

MIT Faculty Newsletter

<https://fnl.mit.edu>

in this issue we offer MIT's New AAUP Chapter ([page 3](#)); Faculty Chair Mary Fuller's "Governance and How to Use It" ([page 5](#)); and "A Message From the Keepers of the Pulse of the MIT Faculty" ([page 9](#)).

[Deadline for submissions for the November/December FNL is November 18.]



Baker House

On Being a Head of House

John E. Fernandez and Malvina M. Lampietti

On the origins

DURING THE WANING WEEKS of summer, thousands of MIT students replay a phenomenon as old as formal education itself – arriving at their new academic home. Before the first residential colleges emerged in Europe in the 12th century, other forms of living and learning in particular places, residential education, existed across the globe.

From Plato's Academy in the northwestern outskirts of Athens in 387 BC and across ancient China at the regional academies of the Qing dynasty and at Al-Azhar university in Cairo founded in 970 CE and other centers of learning across Africa and the Middle East during the Islamic Golden Age, students and teachers have come together in designated places to teach and learn. Many of these were located in cities which have func-

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How the Rights of MIT Student Protesters Were Undermined (And How to Fix Things Moving Forward)

Marah Gubar

Editor's Note: *The following exposition was requested by the Faculty Newsletter as a Special Feature and accounts for its necessary unusual length.*

ON MAY 8, 2024, administrators at MIT began informing 23 members of the group MIT Scientists Against Genocide (SAGE), who had been encamped on the Kresge Oval since April 21, that they were being placed on an "interim suspension" that would last "at least through commencement activities and pending a review by the COD."¹ As that line in the

¹ These phrases appear in COD letters sent to multiple SAGE students on May 8, 2024, as compiled in a document used to collect anonymized, general data about these charges from students who consented in writing to share it. Future historians will want to cross-check this account with

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Editorial Return to the "Unprecedented"

TO NEW MEMBERS OF the community, welcome to MIT! And to the rest, welcome back! After last year, we all needed a rest, and probably not all of us got the rest we needed. But here we are, ready to step up and welcome a new cohort of students, postdocs, staff, and colleagues, to stand at the front of the class and share what knowledge we have, and to encourage our students and each other "to work wisely, creatively, and effectively for the betterment of humankind."¹

It is tempting to say that the challenges of this year will be "unprecedented," with the polarized political climate playing itself out in the presidential election and the ongoing wars in

¹ From MIT's mission statement: <https://www.mit.edu/about/mission-statement/>

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Ukraine and Gaza, with increasing challenges to DEI programs and affirmative action, and with state imposition of gag orders and content restrictions on higher education curricula. According to a PEN America report in February 2024, “Legislators in 33 states introduced a total of 100 educational gag order bills in higher education settings between January 2021 and November 2023. As of January 2024, 9 educational gag orders are in effect in 8 states.”²

However, as Kevin Gannon says in a recent *Chronicle of Higher Education* article, “Talking about how to navigate another ‘unprecedented’ year suggests it’s an aberration, a blip, when in fact, upheaval is the new status quo. Perhaps

² <https://pen.org/the-perilous-state-of-academic-freedom-and-free-expression-in-education/>

the fundamental truth about teaching in higher education in 2024 is that disruption is the new precedent.”³ Political instability is widespread, and climate change requires us to make and anticipate major adjustments at all scales. And higher education, broadly, is grappling with the effects of the pandemic on K-12 education, the increasing mistrust of science, the reliance on generative AI, and the now entrenched view that the sole purpose of higher education is job training.

Across the academy and at MIT, one senses that we are both deeply conflicted in our politics, but also united to uphold academic freedom and to value knowledge and critical thought. A major challenge, then, is to make sure that while articulating our disagreements we don’t undermine the unity we need to stand

³ https://www.chronicle.com/article/a-faculty-survival-guide-for-the-new-academic-year?resetPassword=true&email=shaslang%40mit.edu&success=true&bc_nonce=pgxvk3trdx7m4lzkdttu

firm in our commitment to genuine, independent, and open-ended inquiry.

It is hard to know what the year will bring. But it will not bring an end to the many disruptions we will encounter or solutions to our problems. These are the new normal. Discourse, at times, may not be polite and not take the form of rational debate, but there is much to learn from the passions of others. Living in these times will take patience and resilience. The faculty is the backbone of MIT. Together, we can prepare to face the challenges, unified in commitment to the value of open inquiry, keeping in mind that disagreement is not a failing but, instead, can be a source of knowledge and insight. ■

**The Editorial Board
of the MIT Faculty Newsletter**

Editor’s Note: Due to publication deadlines, the production of this entire September/October issue of the *Faculty Newsletter* did not include last spring’s newly-elected editorial board members.

MIT’s New Chapter of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP)

Sally Haslanger,
on behalf of the MIT
AAUP Executive Committee

THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF University Professors (AAUP) was formed in January 1915. John Dewey (professor of education and psychology at Columbia) was selected as its first president, and Arthur Lovejoy (professor of philosophy at Johns Hopkins) as secretary. AAUP’s core mission has been

to advance academic freedom and shared governance; to define fundamental professional values and standards for higher education; to promote the eco-

*nomie security of faculty, academic professionals, graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, and all those engaged in teaching and research in higher education; to help the higher education community organize to make our goals a reality; and to ensure higher education’s contribution to the common good.*¹

In one of his first acts as president, Dewey appointed Edwin R. A. Seligman (professor of economics at Columbia) to

¹ <https://www.aaup.org/about/mission-1>

chair a committee on academic freedom and tenure that has come to be called “Committee A.”²

The AAUP has chapters at over 500 colleges and universities across all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the US Virgin Islands. To my knowledge, MIT has not had an active chapter for decades. However, MIT faculty have been members at-large, and the history of the AAUP at MIT is strong. Judith Jarvis

² <https://www.aaup.org/about/committees#CommA>

MIT's New Chapter of the AAUP
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Thomson (1929-2020), one of the philosophy section's most notable faculty, was an AAUP member for over 50 years.³ Thomson played a significant role in the AAUP, having served as vice president of the Association and many years on Committee A. Matthew W. Finkin, once Chair of Committee A, imagines someone researching academic freedom in the United States, and suggests

*what our researcher will find is how generously Judith Thomson has given of her time and extraordinary intelligence; and of how measurably better not only Committee A nor only the Association, but the American academic community is for it.*⁴

Given increasing challenges to higher education and concerns about academic

³ <https://www.aaup.org/article/fifty-year-aaup-members-0>

⁴ <https://academeblog.org/2020/12/09/judith-jarvis-thomson-a-reminiscence/>

freedom, this is a moment when it makes sense to work together to strengthen our commitment to academic freedom and faculty governance at MIT. With this in mind, a group of faculty has revived the

Given increasing challenges to higher education and concerns about academic freedom, this is a moment when it makes sense to work together to strengthen our commitment to academic freedom and faculty governance at MIT.

MIT AAUP Chapter. This entitles the chapter to professional resources to support our work, including expert advice, historical documents, policy statements, webinars, networks of faculty addressing similar issues, and more. Any MIT member of the AAUP is eligible to join the MIT Chapter.

In order to form this chapter, a minimal executive committee was formed, including: Sally Haslanger (philosophy), president; Erica James (DUSP and anthropology), vice-president; Eric Robsky Huntley (DUSP) secretary; and Marzyeh Ghassemi (EECS), treasurer. Two

at-large members of the executive committee will be elected once we gain critical mass. Chapter meetings will be held monthly, and the agenda for our efforts at MIT will be shaped in those meetings.

We encourage research and teaching staff – including faculty, postdocs, lecturers, research scientists – to join the AAUP and the MIT Chapter. To join the AAUP, visit their website: <https://www.aaup.org/>. To express your interest in being involved in the MIT Chapter (whether or not you are an AAUP member), please fill out this form: <https://tinyurl.com/mitaaup>. For further questions about the MIT Chapter, contact: aaup-info@mit.edu. ■

Sally Haslanger is Ford Professor of Philosophy and Women's & Gender Studies (haslanger@mit.edu).

Four Elected, One Re-elected to FNL Editorial Board

FOUR NEW MEMBERS AND one current member were elected to the Faculty Newsletter editorial board in the Institute-wide elections held last spring. Nearly twenty-eight percent of the faculty and emeritus faculty voted in the all-electronic election, which took place over a 10-day period in June.

The following faculty members were elected to the editorial board:

- **Nazli Choucri** (Political Science) re-elected
- **Yoel Fink** (DMSE/EECS/RLE/ISN)
- **Thomas Heldt** (Electrical Engineering & Computer Science)
- **Tanalís Padilla** (History)

- **Franz-Josef Ulm** (Civil & Environmental Engineering)

All the mechanics for the election were handled by the Provost's Office for Institutional Research, without whose assistance the election would not have been possible. The FNL offers them our sincerest thanks. ■

From The Faculty Chair Governance and How to Use It: Some MIT Case Studies

Mary C. Fuller

WELCOME BACK! IN A few weeks, you'll be getting the call to the first of this year's Institute faculty meetings. What are these meetings, and what can we do with and in them?

MIT's system of faculty governance, as best I can tell, dates back to MIT's founding. Some things about it work very well, and others are challenging. Governance itself is challenging, so the challenges may not signal that it isn't working; on some views, an organization like a university *is* a "patterned system of conflict."¹ But challenges are a signal to pay attention and think about how the system could work better. More senior colleagues have often commented that in the past, meetings *were* "better." Curious about how that looked in practice, I did some research in the Institute archives to see how a few important topics were processed through the Institute faculty meeting in the 1980s and early 1990s. This column draws on meeting minutes to describe a handful of case studies from that time, and to suggest a few takeaways in terms of results and best practices.

A little context: MIT's faculty governance combines a structure of task- and policy-focused committees – at a rough estimate, about a quarter of the faculty have some part in this aspect of governance – with monthly open meetings where all faculty have speaking and voting privileges. As Professor Patrick Winston emphasized in an earlier FNL essay, our

faculty meetings allow any faculty member to raise a topic or ask a question directly, without the mediation of a committee or a representative, to an audience of peers and to the senior administration.² What can that look like in practice? While one element of meetings should be *presentations and* open discussion, another can involve the use of parliamentary process.³ In the historical cases I'll cover, the faculty employed resolutions, procedural motions and debate to deal with an emergent issue of concern beyond the "act with power" sphere of the academic program. For each one, I'll describe the issue, the process by which it was introduced, debated, and voted, and the eventual result – not only whether a motion succeeded, but the concrete results that followed.

This will be a schematic account of some very complex issues. In choosing cases from the past, my hope was that temporal distance would make it easier to

² Patrick Winston, "Does MIT need a faculty senate?" (<https://web.mit.edu/fnl/volume/284/winston.html>.) Professor Winston's article responded to an op-ed arguing the converse (C. Cummins, W. Flowers, J. King 2016, <https://web.mit.edu/fnl/volume/283/editorial.html>). A number of faculty chairs have written FNL articles on our existing governance structure, including H. Jacoby (1991); R. Bras (2003); T. Kochan (2011); K. Rajagopal (2016); S. Silbey (2017); R. Danheiser (2021).

