

## September 18, 2019 Faculty Meeting: Summary Minutes

### Summary

Professor Rick L. Danheiser (Chemistry), Chair of the Faculty, chaired the meeting at the request of President L. Rafael Reif. The agenda comprised one item: a discussion of MIT's receipt of donations from Mr. Jeffrey Epstein and related issues.

There were approximately 315 members of the Faculty in attendance, as well as approximately 225 non-faculty observers.

President Reif welcomed those in attendance to the first Faculty meeting of the 2019-2020 academic year, and then turned the meeting over to Professor Danheiser.

Professor Danheiser introduced himself and the other new faculty officers: Professor Duane Boning (EECS), Associate Chair, and Professor David Singer (Political Science), Secretary. He expressed his profound distress and shame on learning of Mr. Epstein's association with MIT and said that he found it unacceptable that this evil man used the good name of MIT to enhance his reputation and perhaps to help him feel better about himself. He stated that it will be a priority of faculty governance, working with the administration, to develop measures to ensure that this cannot happen again. Professor Danheiser reminded the participants that the goal of the meeting is to give as many faculty as possible an opportunity to express their views. Institute Faculty meetings are open, meaning that any non-faculty member of the MIT community may attend as an observer. However, speaking privileges are reserved for only two groups: members of the Faculty as defined in *Rules and Regulations of the Faculty* and certain students: the presidents and vice presidents of the Undergraduate Association and Graduate Student Council, and the student members of the Faculty Policy Committee, the Committee on the Undergraduate Program, and the Committee on Graduate Programs. In addition, beyond the official recording for the purpose of the minutes, recording of Faculty meetings is not permitted.

President Reif spoke first; his full remarks can be found in the appendix to these minutes.

President Reif began his remarks by noting that today's discussion pertains to all of MIT, not just the Media Lab, and he acknowledged the pain, sadness, and disappointment of the community. He expressed hope that the meeting would help MIT to regain its balance and move forward.

His remarks then addressed three issues. First, the results of the fact-finding exercise will be shared with the Executive Committee of the Corporation, which is the body to which he reports as president; the Executive Committee will decide how the information will be shared. Second, in response to questions about how he could have signed an acknowledgement letter to Mr. Epstein without remembering it, President Reif said that he signs many standard thank-you letters every week, amounting to several hundred each year. And third, he acknowledged that there was frustration with the gradual release of information since August 22, but he explained that each letter to the community revealed new facts as they emerged. He expressed regret that some faculty members believed that he was distancing himself from responsibility, which was the opposite of what he intended with each communication. He acknowledged that he made

mistakes of judgment and now seeks to rebuild trust. He also noted that MIT's Office of Violence Prevention and Response is working to identify appropriate charities that serve victims of sexual abuse.

He then shared a summary of lessons learned. There is a process problem that needs to be addressed, and also a culture problem. He agreed that MIT needs a new set of principles to guide whether and how donations are accepted, and must also address the power relationships that prevented students and staff from reporting bad decisions and behaviors they observed. He noted the incredible bravery of several Media Lab members. He also said this moment of crisis must be a moment of reckoning, and that female faculty, postdocs, students, and staff have called this a "last straw" moment.

In closing, President Reif said he felt a deep responsibility to help repair a system and a culture that failed the people of MIT. He said he hoped to regain the community's trust, and the first step is to listen to the community.

Mr. Mark DiVincenzo, General Counsel, next provided an update on the fact-finding process. He noted that, as previously announced, an outside law firm, Goodwin Procter, was retained by the Executive Committee of the MIT Corporation to do a fact-finding review to answer questions related to the gifts to MIT from Mr. Epstein. The findings will be provided to both the Executive Committee and to President Reif. Most of the senior administrators report directly to President Reif, and as such, he will make any decisions regarding any of them; the Executive Committee will review any such decisions. In addition, the officers of the Corporation serve at the pleasure of the Corporation, meaning that the Executive Committee will make any decisions related to the President or any other officers of the Corporation.

