

October 22, 2025 Faculty Meeting: Summary Minutes

Summary

President Sally Kornbluth and Professor Roger Levy, Chair of the Faculty, chaired the meeting. The agenda comprised seven items:

- Vote on the Proposal to Move December Faculty Meetings to the Last Week of Classes
- Vote on the Motion to Accept the Recommendations of the Ad Hoc Committee on Faculty Newsletter Policies and Procedures
- Compact for Academic Excellence in Higher Education
- Search Process for Chair of the Faculty
- Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Future of the Arts at MIT
- Recommendations of the Ad Hoc Committee on Academic Freedom and Campus Expression
- New Business

With 58 members of the Faculty present, a quorum was reached at the start of the meeting. Approval of the September 17 minutes was held over to the November meeting.

1 Vote on the Proposal to Move December Faculty Meetings to the Last Week of Classes

At the September 17 Faculty meeting, Professor Roger Levy, Chair of the Faculty, presented a motion to change *Rules and Regulations of the Faculty* so that the December Faculty Meetings will be held on the Wednesday of the last week of classes, rather than during finals week; the motion was duly seconded. (For details of the motion, see the minutes from the September meeting.) Professor Levy reminded faculty of the rationale for the motion, after which he called for a vote. Because the motion involved changes to *Rules and Regulations*, it required a three-fifths majority of faculty voting to be in favor, with a minimum of 30. With 53 in favor and 0 opposed, the motion passed.

2 Vote on the Motion to Accept the Recommendations of the Ad Hoc Committee on Faculty Newsletter Policies and Procedures

At the September 17 Faculty meeting, Professor Susan Silbey, chair of the Ad Hoc Committee on Faculty Newsletter Policies and Procedures, presented the committee's recommendations and made a motion, duly seconded, that the faculty accept the recommendations. (For details see the September minutes.) Professor Silbey reminded the faculty of the recommendations. Prior to the vote, a faculty member expressed concern regarding a negative experience with the FNL and asked that this concern be included in Professor Silbey's report. Professor Levy noted that the faculty officers would not be taking addenda to remarks in terms of the Institute Faculty Meeting minutes. Another faculty member raised a question regarding term limits that they would also like taken into consideration. At this juncture, Professor Levy requested that faculty go to the voting website to vote on whether to accept the committee's recommendations. With 55 in favor and seven opposed, the motion passed.

3 Compact for Academic Excellence in Higher Education

President Kornbluth spoke next about MIT's response to the Compact for Academic Excellence in Higher Education sent to her at the start of October from the US Department of Education (DoE) with a request for comments; this letter was sent to nine universities. She expressed her gratitude to the many faculty who provided input as she and her team were considering the Institute's response. Her sense was that, though not everyone was entirely in agreement, there was a reasonable consensus. On October 10, President Kornbluth sent a letter to the DoE explaining why MIT was not able to support the proposed approach to the issues facing higher education. Since her letter, six of the eight other universities also declined to participate, with no response at that time from the remaining two.

President Kornbluth asked if anyone wanted the opportunity to say anything else. One faculty member expressed concern that the Institute had lost an opportunity to partner with an external entity to improve itself in ways that might not be possible with solely inside forces involved. Another suggested that it might have been preferable to try to negotiate rather than to not engage at all. Yet another expressed gratitude to President Kornbluth for her leadership.

President Kornbluth responded that the premise itself was problematic: she found troubling the idea of making an agreement that would lead to judgment of science based on anything but merit. The bedrock of the scientific establishment has been peer review. Making judgments on science based on political alignment or having science adjudicated by non-scientists was not a viable pathway. Regarding having a "seat at the table", she reminded faculty that she spent a lot of time meeting with people both in Congress and in the Trump administration. She expressed willingness to talk with faculty about things that could improve at the Institute, and she called on not only MIT but higher education as a community to reflect on areas for potential change, noting that self-reflection is always important. She ended by commenting on MIT's partnering with the government in areas such as quantum and AI, among others.

Professor Levy concluded the discussion with a few personal remarks about the process by which the MIT community digested and collectively responded to the Compact. He commented on the extraordinary passion and near unanimity on this issue, but noted that, at the same time, there was a broad diversity of opinions, even among those wanted to see the Compact rejected. He expressed that the faculty and the broader community should feel proud of having both the shared direction and also the ability to collegially express differences of opinion. He closed by thanking President Kornbluth for her leadership in putting MIT in a true leading position within academia with respect to this issue.