³ Customarily in accordance with *Robert's New Rules of Order*. The aims of such procedural rules are to protect the rights of members to be informed, discuss, and vote, provide that the majority vote rules, and protect the right of dissenting voices to be heard. (Sarah E. Merkle, "Three Foundational Principles of Parliamentary Procedure," The Law and Order Blog, <https://civility.co/>.)

see process as well as substance. That said, histories of even the recent past are always contentious, and I hope readers will proceed with the caveat that this column provides a far from full account. Many colleagues and alumni will recall these events in greater detail, and with perspectives that are not captured in the minutes.⁴

A new model of affiliation. The first case is a set of meetings that took place in fall 1981 regarding a proposed affiliation with the Whitehead Institute, characterized as "an institutional experiment"; the proposal emerged from roughly a year of preparatory discussion.⁵ At the monthly meeting held Sept. 16, 1981, discussion began, but was cut short by other routine but pressing business. On Sept. 30th, discussion continued at a **special meeting** held for the purpose; 90 members attended. President Paul Gray noted that while the proposed affiliation was "not a matter for faculty vote, . . . faculty views will be explored and considered" before an eventual decision by the Corporation. After those present explored the principles and details of the affiliation, President Gray proposed introducing a "sense of the faculty" **motion** to gain a "clearer sense of the faculty's sentiments." The provost and others expressed concerns that a vote could suggest negotiators did not have "a

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⁴ Additional coverage of some topics may be found in the archives of *Tech Talk*, the *Faculty Newsletter*, and *The Tech*.

⁵ Minutes 9/30/81 and 9/16/81. Unless otherwise specified, all quotations and facts are drawn from the minutes of Institute faculty meetings referenced by date.

¹ Deborah M. Kolb and Susan S. Silbey, "Enhancing the Capacity of Organizations to Deal with Differences," *Negotiation Journal*, Oct. 1990, 301. Professor Silbey (Anthropology/Sloan) is a former chair of the MIT faculty.

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mandate to reach an agreement.” Others worried that numerous abstentions (not recorded, per *Robert’s Rules*) by those not yet ready to vote would produce a misleading result; President Gray “bemoaned the missing parliamentarian.” Faculty indicated that “if a sense of the faculty was to be secured, all faculty members should have been informed in advance of a vote.” Accordingly, a vote was taken to **table the motion**, enabling it to be “taken from the table” for consideration at a later meeting if appropriate. In between the September and November minutes, a number of documents are included in the record: a letter from concerned faculty, a letter from President Gray and Provost Francis Low explaining their support for the affiliation, a text of the draft agreement, and the text of a **resolution** urging the administration “not to affiliate under the proposed terms” but to seek other ways of advancing the donor’s vision for biomedical research and training. The letter from Gray and Low encouraged faculty to attend the November meeting and expressed that they would not wish to proceed if there was “a collective negative expression of opinion.”

The November 18th meeting drew 350 faculty. Provost Low reported on newly clarified details of the proposed agreement. After some questions and answers, the previously circulated **resolution** cautioning against the affiliation was introduced, with its sponsors briefly explaining their intention as concern rather than opposition. Chair of the Faculty Felix Villars secured consent to split the motion into two parts (**divide the question**). On what was now the first motion (urging not to affiliate as proposed), some members continued to express opposition while others described an “evolution in their thinking” to a more positive view. A motion to **call the question** passed, and the first motion (opposing the terms of the affiliation) failed. The second motion (asking that a different mode of engagement be created) then became “difficult to

interpret,” and a faculty member proposed a substitute motion *supporting* the planned affiliation but acknowledging concerns and risks. After Gray consulted with the parliamentarian so “we don’t get in the soup,” a **motion to replace the original with this substitute text** passed. Another motion **called the question**, and the new motion was “overwhelmingly approved.” At the December meeting, with “barely a quorum present,” the secretary was asked and agreed to submit revised minutes providing a more expansive record, using a tape recording of the meeting and notes by a colleague. The Whitehead Institute was established by agreement in 1982 to advance research in molecular biology and genetics.

Activism and disagreement. In 1985-86 and again in 1991, two sets of meetings dealt with MIT’s response to student protests urging divestment from apartheid South Africa. These took place against the background of other activities, which suggest a broad alignment of opinion across all levels of the Institute that the system of apartheid in South Africa was abhorrent. In September 1985, President Ronald Reagan issued an executive order imposing economic sanctions against apartheid South Africa, and the MIT Corporation began to study MIT’s financial relationships with entities doing business in South Africa and to develop recommendations on disengagement as well as positive actions the Institute could take in its capacity as an educational institution.⁶

Over November and December 1985, a process of debate and amendment resulted in a faculty resolution urging Institute action to “hasten the achievement of full political rights for all South Africans,” including full divestment from firms doing business in South Africa

⁶ Ronald Reagan, [Message to the Congress Reporting on the Economic Sanctions Against South Africa Sept 5, 1986](#) (Reagan’s executive order is referenced in the Corporation documents). The faculty meeting minutes include reports from the Executive Committee of the MIT Corporation and the Corporation’s Advisory Committee on Shareholder Responsibility among other related documents.

(repeatedly amended, passed 131-40 on 12/18/85). In March 1986, student protesters placed a symbolic shantytown on Kresge Oval as part of a campaign urging full divestment; after initial discussions about registering the protest-in-place for a defined time, structures were put in place without agreement and occupied for 12 days. On March 14th (the day after the end-date initially discussed), the structures were removed, and six students were arrested for obstructing removal. At the March 19th meeting, during an open discussion, faculty asked for information on this series of events. Members of the administration described the concerns that led to a decision to remove the structures and to charge students obstructing their removal with trespassing, as “the least consequential of the actions possible.” Those in attendance expressed a shared sense of regret but differed on student responsibility and MIT’s next steps. A **resolution** was presented that urged prosecutions to be terminated and criminal records expunged, also asking MIT to pay court costs and legal expenses for students. Discussion produced a decision “to delay a vote until the whole faculty can be given due notice,” and the faculty officers were asked about calling a **special meeting**.

On March 27th, a **special meeting** was called to consider the resolution; the meeting was held on April 3rd with 90 faculty present. President Gray provided additional details about the shantytown and his discussions with the student organization that erected it. Charges had been dropped, and the judge had acted to prevent any record of a conviction. After some discussion, a motion was made to **postpone a vote on the resolution indefinitely**. A motion to **call the question** on postponement passed, and the motion to postpone indefinitely failed. A motion to **call the question** on the main resolution also failed and discussion continued. A faculty member who voted against postponing a vote now wished to regain that option but “this taxed the parliamentary expertise present at the meeting.” A

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motion to **table** the resolution failed, and more discussion followed. After a motion to **call the question** on the resolution passed, one of the resolution's sponsors spoke to emphasize that it should not be understood to convey "a sense of censure or rebuke." The resolution passed 59-35. Over the next several meetings (April 16th and May 21st), President Gray gave updates on the status of the legal process. MIT did not pay court costs; none of the arrested students appeared to have faced enduring legal consequences.

Anti-apartheid, pro-divestment protests occurred again in spring of 1990. President Gray indicated that he had begun interacting with groups concerned about these issues in early February, and several significant protests took place in March and April (including the placement and removal of more shanties on Kresge Oval, April 6th and 9th). The resulting confrontations led to injuries to police and students and, eventually, 32 student arrests.⁷ The call to the April 18th, 1990 faculty meeting included an agenda item on campus demonstrations and indicated that "several faculty have expressed an interest in introducing a motion." Forty-five faculty attended, just above a quorum. The meeting began with a chronology of events offered by Chair of the Faculty Jake Jacoby. The **motion** introduced expressed regret about the physical confrontation, arrests, and injuries occurring at protests and during removal of the shanties. Alluding to the 1986 motion, the resolution asked for similar actions on prosecution, criminal records and court costs, and requested that a joint advisory panel on demonstrations be stood up to set policy, consult in crises, and monitor "major political demonstrations on campus."

Discussion followed, this time including remarks by faculty observers and student participants in the demonstra-

tions (who had speaking privilege as leaders in student government). A motion was made to **postpone the vote** because "most faculty members did not have adequate notice of . . . the Resolution."⁸ Another colleague urged speedy action on behalf of the affected students. The motion to postpone failed 24-23. Sponsors of the main motion accepted a suggestion to **divide the question**, separating the motion into two parts. The first motion (expressing regret and asking MIT to remove legal consequences and costs) passed 25-13. A motion to **postpone** voting on the second motion (establishing a standing advisory panel) passed unanimously.

At the May meeting (90 members in attendance), a revised version of what was now the second motion was offered, asking for a study panel to review and make recommendations on how demonstrations are handled, on guidelines for the conduct and handling of demonstrations and on the establishment of an advisory panel to be consulted in times of crisis. An amendment ("possible establishment") failed 39-37. The motion passed with "some dissenting votes" (numbers not given). The resulting study panel, chaired by Professor John Kassakian, reported out in May 1991, and its brief report was supported by FPC and formally endorsed by the faculty; the principal takeaway was to involve, consult, and make use of faculty in responding to demonstrations. A small sit-in that month was resolved through conversation with faculty and administrators, who negotiated an end time in exchange for forgoing disciplinary action against the protestors. After this period, need for the recommendations of the Kassakian report did not arise. One visible and lasting result was the establishment of an informal problem-solving committee, PORTIA, by Associate Provost Jay Keyser (well-known as the originator of Random Faculty Dinners). I will circulate the Kassakian

⁸ Secretary of the Faculty Jack Ruina adds a note that it is "usual procedure when a vote is expected" to include a text in the call to the meeting. Ruina served as Secretary for five consecutive terms, 1981-91.

report to the Faculty Policy Committee this fall.

The 1986-91 meetings straddled a third case (closing Applied Biological Sciences in 1988) and overlapped a fourth one (reviewing the status of ROTC on campus in 1990). Both were substantial topics of debate and discussion with important outcomes. For these two cases, I'll give a more skeletal outline of process and focus on the results.

Closing an academic department. In February 1988, with 100 members present, a discussion began with the provost expressing his regret for flaws in the process of arriving at a decision to close the Department of Applied Biological Sciences (ABS) and move its faculty to other units; other leaders echoed this sentiment. On the March 1988 agenda were reports from the administration and the chair of the faculty regarding the ABS decision and **two motions**. At the meeting held March 16th, with 220 members attending, Chair of the Faculty Bernard Frieden reported that the administration had agreed to work with the Faculty Policy Committee to arrive at standards for processes that might lead to closing or reorganizing academic units. A sponsor of the first, longer motion described its spirit as expressing the "need for a clear statement of what tenure at the Institute means and about the need for policies and procedures for situations like the ABS closing"; concerns were nonetheless expressed that the wording of the motion was unduly negative and could be "too constraining for good governance."⁹ A vote on the first motion was **postponed** to "see what happens." The second **motion** was briefer, asking for a review of the process to determine lessons learned, make recommendations, and report to the faculty. It passed unanimously.

These meetings on the ABS process had two direct results: one was the founding of the *Faculty Newsletter*. The other

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⁷ Dates and details taken from Samuel J. Keyser, *Mens et Mania* (Cambridge, 2011), chapter 13.

⁹ Concerns about the pitfalls of overly constraining language can be seen across a range of issues.

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was appointment of the Committee on Reorganization and Closing of Academic Units, chaired by Professor Sheila Widnall and jointly appointed by President Gray and Chair Frieden. Six weeks later, at the May 1988 meeting, the faculty accepted and endorsed the Widnall committee report and its recommendations; the sponsors of the first motion moved to **postpone indefinitely** a vote on their motion, effectively doing away with it. The report provided a defined process to be followed in closing or substantially reorganizing academic units; delineated the nature of tenure appointments and appointments of non-tenured faculty for the first time; and gave faculty committees guidelines for considering proposals to terminate degree programs. Over the next nine months, the Faculty Policy Committee worked with Institute counsel and the Corporation to craft changes to Policies and Procedures and to the Rules of the Faculty; motions to make these changes were voted and passed with virtual unanimity in March and April 1989, and the committee's work became part of MIT's operating system of rules and policies.

ROTC, federal policy, and MIT values.

