November 20, 2024 Faculty Meeting: Summary Minutes

Summary

President Sally Kornbluth and Professor Mary Fuller, Chair of the Faculty, chaired the meeting. The agenda as distributed comprised four items:

- Update on the Task Force on the Undergraduate Academic Program
- Motion for Housekeeping Changes to *Rules and Regulations of the Faculty*
- Motion Presented at the October 16 Faculty Meeting
- Current Issues in DC

However, subsequent to distributing the agenda, it was determined that the final agenda item was sufficiently timely and important that it was changed to be the second agenda item during the actual meeting. Because of extensive discussion on this topic, there was not sufficient time for either of the other two agenda items.

With 91 members of the Faculty present, a quorum was reached at the start of the meeting, and the October minutes were approved. A total of approximately 126 faculty members participated in the meeting.

1 Update on the Task Force on the Undergraduate Academic Program

In February 2024, then Vice Chancellor Ian Waitz and Chair of the Faculty Mary Fuller announced the formation of the Task Force on the Undergraduate Academic Program (TFUAP), to consider all aspects of MIT's undergraduate academic program as areas for possible improvement. This was one of the key recommendations to come out of Task Force 2021 and Beyond.

TFUAP co-chairs, Professors Adam Martin (Biology) and Joel Voldman (EECS), provided an update of the group's work during Phase 1 of three phases, also seeking input from faculty on a set of draft learning goals. During Phase 1, TFUAP focused on learning from the community in a variety of ways, including two surveys and meetings with academic departments, the School/College Councils, faculty governance committees, staff from offices working with undergraduates, and students. TFUAP also got relevant data from the Registrar's Office and reviewed reports from prior committees, as well as looking at peer institutions. The input from all of this informed the development of nine learning goals – what MIT students should know or be able to do when they graduate:

1. Every MIT graduate will know strategies for managing their time, advocating for and taking care of themselves, and finding fulfillment and belonging in their academic/professional pursuits and personal life.
2. Every MIT graduate will be equipped to solve problems using fundamental technical ways of thinking, including mathematical, computational, and scientific. Every MIT graduate will share a common base of technical understanding.
3. Every MIT graduate will be able to critically analyze their values, their responsibility to other people and the planet, and be able to articulate reasons for their choices. They will

understand the relationship between individuals and society and how to evaluate events, texts, and artistic production from the past and present.

4. Every MIT graduate will be able to work collaboratively in teams, give and receive productive feedback, and take on leadership roles.
5. Every MIT graduate will be able to effectively use written, oral, and visual communication to articulate their opinions and ideas to a range of audiences. They will be able to actively listen to, and engage with others whose perspectives and opinions differ from their own.
6. Every MIT graduate will be a critical reader, thinker, and listener who carefully examines assumptions, data, information, and ideas, before formulating an opinion or proposing a solution.
7. Every MIT graduate will have the knowledge and skills to become a leading member and help advance the state of the art in their chosen field of study.
8. Every MIT graduate will be able to apply their knowledge and skills to solve real-world challenges. They will be able to ask insightful questions and have the flexibility to creatively address problems from a variety of contexts, even those different from their chosen field of study.
9. Every MIT graduate will be a curious, life-long learner, able to learn effectively in academic and non-academic contexts.

and four process goals – what the academic experience will be for all undergraduates during their time at the Institute:

1. Build and strengthen community, and support academic and social belonging
2. Support wellbeing
3. Include experiential learning
4. Celebrate unique passions, creativity, joy of learning, and sense of wonder

(Details regarding all the goals can be found in Enclosure C to the November 20 agenda, TFUAP Phase 1 Report.)

Phase 2 will involve an exploration of different educational programs that address and meet those goals. To inform this exploration, TFUAP will issue a call for white papers to solicit community ideas about how the educational program should be structured. This input will inform the group's work in developing a draft program.

Notable comments during the discussion period included points such as: ensuring that the way in which the goals are articulated is meaningful to students; determining how to effectively measure whether the goals are being met; the importance of learning what employers of MIT graduates are looking for; and the value of ensuring that there were common principles and a common understanding of the meaning of words used in expressing the goals. Professor Voldman also emphasized in response to a question that the goal of the white papers was to bring a variety of different perspectives and experiences to bear on the question of the structure of the educational program.

2 Current Issues in DC

President Kornbluth introduced the next speakers: Maria Zuber, MIT Presidential Advisor for Science and Technology Policy, and David Goldston, the Director of MIT's Washington, DC office. She mentioned the forward-looking planning done over the previous months, with leadership from Professor Zuber and Mr. Goldston, to begin to consider what to expect after the elections on November 5 and how to best prepare MIT. President Kornbluth noted that the MIT community needs to be prepared for a broad range of potential impacts, in particular in areas such as research funding and the Institute's endowment, as well as community members from other nations. Some important issues draw bipartisan concern: biosecurity, China, the affordability and value of a college education. It will not be possible to know which will be significant and when anything might be coming. It is critically important to do everything we can to respond and adjust in such a way as to defend the essential missions of MIT.