Provost Martin Schmidt commented briefly on two related matters:

First, in August 2019, President Reif asked him to convene a group to examine the facts around the Epstein donations, review MIT's current processes, and identify any lessons for appropriate ways to improve them. Provost Schmidt and Professor Danheiser were working closely together on the charge to and composition of this group. However, Provost Schmidt noted that in addition to processes, it is also important that MIT develop a new set of principles, clearly grounded in the community's values. In February 2019, President Reif asked Professor Susan Silbey, then Chair of the Faculty, to work with Associate Provost Richard Lester to form a committee to consider MIT's principles for international engagements. Because of substantial overlap between these two groups, Provost Schmidt and Professor Danheiser were in agreement for the need to create an analogous group or to modify the existing international group to ensure alignment of the principles and guidelines as they are developed.

Second, School of Architecture and Planning Dean Hashim Sarkis has formed a leadership committee to assist in the running of the Media Lab as they reflect on the Media Lab's day-to-day operations, consider potential changes, and seek new leadership. This committee is chaired by Professor Pattie Maes and includes Professors Deb Roy and Tod Machover, Vice President for Research Maria Zuber, and Vice President for Human Resources Ramona Allen. They sent a message to the Media Lab community the previous day to report on their plans for operations

and for actions intended to facilitated learning about the Media Lab and to encourage deeper reflection. They plan to stand up five working groups to focus on five key areas: culture, funding, governance and leadership, student-advisor relationships, and the research charter, ethics and rigor.

Professor Danheiser reminded those in attendance regarding speaking privileges and asked that each person speak for no longer than approximately three minutes to allow for as many as possible to speak. He invited anyone who might not have an opportunity to speak to submit comments or questions in writing to a special email address; these would be included in an appendix to the minutes.

Twenty-four individuals had the opportunity to speak during the remainder of the meeting. They are listed here, in the order in which they spoke:

Heather Paxson and Lisa Parks  
Susan Silbey  
Rosalind Picard and Linda Griffith  
Angelika Amon  
Ceasar McDowell and Ruth Perry  
Yossi Sheffi  
Ed Bertschinger  
Jacob White  
Sasha Costanza-Chock  
Leigh Royden  
Pattie Maes  
Alex Slocum  
Mahi Elango (UA)  
Kieran Setiya  
Alex Joerger (GSC)  
Craig Carter  
Elly Nedivi  
Heather Lechtman  
Jonathan King  
Gigliola Staffilani  
Hashim Sarkis

Though unusual, it was deemed important that speakers were granted the option of having the full text of their remarks included in the record. Full texts or summaries of all remarks, in the same order as above, can be found in the appendix to these minutes.

Speakers' remarks ranged from critiques of the administration; calls for the development of principles to guide MIT's donations and engagements; a written call to action signed by female faculty members; a defense of the administration; personal stories of hardship; and calls for unity and healing. There was also a motion made and seconded to establish an ad hoc faculty committee to protect academic integrity; the full text of the motion is available in the appendix.

A secondary motion was made to delay discussion of the motion until the October 16, 2019 Institute Faculty meeting; the motion passed by majority vote.

President Reif expressed his gratitude to each speaker over the course of the meeting. At the end, he thanked everyone for their comments, noting his respect for the diverse perspectives. He added that he would like to continue the conversation and to address cultural aspects that were mentioned.

With no new business, the meeting was adjourned.