Like the debate on divestment from South Africa, discussions of the ROTC program at MIT in the early 1990s touched on a topic that reached beyond our campus. In this case, the policy of the federal government barring gays and lesbians from openly serving in the military conflicted with MIT's values; events brought this conflict to the fore. At MIT, the minutes show little dissent either on the issue or on the value of *having* ROTC on campus; debate was on exactly how to proceed, and what kind of language to use. Prior to the May 16th, 1990 meeting, faculty had proposed two concurrent resolutions regarding ROTC policy on sexual orientation; a revised version of the **first resolution** resulting from "many discussions" was presented in the meeting and endorsed by the sponsor of the **second resolution**,

withdrawing his own. The single resolution discussed endorsed the leadership of the president and provost in opposing the DoD's discriminatory policy, endorsed the recommendations of an existing study committee on ROTC, requested that the committee recommend a deadline for terminating the program if necessary, and requested an annual report on progress. The **motion** was approved with a few dissenting voices.¹⁰ Working within the constraints of regulations and its own

debate and shape action on a range of small and large topics, from the local to the international; this level of expertise should be accessible to all of us. (I hope to prepare a guide to frequent motions and meeting "best practices" for the faculty governance website). Agreements on a course of action often preceded any parliamentary process; in several cases, motions stimulated focused exploration of the issues and produced a compelling record of consent to act.

These cases show both the administration actively soliciting a coherent "sense of the faculty" in shaping institutional decisions and the faculty seeking to direct the administration to act.

principles, MIT would design a relationship with the campus ROTC program consonant with Institute values and policies, and a faculty committee would monitor and report annually on the status of the program and of DoD policy. President Charles Vest engaged in years of face-to-face advocacy in Washington, and in 1998 MIT joined an *amici curiae* brief on *Able v. US* asking that the policy be ruled unconstitutional. Nonetheless, it took over almost 20 years of litigation and lobbying to move past what the 1991 minutes describe as "anger and opposition" among national leaders. The policy of exclusion would finally be changed in 2010.

A few takeaways

1. A relatively small number of parliamentary motions enabled faculty to

¹⁰ The committee on ROTC accordingly reported to the faculty in October, 1990, and proposed further actions in a motion approved by its members, the Faculty Policy Committee, and the Undergraduate Association; the motion passed with two abstentions. See further the 1996 column in FNL by Professor Steve Graves, chair of the 1996 Task Force on ROTC:

<https://web.mit.edu/fnl/vol/archives/fnl82.pdf>. A 2003 column by Professor Michael Piore describes MIT's approach to resolving the values conflict locally: <https://fnl.mit.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/fnl161.pdf>.

2. These cases show both the administration actively soliciting a coherent "sense of the faculty" in shaping institutional decisions and the faculty seeking to direct the administration to act. The number of faculty participating in deliberation on such motions (from 45 to 350) varied widely, as did the degree of consensus achieved (from a 1 vote majority to unanimity).

3. Faculty have repeatedly articulated the expectation of ample notice when a significant vote is expected, and time to read and absorb the resolution on which they are expected to vote. Common practice has been to request time on the agenda that circulates with the call to the meeting, providing the text of the relevant motion and its rationale as an enclosure. When topics arise quickly or when discussion goes beyond the time available, special meetings can provide the needed time for deliberation and debate (the same expectation of sufficient notice applies). For many complex questions, the next step has often been to delegate a group of faculty as a committee to do a deeper dive and report back with recommendations.

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4. Sponsors of successful resolutions often consulted on and revised them between the call to the meeting and the meeting itself, or between the first and second meeting at which a resolution was discussed, making changes that led to greater assent. There may be some lessons in studying the kinds of changes that made motions more attractive and thus secured better approximations of a real “sense of the faculty.” But these don’t have to come from study of the archives: both

common sense and recent experience suggest that conversation and coordination across a range of viewpoints and perspectives will be our best tool in discovering language and recommendations that the greatest number of faculty will readily understand and support.

Summary points: Collaboration with colleagues before and between meetings is generally critical in drafting successful, actionable resolutions; the broader the consultation, the smoother in-meeting process can be. The most compelling motions registering a “sense of

the faculty” will pass by a sizable margin at a well-attended meeting after ample discussion and debate by an informed electorate.¹¹

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

¹¹ The standard parliamentary manual, *Robert’s New Rules of Order*, notes that the parliamentary process assumes an assembly where members can hear each other speak, and that many complications not covered by the rules are introduced by allowing asynchronous voting on motions.

A Message From the Keepers of the Pulse of the MIT Faculty

Roger Levy
Yossi Sheffi

THE PULSE OF THE Faculty of MIT was originally conceived by Michael Short (Nuclear Science & Engineering) and Anette “Peko” Hosoi (Mechanical Engineering), and rolled out with the support of [MIT’s Faculty Officers](#) in December 2023. The Pulse is a remarkable innovation by Mike and Peko: an online space where the community of MIT faculty can propose simple questions, contribute to prioritizing which questions to put to the Faculty as a whole, and submit their views on those questions. Participation is restricted (through Certificate authentication) to MIT faculty, and is anonymous. The Pulse thereby offers a unique channel of communication among MIT faculty on issues widely deemed as important for the Institute.

One of the Principles Mike and Peko established for Pulse is that the role of Keepers of the Pulse (also called “Question Keepers”) be handed off at

regular intervals to new faculty who would be nominated and elected through the Pulse itself. In the summer of 2024, we (Roger Levy and Yossi Sheffi) were selected through this mechanism as the new Keepers. In August 2024 we took this role over from Mike and Peko. With this article we want to recognize Mike and Peko’s achievement, express our gratitude for their leadership in launching Pulse and serving as its Keepers for the first year, and briefly describe how we plan to follow in their footsteps in ensuring that Pulse serves the MIT faculty as effectively as possible.

As the new Keepers, we plan a few initiatives to ensure transparency, foster collaboration, and encourage broad faculty participation in the Pulse. One of these is regular longer-form communication with the faculty through the *Faculty Newsletter*, starting with this article. Broadly speaking, we see the Keeper role as enabling

your active participation for the benefit of the entire MIT community, strengthening our collective voice, and contributing to more inclusive decision-making processes. Here we’ll review the Pulse questions from 2023–2024 that elicited the greatest faculty response, and offer encouragement and a few guiding remarks regarding submitting and prioritizing Pulse questions based on our initial experience as Keepers.

Below we report the 10 2023–2024 Pulse questions (before we assumed the role of Pulse Keepers) that received the most faculty votes, with brief summative remarks regarding the responses. In reading this list, we urge you to keep in mind that Pulse is *not* currently designed as a scientifically valid opinion survey. Based on our review of previous Pulse questions and responses, we believe that the MIT community would nonetheless

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**A Message From the Keepers
of the Pulse of the MIT Faculty**

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benefit from carefully considering best practices for such surveys, as we briefly note later in this article.

- The most voted-on question was, “Are you concerned about retaliation from any of the people listed below when you speak your mind?” (320 votes!) Less than a third of the faculty responded “no” or “abstain”, with over two-thirds indicating concern about retaliation from (the most being retaliation from students).

- 319 faculty responded to the question, “Should we restore the faculty dining area on the 4th floor of the Stata Center?”; with the overwhelming majority responding “yes” that a faculty dining area of some form should be restored.

- “Should MIT increase the cadence of faculty sabbaticals?” elicited 293 responses, with 62% responding “Yes”, and only 13% responding “No”.

- For the question soliciting current opinion on the Schwarzman College of Computing (290 votes), the plurality response (31%) was “Too much hype that is not backed up with substance.”

- 202 of 285 voting faculty responded “No” to the question, “Do you know about the link on the MIT homepage for campus updates and correcting misinformation?”

- “Should all faculty be guaranteed by MIT a minimum discretionary income of \$5-10k per year?” elicited 282 votes, 148 of which responded “Absolutely” and the remainder of which expressed varying degrees of caution or opposition.

- “Do you think the DEI establishment at MIT is serving our community?” elicited 273 votes. The question offered many possible response options and responses were widely distributed among them.

- “Is it appropriate to require faculty candidates to submit DEI statements?” elicited 272 votes, the majority of which were some form of “no”.

- “Your Preferred Grad Admissions Site: Slate or Gradapply?” also elicited 272 votes; the majority of responses indicated a preference for Gradapply.

- Rounding out the top 10, “Should the faculty have opportunities to rate senior administrators?” elicited 265 responses, which were almost exactly split between an affirmative answer on the one hand and a variety of negative or more restrictive answers on the other.

We invite you to view the full results of these and other questions by visiting the [Pulse results page](#).

For the question soliciting current opinion on the Schwarzman College of Computing (290 votes), the plurality response (31%) was “Too much hype that is not backed up with substance.”

We believe the responses to these questions indicate Pulse’s potential for identifying topics widely deemed by faculty to be important for the Institute, and for eliciting faculty opinion on these topics. During our term as Keepers, we will continue to work to improve this tool. Please submit questions that are on your mind, help prioritize the submitted questions for voting, and vote your mind! We encourage you to keep several points in mind as you do so:

First, many questions require accompanying context or analysis to achieve their value. For example, questions related to MIT outlays (salaries, benefits, overhead, etc.) may require financial analysis regarding the impact on MIT to be more relevant. Please consider what additional context or analysis may be worth including in your submitted questions. Where possible, we also will make an effort to provide any additional context we’re aware of to submitted questions. In other cases, questions may reveal that faculty may benefit from more information about how exactly the Institute does its business. We will also endeavor to provide this information.

Second, the best questions reflect careful consideration of the principles of question design and optimal wording. Both the wording of a question and the response options (as well as the set of response options

given) can influence responses. We encourage you to consult resources for learning about survey design and wording such as those offered by the [Pew Research Center](#) and the [American Association for Public Opinion Research](#). We anticipate revisiting the issue of question design and wording in greater depth in the future.

Third, we sometimes receive questions that are on important and timely topics,

but that contain inappropriate (unclear and/or potentially inflammatory) language. We plan not to release questions for prioritization or voting when we identify such issues. If you do not see a question you have submitted in the [Questions View page](#) of Pulse, you are welcome to contact us to ask why you don’t see your question released, or simply to resubmit a new version of your question, keeping the above considerations in mind.

Finally, please keep in mind that the “Prioritize”/“Deprioritize” buttons on the Questions View are not intended as yes/no responses to the question; these buttons are intended for you to express your view on how valuable it would be to the Institute for the question to be voted on by the Faculty. Likewise, the thumbs-up/thumbs-down numbers appearing next to each question on the Questions View are not intended to provide a sense of faculty sentiment on the response to the question, but rather faculty sentiment on whether the question is worth posing to the faculty as a whole.

We look forward to continuing to interact with you all in our capacity as Pulse Keepers! ■

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Living By Our Values

Or Hen
Ernest Fraenkel

LAST NOVEMBER, ALONGSIDE colleagues from diverse backgrounds, [we wrote to the MIT community](#) acknowledging the pain so many were experiencing in light of tragic events in the Middle East. We pledged to work together to build a better future for MIT, in which we “strengthen the bonds of friendship and collegiality that cut across political, ethnic, and religious differences.” The intervening months have been difficult, both at MIT and around the world. On campus, many students and staff have felt harassed and isolated due to their identity or beliefs. Our diverse faculty group launched several initiatives throughout the year to try and address these challenges. MIT supported weekly lunch gatherings of the affected communities, and efforts were made to bring students with opposing views together for dialog. In the process, we formed new bonds of respect and friendship that we hope can help guide MIT into the future. The new academic year will undoubtedly bring with it new challenges. Yet, we remain committed to the vision we laid out last fall.