4 Search Process for Chair of the Faculty

Professor Rick Danheiser, chair of the Committee on Nominations (CoN) and Chair Emeritus of the Faculty (2019-21), spoke next, describing the committee's processes for identifying faculty to nominate to fill vacancies on the Standing Committees of the Faculty (except the CoN, whose members are recruited by the current faculty officers), as well as to identify the next Chair of the Faculty, who will serve during 2026-27 as Chair-elect, and from 2027 to 2029 as Chair. All of these nominees will be proposed for election by the faculty in Spring 2026.

Professor Danheiser focused in particular on the process to identify, review, and recruit candidates for the position of Chair of the Faculty. He described the roles and responsibilities of the Chair, noting that major roles include leading the faculty governance system, chairing the Faculty Policy Committee (essentially the executive committee of faculty governance), and representing the faculty perspective at meetings with the Institute's senior leadership, including not only regular one-on-one meetings, but also meetings of Academic Council and the Corporation. (See Attachment E to the October agenda for full details.) Professor Danheiser noted the increased importance of the Chair of the Faculty in providing the faculty perspective in recent years as a result of the interesting times the Institute has been experiencing.

Professor Danheiser provided an overview of the nominations timetable. The CoN will present its proposed nominees for committee slots and faculty officers (Chair, this year) at the March Faculty meeting. *Rules and Regulations of the Faculty* provides for the nomination of additional individuals for open positions, either at the April Faculty meeting or for one week following that meeting. The election, managed by Institutional Research, will take place online for one week prior to the May Faculty meeting.

He highlighted that the initial list of potential candidates for Chair is composed of all the suggestions from faculty on the annual committee service preference survey, including everyone suggested in the surveys during the current year and several previous years. Professor Danheiser encouraged faculty to continue to reach out over the next month with suggestions. The preliminary list is prioritized by taking into consideration factors such as current significant leadership roles and requests to opt out of service for the next academic year. In addition, several former Chairs were assisting the CoN in defining important and desirable qualities in a candidate for this role. The CoN takes these into account when winnowing the list down to fewer than 20 candidates. CoN members then contact these individuals to ascertain their level of interest. The final step for potential candidates is an interview with the committee.

5 Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Future of the Arts at MIT

Professor Peter Fisher, chair of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Future of the Arts at MIT, and committee member Professor Keeril Makan provided faculty with an overview of the committee's work and recommendations. Professor Fisher noted that the previous comprehensive look at the arts at MIT was in 1987 (the Joskow Report), and over the ensuing 40 years, almost everything recommended in the report had come to pass. Professor Fisher emphasized that the arts have been embedded in MIT from the beginning – they are in fact part of the MIT Charter – and that MIT was ranked first in the arts and humanities in the 2025 *Times Higher Education* World University Ranking. In addition, the arts at MIT today benefit from leadership from two different deans (SHASS and SA+P) as well as a Vice Provost. The committee's charge was to conduct a broad review of the arts at MIT, including how the arts intersect with science and technology, and to establish guiding principles.

Professor Makan next explained the three guiding themes of the report: curriculum, programmatic components, and student life. Since the Joskow Report, successful curricular programs related to Theater Arts have been developed, as well as successful collaborations between SHASS and the School of Engineering in the realms of music, technology, and computation. With regard to programmatic issues, the Center for Arts, Science, and Technology

was highlighted for its impact on bringing together arts, sciences, and technology, and the establishment of the Morningside Academy of Design was acknowledged. The Vice Provost for the Arts organized programs that benefit students, and the Division of Student Life has its own programs as well. Furthermore, the Council for Arts at MIT (CAMIT), created in 1972 by MIT President Jerome Wiesner, brings together friends and donors who support the arts. CAMIT provides funding for student projects and contributes to the curriculum, thus benefiting many across the Institute. In addition, there are at least 49 student-led arts groups at MIT, some of which are completely independent of the curriculum. Finally, over a dozen new arts venues have been created since the Joskow Report, including the MIT Museum, a Media Lab extension, the Metropolitan Warehouse, and the new music and theater buildings.