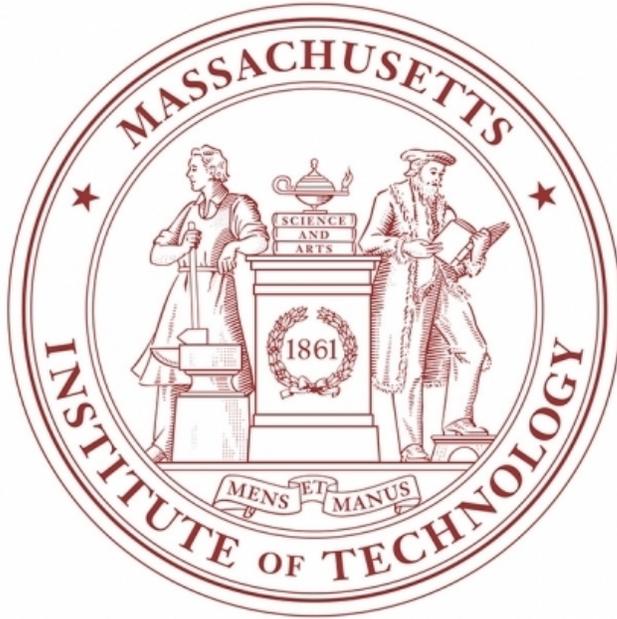
Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David A. Singer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "D" and a long, sweeping tail.

Professor David A. Singer  
Secretary of the Faculty  
September 29, 2019

## **APPENDIX**

**Remarks Made at the September 18, 2019 Institute Faculty Meeting**



## Remarks by President Reif at Institute faculty meeting

**MIT News Office**  
**September 18, 2019**

*The following are the remarks, as prepared for delivery, by President L. Rafael Reif at today's Institute faculty meeting.*

Good afternoon, and welcome to our first faculty meeting of the year.

Out of fairness to our colleagues in the Media Lab, I want to start with a correction to the agenda that we sent out to faculty this week. The title for this section read "Media Lab."

But it is obvious that the topics we will discuss this afternoon concern all of MIT.

Let me take this moment to express my appreciation to the Media Lab faculty, students and staff, and to the interim leadership team, who are working so hard to begin a new chapter.

Over the last few weeks, our whole community has experienced deep pain, sadness and disappointment. Many of you have expressed those feelings to me directly. I know that many of you are angry about the whole situation, and angry at me.

But I will not presume that I know or understand how all of you are feeling or how you have experienced these events. Learning more about that is a central goal of this meeting.

I do know that this is a disorienting time for all of us at the Institute. I have spent my entire career in this community and this institution. I look out at all of you this afternoon, and I see faculty colleagues I have known for decades, and many others just at the beginning of amazing careers. I see students who have chosen MIT as the place to start their journey.

### RELATED

[President L. Rafael Reif](#)

### ARCHIVES



[Letter regarding preliminary fact-finding about MIT and Jeffrey Epstein](#)

I see staff who came to MIT specifically to support the Institute's inspiring work. And I have been hearing from alumni around the world who care deeply about the strength and stature of this institution.

I know all of you work as hard as you can every day to advance our mission. And I know you are accustomed to feeling proud of MIT.

I am too.

So I am deeply distressed, and I am deeply sorry, that steps which I and others took, and failed to take, have been part of bringing this trouble to all of you – to the people of MIT.

I understand that I have let you down and damaged your trust in me, and that our actions have injured both the Institute's reputation and the fabric of our community.

Yet I also know that MIT's reputation is firmly rooted in the brilliant work that you and our whole community have been doing, and sharing with the world, for decades, and that you will continue to do. And I know that the fabric of MIT is incredibly strong. I hope the conversation we have today will be a first step towards restoring that fabric – and making it even stronger.

The purpose of today's meeting is to hear the concerns of faculty and students, to do our best to answer your questions and to help the Institute begin to regain its balance and momentum.

Before we open the discussion, I would like to address three questions I have heard repeatedly in the last few days and then highlight a few things I have learned in the last month. To the questions:

First: Many people have been asking how the results of the fact-finding will be shared with the community. The decision on this matter rests with the group that I report to: the Executive Committee of the MIT Corporation.