Last year, the two of us, together with several colleagues, also traveled to Israel to hear first-hand the stories of people directly affected by the crisis. We spoke to Jews, Muslims, Christians and Druze, who helped us understand the many different ways these communities suffered since October. We were inspired by their stories of resilience and their abilities to live, work and study together alongside disagreements. One common theme emerged from these conversations. When

asked what we can do to help, the heads of the Israeli universities, a leader of the southern branch of the Islamic party of Israel, and a prominent Bedouin Arab professor all called on us to help members of their communities deepen their ties with MIT and other leading US universities. As we reflected on those discussions, we recognized the benefits that would come from forging closer connections between MIT and scientists working in the region. We saw an opportunity to bring exceptional scientists of all backgrounds from Israel to MIT, to enrich the intellectual environment at MIT by creating new partners in research and entrepreneurship. Israelis of diverse religious and ethnic backgrounds will also enrich the social fabric of MIT, bringing perspectives on the conflict that are rarely heard on our campus. Personal interactions between MIT community members and Israelis will also help to humanize a diverse society, and can contribute to reducing tensions on campus.

Inspired by our meetings in Israel and by MIT programs such as [GMAE](#), [MISTI](#), and [MEET](#), we recently launched [MIT-Kalaniyot](#)¹. This faculty-led initiative has two mutually reinforcing goals: strengthening the MIT campus community and deepening academic ties with Israeli researchers, including Jews, Arabs, and other minorities. MIT-Kalaniyot will support postdoctoral and sabbatical visitors

from Israel selected for their academic abilities and their potential to contribute to the MIT community. By bringing the brightest minds from Israel to collaborate on cutting-edge research, Kalaniyot will enrich our campus and the broader academic world, supporting the MIT mission through education, research, and entrepreneurship.

We believe that programs like Kalaniyot can help foster an environment of learning, respect, and mutual appreciation. Of course, MIT-Kalaniyot alone will not solve all the challenges that the crisis has created for our MIT community and for scholars living in the Middle East. We therefore stand in support of our peers as they develop complementary and collaborative faculty-led initiatives for other communities in the Middle East and North Africa. We believe that by focusing on our shared values we can contribute to positive change both on campus and ultimately around the world.

In November we pledged to “vigorously pursue the MIT mission: to develop in each member of the MIT community the ability and passion to work wisely, creatively, and effectively for the betterment of humankind.” We hope to continue doing that this year through Kalaniyot and other positive campus initiatives and invite all interested colleagues to join us on this mission. ■

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¹ The program is named after a flower (*Anemone coronaria*) that blooms in the south of Israel following winter rains, marking the rejuvenation of the desert.

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suspension letters indicates, this preemptive punishment was levied by the administration before these student political protesters were afforded the chance to offer exculpatory evidence and exonerate themselves to the faculty-led Committee on Discipline (COD).²

To protest this bypassing of faculty governance and lack of “any meaningful due process” for the SAGE protesters – many of whom were later exonerated after being allowed to defend themselves – an Alliance of Concerned Faculty (ACF) penned an open letter that by May 10th had been signed by 154 MIT faculty and lecturers and sent to the administration.³ By May 17th, a petition circulated by the MIT Graduate Student Union, which demanded that MIT immediately drop its “unjust” disciplinary measures against SAGE protesters, had been signed by 2218 members of the MIT community.⁴

primary sources, some of which will not be viewable for decades (e.g., the full text of some COD documents does not become available to researchers until 75 years after their date of creation, due to FERPA regulations).

² The use of the conjunction “and” (rather than “or”) in this phrase indicated that the lifting of suspensions would not happen until *both* commencement *and* a full COD review were over. Such phrasing contradicted the brief disclaimer near the end of the letter: describing the interim suspension as “temporary,” it noted that the action being taken was “without prejudice to being revised at any time and will be reviewed after any internal MIT investigation and disciplinary proceedings are completed.” Yet even here, the first half of the sentence seems in tension with the second, inasmuch as the latter strongly implies that the suspensions will only be lifted *after* a full COD process concludes. In a May 21st follow-up email to suspended students, *DSL itself acknowledged* that the initial suspension letters had created “confusion” on this point and revised the relevant wording to clarify it (see footnote 20).

³ By May 16th, after that letter was opened up to all MIT community members – such as graduate students and staff – the number of signatories had risen to 281. See <https://sites.mit.edu/dueprocessnow/>

⁴ See “mitgsu” Instagram post of flyer https://www.instagram.com/mitgsu/p/C6_q7x

As a historian of youth culture, I wondered: how have student political protesters been treated in the past at MIT? Have interim suspensions been used in such a peremptorily punitive way before?

Drawing on knowledge already gathered by MIT community elders and SAGE student activists,⁵ and with help from a brilliant MIT librarian, I started digging into the archives to see if there was any past precedent for the administration’s use of interim suspensions on a group of student political protesters. What I’ve found so far is strong evidence that *no*,

There is an urgent need for these newly restrictive “MIT Rules for Campus Protests and Demonstrations” to be subjected to review by the Faculty Policy Committee (FPC) and the Committee on Academic Freedom and Campus Expression (CAFCE).

there is not: this bypassing of the COD – and thus, faculty governance – to levy punishment on students engaged in a collective political protest represents a radical break with past precedent, whereby pro-Palestinian protesters have been subjected to a disproportionately harsh punishment compared to other prior groups of political protesters at MIT.

Moreover, during the 2023-24 school year, MIT’s “time, place, and manner” restrictions on student-organized campus events were ratcheted up on the fly by MIT administrators and staff, in a way that similarly sidestepped faculty governance. There is an urgent need for these newly restrictive “MIT Rules for Campus Protests and Demonstrations” to be subjected to review by the Faculty Policy Committee (FPC) and the Committee on Academic Freedom and Campus Expression (CAFCE). For in their current form, these rewritten policies do not merely carry the *potential* to criminalize even the smallest and most peaceful gatherings of students expressing their political views. Rather, they have *already begun*

[6u6wd/?hl=en](https://tinyurl.com/mit-unfair-discipline); petition itself is located at tinyurl.com/mit-unfair-discipline.

⁵ Emails from SHASS faculty members received by author; SAGE website <https://mitsage.my.canva.site/>

doing so, having been cited in an unprecedented summertime rash of new COD cases filed in July 2024 against students who were exercising their free speech and assembly rights in ways that could not, by any stretch of the imagination, be described as constituting a “direct threat” to others on campus nor disrupting “the essential activities of the Institute” – the reasons for restricting free expression identified in the “MIT Statement on Freedom of Expression and Academic Freedom” (2022).⁶

An Unprecedented Wave of Interim Suspensions

What evidence suggests that MIT’s bypassing of the COD to levy interim suspensions on the SAGE protesters last May was unprecedented? To begin with, as recently as 1990, this mode of punishment was not being used to circumvent the due process of political protesters, as a dramatic run-in between MIT student protesters and campus police reveals. In April of that year, Ronald W. Francis and Steven D. Penn – two members of the student-led group Coalition Against Apartheid (CAA), which was urging MIT to divest

⁶ After noting that “MIT does not protect direct threats, harassment, plagiarism, or other speech that falls outside the boundaries of the First Amendment,” this Statement makes clear that students do, however, have a protected right to express political views “without constraints”: “We cannot prohibit speech that some experience as offensive or injurious,” it explains, adding that “Even robust disagreements shall not be liable to official censure or disciplinary action.” Though MIT may sometimes impose restrictions on “the time, place, and manner” of protected political expression, the bar for that kind of clamp-down is high: when it threatens “to disrupt the essential activities of the institute.” See https://facultygovernance.mit.edu/sites/default/files/reports/2022_1221_MIT_Statement_on_Freedom_of_Expression_and_Academic_Freedom.pdf

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from South Africa – were accused by MIT’s police chief of a serious crime: assaulting a campus police officer, who was physically injured when CAA demonstrators rushed into an elevator at E52 as part of one of their pro-divestment demonstrations. The student protesters were attempting to enter the sixth floor Faculty Club where Corporation members were meeting and lunching.⁷ The police officer was injured severely enough that three months later she was still unable to return to work.⁸

Yet even this serious allegation did not trigger the MIT administration to levy preemptorily punitive interim suspen-

⁷ Andrea Lamberti, “CPs Bring Penn, Francis Before COD for Assault,” *The Tech* 110:21 (24 April 1990): 1-2. This issue of *The Tech* also included an announcement for an upcoming colloquium set to feature both pro- and anti-divestment speakers – a little hint that we cannot claim that when past political protests happened on campus “there weren’t two sides,” as MIT administrators have said in an effort to justify actions taken in response to current tensions on campus related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In fact, Paul E. Gray, who served as president of MIT during the South Africa divestment protests, cited the existence of student counter-protesters in 1986 as a serious threat to the safety of encamped pro-divestment student activists, recalling an occasion on which the former threatened to attack the latter and had to be talked down by campus police. Even anti-Vietnam War protests on campus did not go unopposed: on November 7, 1967, the “Young Americans for Freedom” group organized a counter-protest, taking the other side when MIT’s “Committee to End the War in Vietnam” organized a sit-in against Dow Chemical Company (producer of napalm). The MIT Museum also has photos of an intense 1969 confrontation outside Kresge between anti-Vietnam-war protesters and a counter-protester whose sign reads “Fight Communists and Students’ Red Anarchy.” See “President Gray Discusses 1986, 1990 Demonstrations,” *The Tech* 34:28 (April 25, 1990): 8; “Protesters Picketed at M.I.T.,” *Boston Globe* (November 7, 1967): 3; and <https://mitmuseum.mit.edu/collections/object/GCP-00049818?query=photos%20student%20protest&resultIndex=6>

⁸ Linda D’Angelo and Dave Watt, “Penn and Francis are Cleared by COD,” *The Tech* 110:28 (June 4, 1990): 1, 20.

sions on Francis and Penn. Rather, the police chief’s allegation was taken directly to the faculty chair of COD, who “reviewed the complaint and decided that a hearing [was] warranted” to enable both sides to present evidence before any judgement of culpability (much less punishment) was handed down.⁹ It was fortunate that no preemptive punishment was levied in this case, since photographic evidence soon revealed that Francis and Penn were not even in the elevator when the injury to the officer occurred.¹⁰

The case of Francis and Penn is worth reflecting on today because it proves that, in the past, the immediate involvement of the faculty-led COD in matters of disciplinary governance has worked as a guardrail against over-hasty judgement and sanctioning of students. What happened later in May 2024 with the SAGE students provides additional support for this point. As soon as the COD process was allowed to proceed in the aftermath of these suspensions, five of the SAGE protesters (more than 20%) were exonerated within two weeks. In their meetings with the COD, these students were afforded the opportunity to present time-stamped evidence that proved they were not onsite nor even (in one case) on campus when the actions they were alleged to have participated in transpired.¹¹

But unfortunately, SAGE students had already endured the stress of being hit with one of the most serious punishments the Institute can mete out: interim suspension. Multiple May 8th full suspension letters informed the students that “You must leave campus immediately”: they were “prohibited from participating in any academic activities – including classes, exams, or research – for the remainder of the semester”; “prohibited from participating in commencement activities”; and not permitted to continue residing in MIT housing nor using MIT dining halls. While the students who were

able to quickly contest and disprove the charges against them did get these sanctions lifted faster than the letter indicated was possible, others assumed their chance of finishing the semester and attending commencement was gone and focused on dealing with the urgent threat of being evicted.

Perhaps because the administration’s legal advisers know that Massachusetts law frowns on evictions being enforced without advance notice on people subsisting peacefully in place – per the wonderfully named “Covenant of Quiet Enjoyment” – a follow-up letter to the still-suspended students extended the date of eviction to May 15th.¹² Even so, stress and hardship generated by the eviction threat (e.g., packing up belongings in case eviction was enforced; deciding whether to stay or go; finding new housing options for the rest of the semester and/or the summer) made the process of scheduling and preparing for upcoming COD meetings more challenging for students.

