, I tried to keep myself busy by going to classes. However, I was still glued to my phone, waiting to hear back from my family and the news that they were OK, after a long day of trying to get by and act sane when I was battling with the news of the killing of two of my high school friends, who've been with me through the roughest year of our high school journey. They had dreams – Mariam wanted to be a mathematician, and Asmaa wanted to be an engineer, but they're not here – they're gone. After that long day, at 4:00 pm, when I finished my classes, I went to the Student Center to wait for the rally to start with other people planning to join. I was not involved in the preparation of the rally.

My 10 siblings and my parents are under the threats and the bombardments. They had to move houses and were separated for weeks. All my friends who I grew up with are there. My childhood memories are gone because almost every street I've walked in has been destroyed. This has been going on for almost 142 days. Is it too much to ask from MIT that something has to be done in this emergency? The relentless bombing has completely changed my 10 siblings' lives. They have no universities or schools to go to. My oldest sister Malak was in her fifth year of

medical school, my sister Waed was in her second year of engineering school, my sister Arij was in the first year of her accountancy school, my brother Tariq was in his last year of high school, my sister Nour was in her second year of high school, my sister Hadeel was in her first year of high school, my sisters Maram and Alaa were still in middle school, and my brothers Mohammed and Osama were in elementary school. Now, their future is undefined; they don't know what awaits them, and only death and destruction are what they see. What would you have done if it was your family and friends that are experiencing and are subjected to such a genocide?

This is personal to me. My baby cousin Dana, who was five years old, was infected with Hepatitis A, which caused her severe diarrhea, and she ended up in a coma. She didn't survive – many pleas were made to get her to travel to receive proper treatment abroad, but her tiny, skinny body couldn't tolerate the pain – she is up in heaven now. This is one story of hundreds of thousands of unheard stories buried with their owner. The struggle is beyond describable.

My family has been starving – they have been fasting every day and sustaining themselves on less than a meal a day. I have lost contact with them for the fifth time now – complete blackout, no way to reach and all I hope for is not to read their names on the news. I spend my entire day (first thing in the morning and last thing before going to bed to get a little sleep) reading the news – holding tight into my chest hoping their names are not there.

Participating in the rally and being in community with others who stand against the ongoing genocide in Palestine brought me comfort and hope while I was there. I only remember a little about the speeches' details or the rally's programming because I needed to be in community with others. I was not aware that DSL prohibited the rally. It wasn't until later, on February 13, when I received the letter from DSL, that I was informed that the protest violated MIT policies.

I'm grateful to my friends in CAA for organizing the rally because I was not mentally or physically able to organize such a powerful action. I don't know if the rally was allowed or not; I just know that attending it as a collective way to acknowledge and grieve the bombing that happened in Rafah the night before is what a moral and ethical person would have done. *I strive to be ethical and moral in my actions – the kind of person described in II (18) of the Mind & Hand Book.*

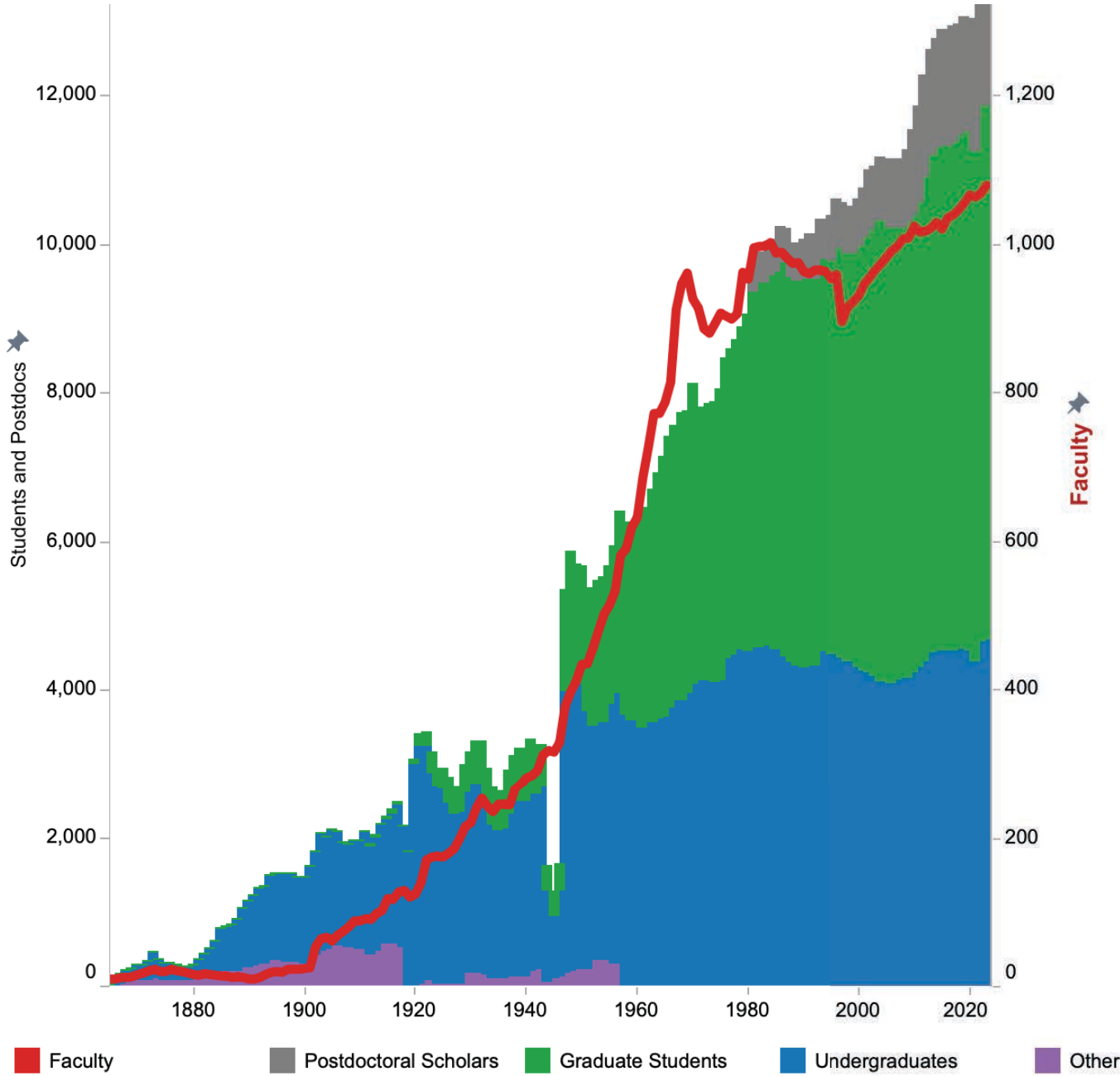
I wanted to gather in community with others to acknowledge the urgency of the situation and *make the names of my two dear friends, the 70 Palestinians killed that night and the 30,000 Palestinians killed over the past 142, memorable because they didn't die in vain.* Their pain is my pain. I hurt for every life lost because I am one of them. That day, I wanted to grieve in community because collective grief is a way of healing and empowerment. ■

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# MIT Numbers

## Faculty, Students, and Postdoctoral Scholars



Source: Office of the Provost/Institutional Research