Professor Zuber began by stating that the only certainties are that there will be change and that it will be a bumpy ride. Her sense is that Congress's highest priority will be to pass a tax bill, because the tax cuts put into place during the first Trump administration are expiring. Because the Republicans hold the White House, the House, and the Senate, at a minimum they will want to retain those cuts, and additional campaign promises made by the President-elect would lead to additional cuts. A large contingent of Republicans in the Senate want cuts to be paid for, so everything in the discretionary budget, which includes all of the science funding will be at risk.

Four working groups were convened to carry out the forward-looking planning mentioned by President Kornbluth. Comprised of faculty and senior staff, these groups focused on the areas of: finances; science policy; international issues, including immigration and national security; and campus life. The main goals were to identify relevant information about possible issues and to suggest internal steps that could be taken to address potential impacts in the context of different election outcomes. This has enabled the working groups to provide community-based advisory input to senior leadership to inform their decision-making.

Mr. Goldston spoke next, stating that the current situation is probably worse for universities than anything seen before, including the McCarthy era and other tough budget periods, and it is unclear where things will end up. He noted that this was not solely because Trump was elected or because Republicans control Congress: a major weakness is that Democrats share some of the same concerns as Republicans when it comes to higher education, so the Democrats are not willing to stand up for higher education at this time. He spoke briefly to the Institute's concerns with regard to each of the four areas covered by the working groups:

- **Finances**: There will be efforts to increase the tax on university endowments, which was initiated for approximately 30 universities during the first Trump administration. MIT's endowment may be reduced as a result, or there could be changes in terms of incentives for charitable giving, which would impact new funds coming into the Institute. Another possibility could be compromises where universities are told what to do with their endowments. Beyond simply the level of the tax, there could be impacts on federal funds coming to the schools that pay the endowment tax, e.g. if a school pays the endowment tax, they won't be allowed over a certain amount in research grants.

- **Science Policy**: In addition to perennial issues like stem cell research, MIT has been paying particular attention to growing bipartisan concerns regarding biosecurity and the possibility of synthetic biology+AI. Some extreme proposals would define problematic research very broadly and could lead to, for instance, increased regulation of any kind of research involving viruses or bacteria.
- **International**: There could be tighter visa rules, as well as proposals to, for instance, prohibit research collaborations with China or other specified nations, given an increased concern in recent years about universities being sources of information for foreign countries that the US does not trust.
- **Campus Life**: Here the Institute is concerned about free speech and diversity issues, and the possibility of federal regulation in these areas. There are bills that have already passed the House, some with Democratic support, that would start putting in limitations on free speech. The Department of Education and the Department of Justice both have power that could be used in various ways to enforce such regulations. With regard to diversity, it is a stated Republican goal to chip away at, if not eliminate, diversity programs, which could be legislated relatively easily in an academic setting.

MIT is, however, well-positioned in this environment, as the Institute has a strong reputation and is viewed as a technical school that runs on merit, and there is broad support for more research in areas that MIT is best known for. In addition, MIT is perhaps better prepared than other schools, given issues on campus over the past year, as well as the efforts of the working groups.

Faculty noted that while it was important to continue advocacy in Washington, it was also important for MIT to look inward and review both its fiscal allocations and its efficiency, as well as programs like DEI that are likely to draw fire. A crisis is a great opportunity for self-reflection, examination, and self-improvement. It is time to honestly assess what is essential to the Institute's mission and values, what is working, and what is ineffective "bloat".

Some of the questions to Professor Zuber and Mr. Goldston focused on how to best advocate for MIT's importance as an academic institution, and whether MIT can take a leadership role in standing up for higher education without drawing unnecessary ire. Professor Zuber responded that MIT needs to engage, to build relationships and offer the administration at the White House and Congress helpful ideas for making America great. Standing up for the Institute's fundamental principles should be done as part of a constructive conversation. MIT can also capitalize on being a STEM-heavy institution, working in areas that could be helpful to leaders in Washington. Mr. Goldston added that the MIT administration is committed to active participation with MIT's Washington office activities. It is also important that faculty at MIT stand together and present a united front, rather than showing divisions on important issues such as free speech.

Another question related to potential impacts on the Institute's undocumented students, postdocs, and graduate students. Mr. Goldston responded that the International Students Office had already put out a note to all MIT's international students alerting them to what they should watch out for. The Chancellor and the Vice President/General Counsel were also checking on DACA students, and the working group on international issues could look into getting the necessary data.

Concerns were raised regarding the potential financial impact of losing significant federal research funding and how that could be mitigated. Professor Zuber responded that the finance working group was looking at various scenarios for impacts to the budget, but that the endowment is not like an ATM where you can pull out as much as you want for whatever purpose.

There were also comments that MIT was not sufficiently publicizing its contributions on issues like climate change that are of interest to the general public and that politicians are greatly influenced by public opinion. In addition, if the Institute is perceived by the public as expensive, wasteful, elitist, and biased, politicians will be similarly influenced by this perception. Mr. Goldston agreed that providing a more positive view to the public should be a longer term effort, and he noted that efforts were underway on this with the MIT Office of Communications. This, however, would need to be addressed in parallel with dealing with the immediate crisis.