The goal of the review is to bring clarity to the interactions with Epstein so that we can correct what went wrong, and then work together to establish principles to prevent anything like it from happening again. I do not know how or what the Executive Committee will choose to share. But I know that they are mindful, as I am, that, as MIT begins to recover from this period of distress, crucial information must be shared, so the community can have confidence in the fact-finding process.

Second: Many students have asked how I could have signed that acknowledgment letter without asking questions, and how I could fail to remember it. The answer is simple: I did not recognize the name, and I sign many standard thank-you letters every week. That includes several hundred letters every year thanking individuals for contributions to the Institute.

Third: I know that for many of you, the four letters I have sent to the community since August 22 were maddening – a drip-drip-drip of information. I make no excuses for that frustrating result, and I certainly wish I could have done it differently. But in each case, I was responding to the facts I had at the time. So I would like to explain why I sent each of those letters.

On August 22, I wrote because it seemed vital to share what we knew then about the total of

Epstein's gifts to MIT, to apologize to the girls and young women he victimized, and to begin to make amends by committing to contribute the money to a relevant charity and by launching an internal review.

On September 7<sup>th</sup>, after the *New Yorker* article, the situation clearly demanded external fact-finding, so I wrote again. Two days later, I wrote again to make sure the community heard from me, not from the media, that we had engaged a fact-finding team at Goodwin Procter.

That letter was also important to give individuals a direct way to share information with the factfinders and to share the initial next steps for the Media Lab community. The final letter conveyed new information that the factfinders had learned – information that I did not have clarity about before then. I wanted to dispel any assumptions you might have drawn from my earlier letters and replace them with definite facts, right away.

I know this last letter in particular generated confusion and dismay. I was trying to convey “just the facts” of what I had learned from the factfinders, without editorializing about them. But after hearing from many of you, I understand now that, unfortunately, you understood me to be trying to distance myself from responsibility for the events and decisions involved. I especially regret that, since it is the opposite of what I intended.

In the end, as I have said, I made mistakes of judgment. I take responsibility for those errors. And I hope to take responsibility for the work that must begin now: repairing the damage and rebuilding trust.

MIT is known for its willingness to face difficult facts, and to run *towards* problems, not away from them. I am trying to do that now.

We are already taking some steps in that direction:

As you know, I asked Provost Marty Schmidt to launch an internal review of how we assess donor relationships and gift agreements, so we can correct the flaws in our process and practices. He'll talk briefly about that in a moment, as well as about the transition team at the Media Lab.

The outside law firm, Goodwin Procter, is fully engaged in its fact-finding now. At the end of my remarks, Vice President and General Counsel Mark DiVincenzo will give an update on that process.

And to follow through on our earlier commitment, we are working with MIT's Office of Violence Prevention and Response to identify appropriate charities that serve victims of sexual abuse, like Jeffrey Epstein's young victims – the victims whose suffering we failed to see.

Which brings me to what I have learned.

The practical steps I just mentioned are necessary. But the two reviews focus mainly on *process*. And, as many of you have told me very clearly, we do have a process problem – but what we *really* have is a *culture problem*, because, as I am learning, our processes and practices reflect some entrenched and destructive attitudes and cultural assumptions at MIT.

I believe they fall into two categories:

The first is around money. From conversations across our community, I know that many people have deep concerns about sources we have relied on to raise funds for the work of the Institute. In this time of growing fortunes and shrinking federal funds, we need to look at everything from the changing nature of the donor population to how we should weigh the political, cultural and economic impacts of donors' behavior. We need to examine the issues associated with anonymous giving – and much more.

In short, people are telling me that to guide how we choose to accept philanthropic gifts, we need to develop a new set of *principles*, clearly grounded in our community's values. I agree.

We also need to work on addressing the power relationships and other cultural factors that kept people, especially students and staff, from feeling that they could question or stop bad decisions much sooner.

For me, the last few weeks have been a time to reflect on the incredible bravery of the several members of the Media Lab who took the risk of calling out the bad judgments and bad practices they saw. As an institution, we owe them a debt of gratitude.