The committee grouped its guiding principles as artistic thinking, artistic excellence, and the arts community. In terms of artistic thinking, it was emphasized that the arts engage with ambiguity, offering multiple solutions that are sometimes contradictory. There is also a connection to engineering because some of the arts lead to the creation of objects. With regard to artistic excellence, MIT is internationally recognized for its artists and scholars, which brings positive attention to MIT. In addition, the School of Engineering has been a great partner, helping to make MIT competitive with its peers. Regarding community, while the report does not focus specifically on well-being, it is generally appreciated that the arts are good for health and wellbeing. The arts nourish people, help people to grieve, and offer opportunities for celebration. The arts also help the MIT community to cope with difficult times.

Professor Makan turned last to the committee's vision for the future of the arts at MIT. It was noted that the committee's report has many specific examples, and it was emphasized that the arts rely upon integration with science and technology as an avenue for helping to address some of the world's great challenges. The arts can help people to think differently about how to solve problems.

Professor Fisher noted that one of the important next steps is the recruitment of a new Vice Provost for the Arts, who will help to shape the course of the arts at the Institute. He then turned to several issues the committee raised. One is the problem of having courses and programs that are over-subscribed. If a Physics class is oversubscribed, students are not turned away, but rather new sections are created. Ensuring that students have access to learning opportunities should be similarly extended to the arts. In addition, some art takes a physical form, and it can be difficult to install art because there needs to be approval from many groups on campus. The committee recommended establishing a new channel for granting permission to create art installations. There is also the issue of awareness: people both in the MIT community and beyond are often not aware of art installations and arts activities. The committee emphasized that the arts should be made an integral part of the MIT brand.

Professor Fisher concluded the formal presentation by sharing that there is great interest in establishing an interdisciplinary center for the arts, and that the arts offer some reprieve in a world saddled with uncertainties.

In the ensuing discussion, one faculty member asked about the definition of "rigor" in the arts. Professor Fisher stated that rigor is part of artistic expression. As examples, he stated that

musicians practice for hours to get their performances right, and writers strive to polish their messaging. Professor Makan stated that one expects the same sort of rigorous approach to the arts as is expected for science and engineering. Regardless of the discipline, MIT has high standards of excellence.

Another faculty member expressed gratitude to former Vice Provost for the Arts Philip Khoury, emphasizing that he had done an outstanding job of promoting the arts at MIT. Yet another faculty member suggested that the report might be a useful tool in the search process for the new Vice Provost for the Arts.

The discussion concluded at this juncture.

6 Recommendations of the Ad Hoc Committee on Academic Freedom and Campus Expression

Professors Peko Hosoi and Michael Sipser, co-chairs of the Ad Hoc Committee on Academic Freedom and Campus Expression (CAFCE), next provided a report on the committee's efforts and recommendations.

CAFCE was convened by the prior Chair of the Faculty, Professor Mary Fuller – now succeeded by Professor Levy – and President Kornbluth. Professor Hosoi shared the committee's charge, which was to provide a roadmap to implement the recommendations of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Free Expression (FEWG), and to serve as a resource for the MIT community when there are contested matters of speech. Because there were a lot of issues, including events, pertaining to free speech over the past year and a half, most of the committee's time ended up being dedicated to addressing these issues. This required extensive work by the committee, amounting to over 50 meetings of the full committee, plus subcommittee meetings. There was also extensive engagement with members of the MIT community. Importantly, the committee members read *MIT Policies and Procedures* and the *Mind and Hand Book* thoroughly, enabling them to point people to relevant policies to consider when thinking about how to adjudicate their issues.

For many meetings, CAFCE served in a consultative role for leadership on campus who had to adjudicate a contested issue regarding free expression. The committee was able to build consistency into the system by offering a broader context, given its more global view of issues across campus. This included sharing strategies that worked well for others in the past. The committee was also able to help leadership to consider an issue in the context of the [MIT Statement on Freedom of Expression and Academic Freedom](#). In addition to these activities, CAFCE contributed to changes in policy. While the committee itself did not have the authority to change a policy, it was able to make recommendations, such as to the administration or to Academic Council, which would take these recommendations into account when considering policy changes.

It is of particular note that all of CAFCE's recommendations and statements are available on the [CAFCE website](#), which brings together information from a multitude of sources and serves as a valuable resource for questions about matters related to freedom of expression, academic freedom, or free speech.