Witnessing this and other negative effects that the interim suspensions were having, 23 faculty and staff who had agreed to serve as these students’ advisors in the COD process co-wrote an urgent email to DSL on May 13th “to implore you to rescind these interim suspensions.” Among other issues, they cited the subversion of student due process and faculty governance as contributing factors to the misidentification – and possible racial profiling – of suspended students who had already been exonerated, two of whom were Palestinian.

Concerned about these and other problems related to the potentially permanent effects of sanctions designed to be temporary, most of the MIT faculty who spoke up at an Institute faculty meeting held on May 15th, 2024 repeated this call to the administration to lift these interim suspensions immediately, with Franz-Joseph Ulm making a formal motion to this effect that was seconded by Sally Haslanger. In its final form, this motion read:

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⁹ Lamberti, “CPs Bring Penn, Francis,” 1.

¹⁰ See D’Angelo and Watt, 20.

¹¹ See footnote 1 for the source of this information as well as the quotes used in the following paragraph.

¹² <http://www.mass.gov/guides/tenants-guide-to-eviction>

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MOVED that all interim punitive actions associated with the recent suspensions of MIT students who have been charged in connection with some form of involvement in the SAGE encampment movement be dropped immediately, to allow the normal faculty-led disciplinary process operating through the Committee on Discipline to proceed with a thorough review of each student's case and avoid judging any student guilty until proven innocent.

During the ensuing discussion, the administration denied that there was anything out of the ordinary about how this disciplinary tool was being used on the SAGE protesters, a claim they repeated during a special follow-up faculty meeting held on May 17th. Interim suspensions are “a normal part of the COD process,” they asserted, before the vote on Ulm’s motion was taken, and failed to garner enough votes to pass: 159 faculty members voted in favor of it, while 200 were opposed.¹³

To support its claim that the use of interim suspensions in the SAGE case does not represent a radical break with MIT’s past precedent, the administration could have indicated – using anonymized, generalized data – how often interim suspensions have been used in past years, and for what types of allegations. Instead, repeated requests to them to release such self-exonerating data have gone unanswered, which adds to the impression pro-Palestinian student protesters might be the main – if not the only – student group to have been sanctioned using this measure.

That explanation would also make sense of why the administration cited only one type of disciplinary case during these faculty meetings as setting a precedent for

¹³ Notably, COD Chair Tamar Schapiro stressed in multiple ways during these faculty meetings that she had not been involved in the levying of these interim suspensions (e.g., by standing apart from other speakers).

their issuance of interim suspensions to student political protesters: namely, sexual harassment. The implicit analogy they drew between ethically motivated political protesters and sexual harassers provoked audible gasps of shock and anger from some faculty in the room at the May 15th Institute faculty meeting. If the administration had a more relevant and appropriate analogous example to cite, wouldn’t they have done so?

Additionally, any public protest disruptive enough to give rise to mass interim disciplinary action of the kind SAGE students endured last May would almost certainly be readily recuperable, not just by researchers and archivists but also by staff (who often serve as the trusted guardians of institutional memory at MIT) or fellow faculty (who often recall – if not participate in – various kinds of activism on campus).¹⁴

All of these data points strongly suggest that even though the COD rules in place today technically *allow* the administration to levy interim suspensions on a group of student political protesters, in actuality they *have never been applied in this way* – and for good reason, since the harsh consequences of being hit with such a punishment without first being given a chance to prove your innocence risks chilling free speech and assembly on campus.

Indeed, archival research aimed at tracing how the COD rules have shifted over time supports the hypothesis that the current application of such a peremptory punitive measure to a group of students is unprecedented. Interim actions that disrupt due process seem to have been initially developed by the COD not to be applied in the case of collective political protests, but rather to address the much more singular situation in which someone facing “potential or pending criminal charges” for harassment or other similarly serious allegations might need their MIT hearings to be put on hold

¹⁴ I don’t recall that any interim suspensions were issued to the Fossil Free MIT student protesters who conducted a sit-in outside President Rafael Reif’s office in the spring of 2016, for example.

because “there is significant concern with respect to self-incrimination” (since pleading the Fifth in a COD meeting is problematic).

The language I just quoted is lifted from a prior version of the COD rules that was still in effect as recently as May 2013. “When the [COD] has deferred the hearing until court proceedings have been resolved,” it states, “interim measures, including temporary suspension, may be taken by the Dean for Student Life” (III.C.2).¹⁵ Note that this very brief mention of interim suspensions implies that the DSL would only levy such peremptory punishment *after* a court and the faculty-led COD had weighed in to certify the seriousness of an alleged offense.

In other words, as recently as May 2013, interim suspension was alluded to only very briefly in the COD rulebook, for use in cases in which the question of who exactly had committed an alleged violation against whom had already been made crystal clear by a court and/or the COD. That’s pretty much the opposite of the messy situation that typically ensues in the wake of politically motivated collective action, which by its very nature muddies the question of who did what to whom, making it very difficult to apportion personal responsibility for particular rule violations to particular people.

No wonder, then, that circumstantial evidence suggests that such peremptory suspensions have been used relatively rarely at MIT, for cases in which a particular individual’s presence on campus has already been judged to constitute an immediate and direct threat to the safety of another particular person, such as sexual harassment.¹⁶ If that’s right, then

¹⁵ I found the May 27, 2013 version of the COD’s “Rules and Regulations” using the Internet Archive “Wayback Machine”: <https://web.archive.org/web/20130527055943/http://web.mit.edu/committees/cod/>

¹⁶ One of the very few explicit mentions of interim suspensions in MIT’s Distinctive Collection appears in a 1996 handbook entitled “Dealing with Harassment at MIT,” which notes that “When there is significant concern with respect to self-incrimination” by an alleged harasser “because of potential or

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the next pressing question is: When and why did the nonsensical logic of “Sentence first – verdict afterward!” start to seem salient to the diametrically different case of student political protesters engaging in collective action?¹⁷

Let me tackle the question of *when* first. In July 2013, when the COD rules got revised, the single sentence mentioning “interim [. . .] suspensions” I just quoted suddenly mushroomed into a whole section on “Interim Actions.” That new section opened with a line so broadly expansive in its assertion of autocratic power that it would make Caligula blush:

*To protect the intellectual integrity, safety, and wellbeing of the MIT community, the Chancellor reserves the right to take any action that they deem necessary or appropriate. In addition, the Dean for Student Life, or designee, may take appropriate interim action regarding a student in order to respond to concerns for the health, safety, and wellbeing of the community. Interim action is taken without prejudice to any subsequent COD process or finding.*¹⁸

If you follow the link in the footnote below, you can review the revised version of this section of the COD rules in place today, which had doubled in size (again) by 2021, and which now reads as even

pending criminal charges,” the COD Chair “can defer the COD hearing until after any charges have been heard in court. When the COD has deferred the hearing until court proceedings have been completed, interim measures, including temporary suspension, may be taken by administrative action” (48). This language almost exactly echoes (or perhaps even influenced, or coevolved with?) the more general COD rules, as revised in May 1996. See <https://dome.mit.edu/handle/1721.3/189947> and

<https://web.archive.org/web/20011201054957/http://web.mit.edu/committees/cod/>

¹⁷ Lewis Carroll’s *Queen of Hearts* issues this declaration at an absurd trial in *Alice’s Adventure in Wonderland* (1865).

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<https://web.archive.org/web/20140122184837/http://web.mit.edu/committees/cod/>

more eager to grant the administration free reign to issue many different kinds of interim restrictions and punishments, “*without limitation*” and *with zero input from the faculty-led COD* (III).¹⁹

To be sure, the general preamble that prefaces the COD rules has long granted the Institute the overarching “right to take any action that it deems necessary or appropriate to protect the intellectual integrity, health, safety, wellbeing, or educational or working experience of the campus community” (as the current wording states). Caligula has been hovering in the background a long time. But again, the mere fact of having *had* that COD-superseding right doesn’t mean that the MIT administration was actually *exercising* it, in general or in the particular case of student political protesters. Similarly, the fact that COD’s guidance about interim actions was radically expanded in July 2013 without much public notice does not mean that such guidelines have routinely guided MIT’s actual practice, nor that – having now noticed them – we should allow them to stand unrevised going forward.

Indeed, even those who approve of interim suspensions being used to end the SAGE encampment may feel frightened when alerted to how radically the passage on interim measures in the COD rules has expanded since 2013 to widen the scope of the kinds of cases that administrators are being encouraged to settle on their own prior to COD involvement. One reason

¹⁹ See current COD rules <http://cod.mit.edu/rules/section3>, which were last revised in September 2021. During the May 2024 faculty meetings, the administration asked why the suspended students were not quickly scheduling their meetings with COD to address and resolve their cases. But why should suspended students rush in to attend these stressful meetings, when they had already been informed that their suspensions would last “through commencement”? As footnote 1 details, even DSL acknowledged that their initial letters had created enough “confusion” to necessitate the sending of a follow-up email on May 21st, which used new language to communicate that the interim suspensions could actually be modified “during” (not just “after”) the COD process, such that seniors could potentially graduate on time.

why this autocratic method of resolving disciplinary measures should be used as sparingly as possible is that it results in a situation in which even the most draconian and unjust punishments handed down by the administration cannot be officially challenged, much less remedied or reversed, by faculty. (Even if Ulm’s motion had passed, it would have been purely advisory to the administration.)

That said, it seems to have been not the administration, but the COD itself – in consultation with the Faculty Policy Committee (FPC) – which has been making these periodic revisions to their rulebook. That’s great news, since it means that the current COD can immediately be 1) apprised that a quiet lurch toward language that encourages top-down administrative decision-making on a broad array of disciplinary matters has happened recently, and 2) encouraged to undertake the urgent task of rewriting the rulebook to rein in that language now. That revision by the COD should be done in consultation with DSL staff, who can work on making similar and related changes to the *MIT Mind and Hand Book*.²⁰

A Rash of New “Time, Place, And Manner” Restrictions

Let’s turn now to the question of *why* a radical expansion of the administrative license to discipline and punish occurred at MIT when it did: 1998, 2013, and (as we will soon see) during the 2023-24 academic year. The timing of this shift actu-

²⁰ See for example section II.18 (<https://handbook.mit.edu/behavior-and-integrity>), which seems to have been changed relatively recently to 1) support the recent COD updates on interim measures, and 2) include an emphasis on student “civility” that seems problematic in light of recent scholarship by African-Americanists and political scientists, such as Alex Zamalin’s book *Against Civility: The Hidden Racism in Our Obsession with Civility* (2022). Or, for an earlier reference, recall Henry David Thoreau’s famous quip in *Walden* (1854), which my MIT students found extra meaningful in spring 2024: “If I repent of anything,” this staunchly unruly practitioner of civil disobedience wrote, “it is very likely to be my good behavior. What demon possessed me that I behaved so well?”

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ally makes perfect sense, since it coincides with two broader phenomena that affected how American universities at large changed their rulebooks during this period.

First, having gotten into legal trouble for not taking allegations of sexual discrimination and harassment seriously enough in the 1990s and early 2000s, college administrators got “accustomed to using punishment as a go-to solution rather than a last resort” during the 2010s in an attempt to address that issue.²¹ Second, during this same time period, a nation-wide crack-down on the rights of student political protesters occurred in the US that scholars, lawyers, and activists refer to as the “Palestine exception” to free speech. Pro-Palestinian speech and activism, their research shows, has been met with far less tolerance than other forms of free expression and assembly exercised during prior American protest movements.²²

Following the passage of US anti-terrorism laws in the 1990s and 2000s that the Center for Constitutional Law described as “Anti-Palestinian at the Core,” many US universities began adopting more restrictive rules governing protests at the very moment when campus activism was becoming “increasingly central” to the movement for Palestinian rights.²³ Keenly aware of this historical context, two Harvard faculty – a historian and a political scientist – published an Op Ed in *The Harvard Crimson* last May to warn their own administration that “Suspending Student Protesters Would Be a Palestine Exception to Free

Speech.”²⁴ “Such disproportionate penalties for relatively minor rule violations,” they contended, “break sharply with more than 50 years of Harvard practice.”