And beyond the serious problems around gifts and donors, I have heard a second area of intense concern. Female faculty, post-docs, students and staff across MIT are telling me that this is a “last-straw” moment, that allowing Jeffrey Epstein to stain our reputation was only the latest example of how many in our community, and the tech world in general, devalue the lives, experiences and contributions of women and girls.

I am humbled that it took this cascade of misjudgments for me to truly see this persistent dynamic and appreciate its full impact. It's now clear to me that the culture that made possible the mistakes around Jeffrey Epstein has prevailed for much too long at MIT. We need to stop looking away from bad behavior and start taking the time to see what it costs us as a community. This moment of crisis must be the moment of reckoning – and a turn towards real accountability.

The questions raised in the last month are profound, especially the cultural ones. Some have even asked if MIT has lost its way – if the Institute we all love has changed fundamentally and irretrievably. For me, the answer is an emphatic *no*. MIT is still MIT. It is still the remarkable community that drew us all here in the first place.

But this disturbing period has shed a harsh new light on some elements of our culture that are serving us very poorly.

Since I played a role in this problem, I feel a deep responsibility to help repair a system and a culture that failed the people of MIT.

We need to identify and root out the cultural factors that contributed to these troubling errors and outcomes, so we can prevent damage like this in the future. We need to examine honestly what is wrong and work together to correct it. We need better processes, of course – better administrative guardrails. But we also need to make sure that, from our principles to our culture, the path forward is shaped by our community's essential values. Because what we *really* want is a values path so clear and firm that people never have to run up against the guardrails at all.

I do believe that institutions are capable of serious, deliberate change. Along with MIT's other senior leaders, I am committed to, and I am certain we are capable of, real change.

But cultural change is the hardest of all. Which means that achieving this transformation will take the sustained commitment and creativity of the whole community.

In other words – we need your help. I need your help.

Right now, I know that the most important thing that I and MIT's other senior leaders can do to “run toward” this problem is to *listen* – to listen to all of you.

This is a difficult moment, but MIT will learn from it – I have learned from it, I will keep striving to learn from it, my senior leadership will learn from it. I hope I can begin to regain your trust – and I believe that together we can, and we will, find a constructive path forward.

---

Topics: [President L. Rafael Reif](#) [Administration](#) [Faculty](#) [Staff](#) [Students](#)

---

## About This Website

This Website is maintained by the MIT News Office, part of the Office of Communications.

MIT News Office • Building 11-400  
Massachusetts Institute of Technology • Cambridge, MA 02139-4307

*This letter originated with a small group of senior women faculty in SHASS and SAP at MIT. A group of tenured women faculty members from across various schools were invited to comment and contribute. We understand that senior women faculty and others at MIT have a range of thoughts, opinions, and feelings about this situation. Please read this as a partial beginning to a larger conversation and collective plan of action. This letter can be found and signed at: <https://concernedatmit.weebly.com/>*

September 16, 2019

To President Rafael Reif and Provost Marty Schmidt:

We write as senior women faculty members (current and emerita) of MIT to share our deep distress over the MIT/Epstein revelations and our profound disappointment in learning of the apparent complicity of administrative leadership. We write also to encourage efforts to uncover the truth about and learn from the current crisis. This letter is a call for integrity and action.

From various departments across MIT, we are gravely concerned about the situation that has emerged: Institute leaders, faculty, and lab directors at MIT may have violated campus fundraising procedures. They certainly violated Institute values not only by accepting money from, but also by inviting onto campus Jeffrey Epstein, a “level three” (high risk of repeat offense) registered sex offender. MIT cultivated a relationship with Epstein over time that rewarded, empowered, and elevated him. With the approval of administrative leadership, faculty and staff attempted to conceal that relationship from those they knew it would disturb. Some students and staff who were asked to collude were made to feel morally compromised. Taking Epstein’s money suggested a willingness to turn a blind eye to the impact of his crimes, which included procuring the prostitution of a minor. The fact that this situation was even *thinkable* at MIT is profoundly disturbing, and is symptomatic of broader, more structural problems, involving gender and race, in MIT’s culture. It is time for fundamental change.