President Kornbluth expressed appreciation for all of these comments. She encouraged anyone with an ongoing relationship with Congressional representatives and staffers to communicate with them. MIT was also using the Corporation and alumni for additional behind-the-scenes networking, as well as working to develop a communications strategy around the notion that MIT is different from other universities and the articulation of the Institute's value to the nation and to the world.

3 Motion Presented at the October 16 Faculty Meeting

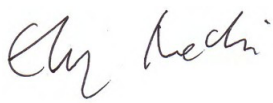
Time having run out, Professor Nancy Kanwisher, creator of the motion presented at the October 16 meeting, made a motion that this agenda item be placed as the first item on the December meeting agenda. The motion was duly seconded, and the result of the subsequent vote was 53 in favor and 18 opposed. Requiring only a simple majority of those voting, the motion passed.

New Business

Professor Michel DeGraff (SHASS Faculty-at-Large) spoke to express a number of concerns. His verbatim remarks are appended to these minutes as an addendum.

With no further new business, the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,



Professor Elly Nedivi
Associate Chair of the Faculty
December 5, 2024

Addendum to the Record of the November 20, 2024 Faculty Meeting

Verbatim Transcript(s) of Faculty Remarks by Request

Prof. Michel DeGraff | degraff@mit.edu | MIT Faculty Meeting, November 20, 2024

Many of you have already heard about the recent suspension of a PhD student and the banning of Issue #5 of the student-run magazine *Written Revolution.* I would like to put these disciplinary measures in the larger context of political repression at MIT where academic freedom & free speech are under threat.

I would like to do this in a scholarly way, appealing to the seminar I'm hosting this semester on “Language & linguistics for decolonization & liberation in Haiti, Palestine & Israel.” The seminar is sponsored by MIT Mind Hand Heart, but it has been censored by MIT Linguistics — on the pretext that it does not "fit our curriculum" and that I "lack expertise" to offer it.

Both pretexts are bogus in the context of a “SPECIAL Topics” elective seminar --- where “Special Topics” means topics OUTSIDE the regular curriculum. Furthermore, the very objective of advanced seminars at MIT Linguistics is ALWAYS to BUILD expertise in faculty’s new areas of interest. This is the intellectual privilege that my colleagues have enjoyed on a regular basis, but they’ve now denied this privilege to the sole BLACK faculty at MIT Linguistics.

So, given the reference we just heard about the McCarthy era, we should all be very VERY concerned about this new wave of censorship — the banning of my seminar and now my being kicked out of MIT Linguistics. These measures parallel the suspension of the afore-mentioned student --- another person of color at MIT ---and the banning of *Written Revolution* --- whose other editors and writers are by and large students of color as well. As far as I know, this level of threats against academic freedom and freedom of expression is a first at MIT.

Please note the Orwellian use of language both against the student and myself. The student who penned a scholarly article on the promises and limitations of “Pacifism” — an article that I plan to include in my future syllabi — has been called a “terrorist.” In the “separation” letter that I received from the SHASS Dean, without one iota of due process for my defense, I am accused of “chilling speech,” “intimidating” and “disrupting” at MIT Linguistics. I’m even accused of violating “time, place and manner” restrictions on free speech. How so, you may ask, when the majority of my communications have been in email? The one verbal communication I’ve had in this context is [a private conversation with Professor DeGraff’s department head]. And now it’s me who’s accused of “chilling speech,” “intimidating” and “disrupting.”

This seems like a classic case of accusations in a mirror and gaslighting.

Now let's address a structural issue that might affect the ways in which the MIT Administration has singled out students protesting against MIT's complicity with the genocide in Gaza. Since MIT Faculty meetings are NOT the rhetorical equivalent of the venerable Daily Wire which seems like a favorite publication among some of our colleagues, let's avoid anecdotal evidence and analyze robust data. The robust data here are from a Columbia University Master's Thesis in Human Rights by Holly Jackson. The title is self-explanatory:

> "The On-Campus Israel Lobby: How the Suppression of Palestinian Activism on US College Campuses Is a Multi-Million Dollar Foreign-Funded Industry"

Time was called at this juncture and Professor DeGraff was asked to stop speaking. Professor Fuller offered to include the remainder of his remarks as an addendum to the minutes, and Professor DeGraff requested that a transcript of his preceding remarks also be included. The following was not delivered orally during the meeting:

If MIT's disciplinary process is at all influenced by this lobby or by other outside forces, then we should all be very concerned. Consider, say, MIT's 1970 *Creative Renewal in a Time of Crisis, Report of the Commission on MIT Education*:

> "Since we are not now, and presumably will never become, an ivory-tower institution, we will always be vulnerable to outside pressure. The protection of MIT from such forces is the special responsibility of the Corporation."

So, I ask that all bans and suspensions and separations be removed immediately, pending due process and investigation of outside pressures on MIT's disciplinary processes.

***Note**: Professor DeGraff's remarks were redacted to remove identifying references to individuals and purported quotations from their communications with him.*