This Op Ed about Harvard came out on May 8th, 2024, the very day that MIT sent out its first batch of interim suspension letters to SAGE students who had participated in the encampment at MIT. So, clearly, it is worth asking whether MIT, too, might have been making a Palestinian exception.

The obvious place for any such investigation to start would be by determining when MIT’s “Guidelines for Free Expression at Campus Events, Vigils, Protests, and Demonstrations” – as they were called during the 2023-24 academic year – went into effect and evolved over time. That’s because the clearest signal that a Palestinian exception to free speech and assembly is occurring is that a raft of new “time, place, and manner” restrictions on student protesters get penned by a university just in time to squelch pro-Palestinian activism on campus.

For example, when our neighbor Northeastern revised its rules for student political protests in 2013, the group Students for Justice in Palestine became the first organization ever sanctioned for violating a permit policy that, as their spokesperson noted, was so new that “nobody even knew it really existed.” This freshly penned rule imposed a multi-day waiting period for such events that the students deemed so “chilling” to their free speech that they organized another demonstration, to protest the policy itself.²⁵ As the advocacy organization Palestine Legal has documented, hundreds of similar “incidents of censorship, punishment, or other burdening of advo-

cacy for Palestinian rights” occurred during the 2010s.

Disturbingly, the evolution of MIT’s Guidelines seems like an even clearer case of the Palestinian exception. For by the administration’s own account, these Guidelines were “updated” in November 2023 and then again in January 2024, in a way that pro-Palestinian student protesters have credibly objected was specifically aimed at quashing their demonstrations.²⁶ For example, on November 8, 2023, the very day before a planned demonstration by MIT’s Coalition for Palestine (C4P) was set to take place in Lobby 7, an email blast went out to the MIT community announcing the existence of what was described as an “updated” version of these Guidelines, which banned Lobby 7 as a venue for student protests.

“I might be misremembering, so double-check me on this,” a graduate student member of the Jews for Ceasefire (J4C) who participated in this sit-in recalled, “but I remember MIT sending out protest guidelines the day before the November 9th sit-in in Lobby 7. At the time the event was organized it was not against the rules, but then MIT made sure it was against the rules by creating new rules.”²⁷

Concerned but determined not to jump to conclusions, I contacted DSL in July 2024 to ask them to supply me with a link to (or a pdf of) an earlier version of the Guidelines, so that I could follow the student’s advice and check what was and wasn’t new about the November iteration

²¹ See Jeannie Suk Gersen, “Speech Under the Shadow of Punishment” (*New Yorker*, 3 June 2024): https://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/speech-under-the-shadow-of-punishment?_sp=42519b12-a004-43ee-8a50-951de0b4c936.1718419102501

²² See <https://palestinelegal.org/the-palestine-exception>

²³ See <https://ccrjustice.org/anti-palestinian-core-origins-and-growing-dangers-us-antiterrorism-law>

²⁴ See Alison Frank Johnson and Steven Levitsky (*Harvard Crimson*, 8 May 2024): <https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2024/5/8/levitsky-frank-johnson-suspending-protesters-palestine-exception/>

²⁵ On the Northeastern protests, see <https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2013/06/12/stifling-student-protest-northeastern-university/H7k5rk8VCsPlpWVaJVS7eFl/story.html>, <https://www.openmediaboston.org/node/2686>, and <https://www.thefire.org/news/students-protest-northeastern-us-demonstration-policy>

²⁶ These Guidelines were described as “updated” in an email sent out to all faculty entitled “Principles and Policies on expression” (8 Nov. 2023), as well as the one sent out to all students that same day:

http://inj9.mjt.lu/nl3/c29AhcOTvSwjK5BkSEzsTQ?m=AWMAACq13CwAAcrtEUwAAAA80XcAAYCrBVwAJdEsAAiQzwBIS_GAmGdLq78WSn6kXBMq1UDVqAAIIWc&b=a3c3498f&e=b5787ca0&x=uuHqfYK6BLY4CuVIF3smg; additionally, the next iteration of the Guidelines webpage stated they were “Last updated: January 31, 2024”; see <http://web.archive.org/web/20240608233720/> <https://resources.mit.edu/freexpression-event-guidelines/>

²⁷ Interview with author, August 2, 2024.

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of them.²⁸ But my request to see an earlier version went unanswered, even though DSL was one of the named groups listed on the Guidelines webpage as having participated in the process of revising them, along with “Institute Events, MIT Emergency Management, [and] MIT Police.” This list indicates that *not a single faculty governance committee* was involved in the process of “shap[ing]” these rules.²⁹

By MIT’s own account, in other words, the campus police have had more “input” on MIT’s most consequential student free-speech policies than faculty. Indeed, as of June 2022, the members of the Ad Hoc Faculty Working Group on Free Expression were apparently unaware that these Guidelines even existed: the detailed report they issued then contains a comprehensive account of all “Current MIT Policies Related to Free Expression” – which makes zero mention of any such guidelines. Perhaps that’s because, as late as October 18, 2023, the “Freedom of Expression” section of the student handbook (*Mind and Hand Book*, II.10) likewise contained no trace of the text and link that would eventually be added in to alert students to the existence of these

Guidelines.³⁰ Using the Internet Archive’s Wayback Machine, we can pinpoint the precise period when this material appeared: the first allusion to the Guidelines’ existence in the *Mind and Hand Book* happened sometime between October 18, 2023 and January 5, 2024.³¹

What this means is that even if some kind of unpublished alpha version of these Guidelines was previously circulating behind the scenes, the November 8th, 2023 beta version almost certainly marked the first moment that these “time, place, and manner” restrictions were published and thus morphed from suggested guidelines into binding official policies that MIT students could be accused of – and punished for – violating. In other words, they only really went into effect as rules that the COD began enforcing in November 2023.

Yet among the changes made to the revised January 2024 version of these Guidelines was the sudden insertion of the following claim to longevity: “these written guidelines have been used for several years.”³² This specious assurance of continuity obscured not only that these Guidelines had only just begun to function as official rules a mere two months earlier, but also the fact that *brand-new restrictions were being imposed on students in this January 2024 reboot*. The most egregious of these is the requirement that student-organized events “*of any size*” must now register them by meeting with Institute officials at least three business days in advance and gaining approval to use a tightly limited set of campus spaces (emphasis mine).

³⁰ See

<http://web.archive.org/web/20231018210311/https://handbook.mit.edu/expression>

³¹ Contrast the October 18, 2023 version of Section II (10) – linked to in previous note – with the next available snapshot of this site available on the Internet Archive, which was taken on January 5, 2024:

<http://web.archive.org/web/20240105194234/https://handbook.mit.edu/expression>

³²

<http://web.archive.org/web/20240608233720/https://resources.mit.edu/freexpression-event-guidelines/>

²⁸ Normally, you can use the “Wayback Machine” to view older iterations of webpages, but if you feed the address of the January 2024 version of the MIT Guidelines webpage – <https://resources.mit.edu/freexpression-event-guidelines/> – into this search engine, you discover that it was actually first created on that date; see

https://web.archive.org/web/*/https://resources.mit.edu/activismguidelines/ What this means is that – intentionally or not – MIT has made it virtually impossible to recuperate the text of older iterations of the Guidelines. But with help from a canny colleague, I still managed to track down a pdf of the November 2023 version:

https://web.archive.org/web/20231113112115/https://studentlife.mit.edu/system/files/2023-11/20231103-mit-guidelines-on-speakers-protests-and-demonstrations-final_1.pdf

²⁹ See

<http://web.archive.org/web/20240608233720/https://resources.mit.edu/freexpression-event-guidelines/>

“Of any size.” Really? Consider the following scenario. Suppose a single MIT student exercises her personal freedom of speech by donning a sandwich board that reads “Free Palestine” and standing silently in the middle of Lobby 7. She is neither disrupting any of the essential functions of the Institute, nor harassing nor threatening the personal safety of anyone else on campus. She is, however, recognizable to other MIT community members passing by – or called to the scene – as someone who, in the past, has led or participated in events organized by officially recognized MIT student groups, such as Jews for Ceasefire (J4C).

As of January 2024, all that has to happen next to set MIT’s disciplinary wheels into motion against this lone student is for *any other single member* of the MIT community – e.g., an MIT faculty member who strongly disagrees with the political view she’s expressing that day; a police officer who is tired of dealing with that student; etcetera – to file a complaint to the COD alleging that an unregistered demonstration has taken place in an unauthorized location. Because the Guidelines now specify that demonstrations can be “of any size,” the COD cannot simply dismiss this complaint, so it sends the student a letter requiring her to quickly schedule, prepare herself for, and attend an hour-long disciplinary meeting to defend herself against this charge.

Even if the sandwich-boarded student’s case is speedily resolved without a disciplinary sanction being imposed on her, this disciplinary meeting itself constitutes a stressful drain not only on her time and energy, but also on that of the one or two faculty supporters she is advised to bring with her to the meeting, not to mention the multiple COD staff and faculty members required to organize and run the meeting and resolve her case. And if the complaint against her has been filed not because she’s disrupting any essential Institute activities, nor threatening the safety of anyone else on campus, but rather because the complainant recog-

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nizes her as a leader or member of a student group whose political views he objects to and wishes to squelch the free expression of on campus, then what he's doing counts as political harassment.

I wish I could have introduced this anecdote by calling it a “counterfactual” scenario. Unfortunately, MIT's new “time, place, and manner” rules have already resulted in an unprecedented rash of nuisance COD complaints of this kind. By the OSCCS staff's own account, July is usually their quietest month. Yet this year, at least seven new disciplinary complaints citing these Guidelines have been lodged against J4C and SAGE students, for small, peaceful July gatherings that barely anyone at MIT knows happened because they in no way disrupted the essential activities of the Institute. On one such occasion, a lunch gathering took place in Stata that was so unobjectionable that several of the participants in it were not charged with anything. But two students whose faces were familiar to campus police already – due to their prior participation in the encampment – received COD letters demanding they defend themselves for being present at that event. Both were Black.³³

Police had initially been called to the scene of this lunch gathering by an MIT staff member whose written complaint reveals that they strongly disagree with the political views expressed on the materials that a few of the students had set out prior to the lunch. When the police demanded that they put these materials away, the students complied. At that point, neither of the two SAGE students had even arrived yet, so there was no good reason why they, too, were reported to the COD for having broken MIT's Guidelines against unregistered demonstrations.

³³ This account of the July 15th incident in Stata is based on eyewitness testimony from two MIT faculty who were present during this event – and who later wrote to the COD to protest the levying of disciplinary charges against the students – as well as students' own account of what happened, which I am sharing with their written permission.

If this is happening in the summer, the fall threatens to be a disciplinary nightmare, especially since these Guidelines have just been revised and expanded yet again. On August 26, 2024, a far more detailed and restrictive version of them appeared online that retains the problematic “of any size” language and retitles them “MIT Rules for Campus Protests and Demonstrations.” Since this major revision occurred over the summer, presumably no faculty committees were involved, yet as now written, *these Rules mark a huge shift in practice by actively discouraging many forms of peaceful protest that MIT students have historically engaged in with great success.*

Recall, for example, the peaceful 24-hour-a-day sit-in outside President Rafael Reif's office that Fossil Free MIT student protesters organized, which lasted from October through March of 2016.³⁴ After the students successfully negotiated with the administration to pressure MIT to take additional steps to address climate change, President Reif publicly pronounced himself “inspired by both your conduct and your results.”³⁵ Yet today, students are being *actively deterred* from undertaking such action, because these Rules expressly prohibit demonstrations from taking place “in or adjacent to [...] administrative offices or office suites” and forbid all forms of “overnight camping [and] other unauthorized space takeovers [...] anywhere on campus, both indoors and outdoors.”³⁶

³⁴ See

https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2016/02/29/mit-fossil-fuel-protesters-settle-for-long-haul/XVplvv2EjM8kZWYKIRMI2M/story.html?s_campaign=8315 and MIT faculty member Kieran Setiya's account of the sit-in in *Life is Hard: How Philosophy Can Help Us Find Our Way* (2022, pp. 138-140).