You have appointed the Goodwin Procter law firm to investigate fundraising practices and MIT personnel involved in this situation. This investigation follows a series of loudly-voiced concerns about MIT’s acceptance of funding from controversial sources. While the ethics of fundraising are crucially important to us, we also strongly believe that the significant gender and sexual implications of the MIT/Epstein relationship must not be lost in these financial investigations and discussions.

Epstein’s victims, survivors, and their families have experienced additional degradation and damage because of MIT’s actions, as have our students, faculty, and staff. By allowing Epstein’s MIT relationships to flourish, the Institute failed in its obligation to provide a safe and supportive environment. Knowing that Epstein was invited to campus offices, survivors of sexual assault, rape, and/or sexual abuse — of whom there are many in this community — have been shaken. How can MIT’s leadership be trusted when it appears that child prostitution and sex trafficking can be ignored in exchange for a financial contribution?

Working to address its long history of gender inequity, MIT has enacted some positive measures over the years to attract and retain women students and faculty and to support them on campus. Yet those efforts are now at risk of being eroded. Epstein's clandestine donations and visits to MIT are a stark reminder that "cutting edge" spaces of "technological innovation," at MIT no less than elsewhere, remain exclusionary zones of privilege.<sup>1</sup> Too often, academic fundraising efforts and the projects that follow reinforce, rather than dismantle, gendered and racialized hierarchies.<sup>2</sup> In 2019/20, there are 1,066 faculty members at MIT. Only 266 of them are women (178 are tenured; 88 are untenured; of all women only 21 are women of color). The Epstein situation has prompted many to question MIT's commitment to meaningful inclusion. Members of our community have been left feeling undervalued, deceived, and unsafe.

How will MIT respond? MIT leadership regularly describes and celebrates the fact that our values and diversity are essential to building a better world. Yet, to our great and heartfelt dismay, MIT's relationship with Epstein exposes a void where basic values should prevail, a cultural crisis that the administration must work to repair. Much needs to be done: from a thorough review of resource development practices and the inclusion of broader faculty participation in and oversight of fundraising, to providing robust support and resources to the women on campus. But that is just the beginning.

Former MIT President Chuck Vest is remembered for conducting a gender equity study in 1999, led by Professor Nancy Hopkins, and implementing many of its recommendations. How will the current MIT administration be remembered?

Sincerely,

[signatures below]

cc: Rick Danheiser, Chair of the Faculty

--

1 <https://medium.com/@zephoria/facing-the-great-reckoning-head-on-8fe434e10630>;

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/11/opinion/epstein-mit-media-lab.html>