Professor Hosoi stated that the most important lesson learned was that it is useful to have a group with a global vision of the types of issues that are happening across campus. This enables communication in a confidential way for those who are struggling with related issues. Another important facet was that the committee needed to be able to communicate about controversial issues in an open way. Trust among committee members was critical, since members needed to not be fearful that their opinions would be shared outside the committee.

One of the committee's recommendations is to continue to have a similar body moving forward. For this committee to operate successfully, it is critical for those who are joining to view their role as listeners who aim to find common ground. It is essential that committee members understand that the goal is to achieve a shared statement that the committee is willing to sign off on, despite each individual's own opinions and biases. Professor Hosoi also emphasized that having a diversity of voices on the committee was very important. The committee is relatively large, but it turned out to be important to have staff, faculty, and students all participating since policies impact people from different groups in different ways. Finally, to make such a committee successful, the members need to be willing to commit a substantial amount of time.

The following are CAFCE's specific recommendations:

- Because issues around free expression and academic freedom remain important on campus, the committee recommends establishing a faculty-led standing committee whose charge involves addressing issues related to free expression and academic freedom.
- As this would be a standing committee, nominations of faculty would go through the Committee on Nominations. Student members would be recommended by the Graduate Student Council and the Undergraduate Association per their usual practices.
- It is hard to predict what challenges lie ahead, so CAFCE recommends that the committee be reviewed by the faculty officers on a regular cadence so that the committee can be dissolved if appropriate.

Professor Levy gratefully acknowledged the extensive work done by the committee and opened the floor for discussion.

Emphasizing the value of evaluating the application of abstract principles using real world examples, one faculty member stated that they had experienced a situation where their own free speech had been repressed on campus and they offered their experience as a case study. Professor Hosoi thanked the faculty member for this offer. She stated that it would be valuable to create a book of case studies – however, a significant challenge is that many people came to CAFCE in confidence, so there needs to be collaborative work to determine how the principles of a case could be shared without violating privacy issues. The faculty member additionally noted perceived conflict between collective academic freedom and individual academic freedom, and advocated that the two should be explored to understand the real limits of academic freedom. Professor Hosoi expressed that she would be happy to follow up.

Another faculty member commented on the report's portrayal of the First Amendment in the MIT Statement on Freedom of Expression and Academic Freedom. The report correctly states

that “MIT has the legal right to apply further internal policies that align with its mission and values, even when it is not protected by the First Amendment.” However, the Statement also says: “MIT does not protect direct threats, harassment, plagiarism, or other speech that falls outside the boundaries of the First Amendment.” This implies that MIT protects speech that is protected by the First Amendment but it does not say so explicitly. However, this is slightly different from CAFCE’s emphasis. Professor Sipser responded that this issue was discussed at length by FEWG, and that the statement that was voted upon by the faculty also includes comments on the First Amendment protections. In addition, Professor Sipser emphasized that the MIT Statement also talks about community values and behaving in a respectful way. After further discussion with the faculty member, Professors Sipser and Hosoi agreed to take a second look at the issue being raised. Later in the discussion, another faculty member stated that there was a statement in the report that the time, place, and manner of protected speech can be constrained or restricted, and that this statement resolves the suggested contradiction.

A concern was raised that faculty should be teaching students not just what one cannot say, but also what one should not say, and it was further stated that recent conflicts on campus could be attributed to the lack of such education. Professor Hosoi responded by stating that CAFCE’s charge was to implement FEWG’s recommendations, which included recommendations around education and other kinds of programming activities on campus. As such, she sees the role of the future committee to include following up on these recommendations.

Professor Levy concluded the discussion by thanking the working group once again and acknowledging the relevance of their work going forward.

7 New Business

A faculty member referenced a recent UN report regarding the conduct of Israel, as well as other resolutions and reports by other associations and organizations, and expressed their sentiment that there is a tension between MIT’s “Mind and Heart” mission for a better world and [alleged] complicity with entities engaged in genocide. The faculty member urged MIT faculty to consider how the Institute might be able to help stop the political economy that enables genocide, aligning with its mission to tackle pressing problems and making the world a better place.

With no new business, the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,



Professor Bevin P. Engelward
Associate Chair of the Faculty
November 12, 2025