³⁵ <https://news.mit.edu/2016/agreement-climate-related-action-reached-mit-administration-student-led-group-0303>

³⁶ <https://resources.mit.edu/protest-demonstration-rules/>. [Contrast these draconian rules to former MIT President Howard Johnson's assurance that “mill-in” protests that involve students congregating in MIT hallways “would be permitted as long as ‘reasonable access’ was maintained” for others to enter and exit offices and classrooms.](#)

Even if some of these Rules were technically on the books already and just not being enforced, the issuance of them now, in this newly detailed and threatening form, seriously inhibits free speech at MIT. Rather than building on a proud history of activism aimed at creating more socially conscious scientists, MIT has instead implicated itself in a repressive trend that the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) recently flagged as crucial for academics to resist. On August 14, 2024, the AAUP issued a statement condemning a nation-wide wave of “hastily enacted [and] overly restrictive policies” imposed “with little to no faculty input” by university administrators, which crack down too harshly on nonviolent campus protest.³⁷

Thankfully, though, MIT *already has access* to a faculty-authored study it can draw on to fix this problem: the deeply erudite, ethically nuanced, yet also usefully pragmatic “Report of the MIT Ad Hoc Working Group on Free Expression” (June 24, 2022).³⁸ What needs to happen next is for the FPC and CAFCE to immediately review the “MIT Rules for Campus Protests and Demonstrations” with an eye toward bringing them into alignment with the excellent recommendations made in this Report. Presciently anticipating how easy it is for overly restrictive rules to be weaponized against MIT community members who express views that others disagree with, the Report reminds us that “Wherever possible we should treat freedom of expression controversies as opportunities for learning rather than occasions for disciplinary action or administrative oversight of some kind” (9).

[as quoted in Robert Elkin and Steven Kaiser's \(misleadingly headlined\) article “Faculty Supports Injunction,” The Tech \(November 4, 1969\): 2.](#)

³⁷ AAUP Condemns Wave of Administrative Policies Intended to Crack Down on Peaceful Campus Protests” (August 14, 2024): <https://www.aaup.org/news/aaup-condemns-wave-administrative-policies-intend-ed-crack-down-peaceful-campus-protest>

³⁸ https://facultygovernance.mit.edu/sites/default/files/20220901_Final_Report_of_the_Ad_Hoc_Working_Group_on_Free_Expression.pdf

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Notably, this 2022 Report also recommended that the administration create a “Question and Answer” webpage to help *all* members of the MIT community familiarize ourselves with existing policies and support us as we grapple with the painfully hard cases: the ones that force us to recognize that a robust commitment to freedom of speech sometimes compels us

to allow the expression of views on campus “that some experience as offensive or injurious” (21, 1). But what the administration created, instead, was a webpage *aimed only at students* that includes some brand-new policies that further restrict their free expression and assembly rights. In so doing, the administration and staff hastily altered MIT’s rules in a way that profoundly misconstrues both the remit of Recommendation 4 and the content of the Report as a whole.

MIT urgently needs to loop faculty back into the process of rewriting its rulebook(s). Hanging in the balance here is both the free expression and assembly rights of students and the right of faculty to have a say in governance issues related to academic freedom and student learning. ■

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Stopping Climate Change: A MITEI Perspective

William H. Green

I STRONGLY BELIEVE WE can stop climate change. We are already making great strides transitioning from fossil fuels to clean energy; researchers at MIT and other universities are working hard every day to invent the future. Still, change is not happening fast enough. But by involving everyone in the solution, we can reduce greenhouse gas emissions in time to meet the goals of the Paris Agreement.

In many fields, inventions that challenge the status quo can be profitably commercialized by start-up companies, with modest investment. This happens all around us in the Boston area.

But stopping climate change is different. Success is not primarily measured by profits, but by how much and how quickly

we reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Start-up companies – funded by millions of dollars – are essential for innovation, but too small to achieve significant reductions. Huge levels of investment – hundreds of billions of dollars – by big companies are essential to achieve the gigantic scale necessary to solve this global problem. However, because new clean technologies have difficulty competing with well-established processes powered by cheap fossil fuels, big companies are reluctant to make major investments unless government policy support reduces the risk.

All are essential for a real climate solution: universities and start-ups for innovation, government for policy, big companies for massive scale.

With so many stakeholders, the process is slow. Consider electric vehicles (EVs). Rechargeable batteries with high energy density were invented in universities around 1980, then commercialized in the 1990s. By 2000 we knew that EVs based on these batteries could be a good climate solution – if they were affordable. In 2001, Norway provided a big tax benefit for EVs. In 2008, the US Congress passed a law supporting low-emitting vehicle technologies. In 2009, when Tesla was still a small company, the US government loaned it \$465 million to build its first big factory, allowing Tesla to achieve consistent profitability 10 years later. More recently, US automakers have begun [continued on next page](#)

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investing more than \$170 billion in EV development and manufacturing, supported indirectly by provisions in the 2021 Infrastructure Act and the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act. Overall, it took 45 years from invention to climate impact. We need to be faster.

We can accelerate the complicated process of moving climate solutions from laboratory to large-scale commercialization by bringing stakeholders together earlier in the process to discuss, develop, and fund solutions. As the new director of the MIT Energy Initiative (MITEI), I am focused on convening researchers, economists, industry, non-profits, and government to reach consensus on practical approaches to decarbonize each sector of our economy as quickly as possible. That consensus reduces the risk, and so encourages the massive investments needed to stop climate change.

Each sector has challenges. For example, no one has invented rechargeable batteries with a high enough energy density for trans-oceanic shipping, long-haul trucks, and airplanes. Research from my lab suggests that innovative ways of delivering clean hydrogen to the truck's engine could enable affordable long-haul trucking with dramatically lower emissions. If the cost of clean hydrogen could be reduced, that new trucking system could beat diesel in the market, not just in the US, but worldwide, bringing us significantly closer to the global net-zero goal.

Last spring, MITEI brought together researchers, business leaders, and government experts to discuss the possibility of obtaining cheap clean hydrogen from geologic sources. This symposium exemplified what I believe is our best chance at success in solving complex challenges – gathering all stakeholders, clarifying what remains unknown, considering both pros and cons, and building consensus around promising technologies and how to move

them forward quickly. MITEI's symposium on geologic hydrogen happened in an era of growth in interest in hydrogen as a possible fuel source, in part spurred by the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act's financial incentives for clean hydrogen production.

MITEI also supports decarbonization projects across the MIT campus through its industry-supported Seed Fund grants for early stage clean-energy research ideas and its Future Energy Systems Center project grants to examine decarboniza-

We can accelerate the complicated process of moving climate solutions from laboratory to large-scale commercialization by bringing stakeholders together earlier in the process to discuss, develop, and fund solutions. . . . MITEI also supports decarbonization projects across the MIT campus through its industry-supported Seed Fund grants for early stage clean-energy research ideas and its Future Energy Systems Center project grants to examine decarbonization solutions.

tion solutions. A few of the industry-funded projects starting in 2024 include novel flow battery technology to enable greater grid resilience for green electric grids; new battery architecture to boost energy and power density to expand capacities and improve battery safety; methods for conversion of plastics and biowaste to sustainable aviation fuels; conversion of CO₂ to useful products; using AI to optimize distribution and management of charging stations for electric vehicles; modeling how the maritime shipping sector could reach net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050; agent-based modeling for examining grid resiliency; and assessing the potential of geologic hydrogen as a sustainable energy source. These MITEI projects and others are being executed by teams from a diverse set of departments across MIT.

Applications for the next round of Future Energy Systems Center projects will open in December and for the next round of Seed Fund proposals will be open in January. Through its symposia and conferences, MITEI convenes the stakeholders in our energy system. And through programs like our seed funding and Future Energy Systems Center, MITEI supports scientific, technological, and educational efforts to advance the energy transition and address the impact energy has on climate change.

And, while we focus on these necessary advances, I recognize that to solve the climate problem, the entire global economy needs to change – not just transportation. We need to convene universities, industry, and government to address the challenges of every sector including construction, manufacturing, agriculture, and the electric grid. With support from business and government, we at MITEI are searching for real climate solutions that the public will adopt, and that merit the huge investments necessary for wide deployment. By working collaboratively to solve these complex issues we will successfully address the greatest threat facing humanity today. ■

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On Being a Head of House

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tioned for millennia as nodes of trade, sites of manufacturing and production, seats of religious and political power, wellsprings of culture and innovation. In guilds, seminaries, societies, schools, colleges and universities, these institutions have concentrated intellectual and material resources in loci of learning.

In the modern era of western universities, residential education is popularly considered the norm, though still not the experience of many students. In the US, about 40% of all students enrolled at public four-year universities and colleges and almost 60% at private universities live on campus (Urban Institute 2015-16). Across Europe only about 15% of enrolled students live in institutional accommodations, and the remaining live off campus – 34% live with parents, 26% with a partner or children and the remaining live alone, while in Canada only 8% of students live on their university campus – the rest living mostly at home with their parents (Usher 2021; Schirmer et al. 2024).

However, in the US we often associate the idea of *going to college* with the essential act of leaving home and living on or near a university campus – the residential education experience. The statistics above show that doing so is less common than the popular culture would suggest and more of a privilege than is generally appreciated.

The position of MIT *Head of House* in its current title and form started as *Housemaster* in 1958 with Prof. Howard Bartlett and his wife Helen in Burton House. Before then, in the early 1950s, some dormitories had a faculty resident, whose duties were relatively limited. Today's 19 undergraduate and 12 graduate Heads of House assisted by Associate Heads of House, welcome students to campus not only to facilitate their time in the classroom but to support the manifold learning they will engage in as they settle into a new home, most sharing their living quarters with one or more roommates, in a new community, in a new city.

We welcome them knowing the trajectory of their lives will forever be demarcated by the gravity-turn of their arrival on campus – their previous accomplishments and interests fundamentally and irrevocably altered and enriched by the residential experience. And like other stewards of residential education throughout history, the MIT Heads and Associate Heads of House act as primary stewards of that experience.

What we do

Our frontline role begins with the reality that much learning happens outside of the classroom and in the residence halls. It only takes a visit to any undergraduate

non-academic issues, discerning in real-time the state of individual and collective wellbeing, and making best use of the wide range of resources for support across MIT.

Also, Malvina and I are Heads of House in an undergraduate dorm and while it may be obvious to the reader, it is important to note that the role of the graduate Heads of House differs significantly in many, if not most ways from that of the undergraduate Heads of House. The account detailed in this article is what we know best – the role of the undergraduate Head of House.

A visit to a dorm on campus at any time of day or night would also give you

Mentoring and supporting students in realizing their goals is a major part of our role because the activation energy for precipitating new projects is not usually a concern. Students don't need any motivation from us to do new, interesting things. What they may need is thoughtful and targeted mentorship on how to achieve their goals for maximum success.

dormitory on a weeknight, the later the better and frankly most weekends as well, to appreciate the intensity of learning in the residence halls during the 50-85% of waking hours not in a classroom. Study groups fill every corner of the dorm and fully occupy lounges, conference rooms, dining halls and other spaces as they work on problem sets and prepare for the next exam.

At Baker House, we are in this mix every day, from bringing them fresh fruit with our roving snack cart on the eve of major exams to meeting weekly with house student government. While a Head of House at MIT is not a college Don in the English tradition, nor a house master with disciplinary responsibilities, nor a residential Dean as at Harvard and other universities, we share several priorities with these other positions. Our mandate includes acting as caretaker of the residential community, enriching the intellectual and cultural environment, mentoring students on a wide range of academic and

the strong sense that each residence is unique in almost every way, from the physical configuration and age of the building to the intangibles of the culture of the community – each with its own history and distinctive ongoing life – the intentional rebuff of a single standard model for living at MIT. So, while this article aims to provide general thoughts on the role of the Head of House at MIT, it is really our unique experience at Baker House which informs much of our perspective. Every Head of House has their own unique experience, perspective, and approach to their role.

At Baker, we have found that effective stewardship of community – about 325 undergraduates – begins by collaborating with our residents to facilitate their priorities. Student-led initiatives are the lifeblood of the community and are also most likely to succeed. Mentoring and supporting students in realizing their goals is a major part of our role because

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the activation energy for precipitating new projects is not usually a concern. Students don't need any motivation from us to do new, interesting things. What they may need is thoughtful and targeted mentorship on how to achieve their goals for maximum success. Engaged with us in this is the house team comprised of currently enrolled graduate students in the position of live-in Graduate Resident Advisors (GRAs), the Area Director (AD), a live-in staff member of the Division of Student Life as well as the House Operations Manager and their staff. In addition, upper-level students have the opportunity to become in-house Resident Peer Mentors to guide and advise first-year students on all things MIT.

GRAs live alongside undergraduates with responsibilities to the whole building and in particular the group of students they are assigned who live in the same area or floor as their living quarters. GRAs hold regular study breaks, help residents uphold community standards from distinguishing acceptable levels of sound from unacceptable levels of noise to roommate best practices and more. The AD works closely with the GRAs and us in supporting all aspects of house life. We manage the house team, meeting biweekly and in regular communication.

How much time is taken up as a Head of House? The answer to that question is not easy. There is no meaningful average number of hours as the semester ebbs and flows and there is no typical minimum or maximum number of hours per week. For us, the time spent has never been overwhelming or onerous but rather dominated by joyful, wonderful, and deeply satisfying interactions and engagements with our residents.

As the semester proceeds, there is always an unmistakable uptick in the ambient stress and concomitant lack of sleep and anxious vibes. Regular study breaks offered by the GRAs on their floors and whole-house study breaks produced by the entire house team – with smoothies

and various activities – are a salve to ease the emotional strain of succeeding at MIT. It is also the role of the Head of House to address difficult situations and there is a very wide range of severity, from mildly contentious and often easily solved roommate issues to true crises. As the reader knows, stress is a type of psychological pain which at relatively moderate levels can be a positive motivator but at sustained higher intensities may lead to negative consequences. Keeping an eye on the possibility of low probability high consequence situations is part of the role. We are attuned to the subtle signs of emerging crisis, but we are just one component in a deeply resourced and integrated system for supporting students.

As Heads of House we also saw something else during the pandemic. Whether always there and dormant or an emergent attribute of residential education, we could feel that the substantial *resilience* of the system was on full display.

Our first function when attending to a difficult situation is to connect the student to the proper resource at MIT, be it Student Mental Health and Counseling, academic support through Student Support Services, or other office at MIT. We have managed situations involving student-to-student violence and intimidation, self-isolation, drinking to excess including transports to hospital, allegations of plagiarism and other academic misconduct and more. For these and other kinds of predicaments, the resources to support us in our role are diverse and specialized. We are never alone at any stage of responding but often are the first to pick up early warnings of impending concern and then we act as a key link to the diversified network of support and expertise well beyond the walls of Baker House.

It is important that we include mention of this part of the role for not doing so would be to misrepresent the entirety of our experience. And yet, it should be of no surprise to readers that

Heads of House are, by sheer proximity and number of interactions, more likely to encounter these issues than most other members of the MIT community. Malvina and I, knowing what we now know about every aspect of the student residential experience, embrace the central role Heads of House play in addressing these challenges alongside the spectrum of joys that characterize the Baker House community.

Resilience and solace

At the height of the pandemic, one of the messages we heard from our residents living at home was their desire to return to Baker as soon as possible. For some, not being on campus and living away from

their residence halls was eroding their MIT identities. Clearly, living at MIT was central to being truly *of MIT*. This topic of student identity and residential education has been a subject of research interest over many decades (Chapman and Pasarella 1983; Arboleda et al. 2003; Cheng and Chan, 2019).

As Heads of House we also saw something else during the pandemic. Whether always there and dormant or an emergent attribute of residential education, we could feel that the substantial *resilience* of the system was on full display. During the spring of 2020 and throughout the next year, the Heads of House worked with students, staff, emergency management professionals, the administration including senior leadership as the situation and the virus quickly evolved.

Student residents of the dormitories were absolutely central to the success of maintaining operational continuity. Their valuable participation in the consideration and implementation of developing

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On Being a Head of House

Fernandez and Lampietti, from preceding page

policies was key to achieving a successful outcome to keep things moving forward. We welcomed back our residents in phases beginning the fall of 2021 and then we became the front line of reporting on the state of affairs in the residence halls as social distancing, twice weekly testing, and daily attestation became the norm. We also witnessed the extraordinary service of Baker's essential workers – our house operations manager, cleaning and maintenance staff, dining hall chefs and staff and all those people who came to campus – the essential workers of MIT – to ensure that residential education would not cease altogether.

Throughout that unprecedented time, the residential education system was surprisingly resilient by endowing the situation with a range of adaptation potentials that reduced the possibility of a systems collapse. We learned that residential education is robust in its resilience. While it would be impossible to predict how the residence halls will contend with future crises from endogenous or exogenous forces, it seems the residential context can provide a substantial reserve of resilience to the entire institute. We assert, with some authority from our first-hand 24/7 experience throughout the pandemic, that the presence of Heads of House, primarily members of the faculty and their partners, are critical elements of this reservoir of resilience.

Another attribute that we have come to appreciate is the significant capacity of the residence halls to provide solace to the MIT community in difficult times. This function of solace, especially in the preservation of norms and protection from disruption, seemed to emerge recently in response to the loss of civility on campus and beyond. Generally, residence halls were relatively quiet and calm despite the substantial contention and outright confrontation on campus this past spring precipitated by the public outrage from the

horror of October 7, 2023 and the ensuing loss of life in Gaza. While the encampment was no more than 200 yards from Baker's front door and the frequent protests on Mass. Ave. not much further than that, the Heads of House, GRAs, and student leaders alike did not see confrontation and conflict escalate within the residence. At Baker we saw something different than what was happening very close by – a resolve to keep going, continuing the core work of being at school in the protected and stable environment of the residence hall.

The two attributes of resilience and solace, emergent or simply dormant in the residential education system, are dependent on effective stewards – positive actors – within the system. The Heads of House and the house teams, including building staff, dining staff and others working in the halls are the primary stewards of the residential experience that undergraduate and graduate students depend on to accomplish what they set out to do in coming to MIT.

As Heads of House these past few years, we have seen residential education at MIT and across academia evolve and improve with deepened resources, refined protocols, enhanced and effective engagement across the community. We have seen the collaborative work of the staff of the Division of Student Life with the residential house teams contend with novel opportunities and difficult challenges. As residential education continues to respond to a changing world and strives to effectively and humanely serve students of the 21st century, we hope that the time-honored role of a welcoming steward of the whole MIT student experience continues to be the house teams and especially the Heads of House. ■

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John and Malvina are married and both serve as Heads of Baker House.

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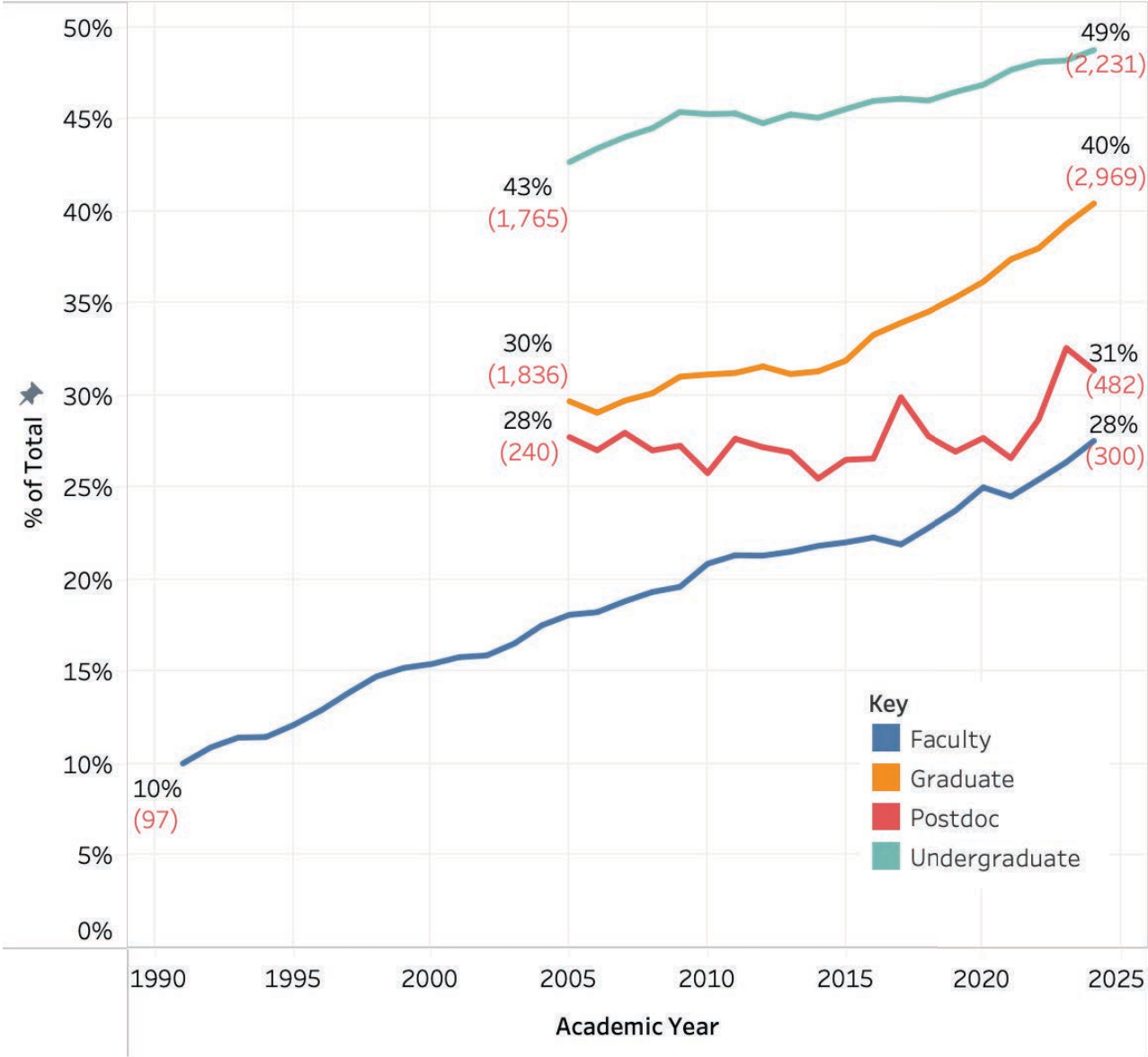
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MIT Numbers

Trend of Women Faculty, Postdocs, and Students



Source: Office of the Provost/Institutional Research