2 <https://thetech.com/2019/08/29/joi-ito-needs-to-resign>

**Signed:**

*[signatures updated as of 2:15pm on 9/18/19]*

Elizabeth Wood - Professor, History

T.L. Taylor - Professor, CMS/W

Lisa Parks - Comparative Media Studies/Writing & STS

Helen Elaine Lee - Professor, CMS/W; Director, WGS

Heather Hendershot - Prof. of Film and Media, Comparative Media Studies/Writing

Caroline A. Jones - Professor / Architecture

Jennifer Light - Bern Dibner Professor, STS / DUSP

Jing Wang - Professor, CMS/W

Heather Paxson - Professor, Anthropology

Sally Haslanger - Ford Professor of Philosophy and Women's & Gender Studies  
Eugenie Brinkema - Associate Professor/Literature  
Marah Gubar - Associate Professor of Literature  
Yang Shao-Horn - WM Keck Professor of Energy  
Silvija Gradecak - Professor, DMSE  
Ana Miljački - Associate Professor / Architecture  
Janelle Knox-Hayes - Associate Professor, Department of Urban Studies and Planning  
Anna Frebel - Associate Professor of Physics  
Gigliola Staffilani - Abby Rockefeller Mauze Professor/ Mathematics  
Patricia Tang - Associate Professor of Music  
Nancy Leveson - Professor of Aeronautics and Astronautics  
Stephanie Ann Frampton - Associate Professor of Literature  
Eden Medina - Associate Professor, STS  
Leona D Samson - Professor Emerita, Biological Engineering and Biology  
Dorothy Hosler - Professor, DMSE  
Renée Green - Professor, SAP, ACT  
Sherry Turkle - Abby Rockefeller Mauzé Professor of the Social Studies of Science and Technology/STS  
Ellen T Harris - Class of 1949 Professor Emeritus/Music and Theater Arts  
Erica Caple James - Associate Professor of Medical Anthropology and Urban Studies  
Kate Brown - Professor, Science, Technology and Society  
Angelika Amon - Professor of Biology  
Anne McCants - Professor of History and Director of Concourse  
Kristel Smentek - Associate Professor/Architecture  
Terry Knight - Professor/Architecture  
Ruth Perry - Ann Fetter Friedlaender Professor of Humanities  
Lerna Ekmekcioglu - Associate Professor of History, McMillan-Stewart Chair in Women in the Developing World  
Tanja Bosak - Associate Professor of Geobiology, EAPS  
Adele Naude Santos - Professor of Architecture and Urban Design  
Sandy Alexandre - Associate Professor / Literature  
Rebecca Saxe - John W Jarve (1978) Professor of Cognitive Neuroscience  
Laura Schulz - Professor of Cognitive Science, Department of Brain and Cognitive Sciences  
Sheila Kennedy, FAIA - Professor, Architecture  
Heather Lechtman - Professor of Archaeology and Ancient Technology, Department of Materials Science and Engineering  
Mary-Lou Pardue - Boris Magasanik Professor of Biology Emerita  
Heidi Nepf - Donald and Martha Harleman Professor, Civil and Environmental Engineering  
Nancy Kanwisher - Professor, Brain & Cognitive Sciences  
Deborah Fitzgerald - Leverett Howell and William King Cutten Professor, Program in Science, Technology and Society  
Sana Aiyar - Associate Professor, History  
Christine J. Walley - Professor of Anthropology  
Cathy Drennan - Professor of Biology and Chemistry  
Nergis Mavalvala - Marble Professor of Physics  
Jean Jackson - Professor of Anthropology Emerita

Noelle Selin - Associate Professor, IDSS and EAPS  
Suzanne Flynn - Suzanne Flynn  
Margery Resnick - Assoc. Prof. of Literature  
Sarah Williams - Associate Professor / DUSP  
Bilge Yildiz - Professor, Nuclear Science and Engineering, Materials Science and Engineering  
Emma Teng - Professor / History, Global Languages  
Mary Fuller - Professor, Literature  
Manduhai Buyandelger - Associate Professor, Anthropology  
Barbara Imperiali - Professor of Biology and Chemistry  
Jessika Trancik - Associate Professor, IDSS  
Esther Duflo - Professor, Economics

Susan Silbey  
Anthropology Program  
Sloan School of Management

---

When we live in a culture whose anthem is “move fast and break things,” when disruptive entrepreneurship is the ostensible purpose of education, we cannot really be surprised that a level 3 registered sex offender is a courted financial donor to educational institutions and is celebrated for his imagination and creativity. Jeffrey Epstein, a known sexual predator who trafficked in young girls is invited to campuses. We should be horrified but not surprised.

There are two issues here and while closely entwined are nonetheless distinguishable: one is taking money from this person and another is inviting him to campus to mingle with the community. We need to address both: donations and visits to campus.

We all know that MIT, like all institutions of higher education, research and the arts need capital. For nearly forty years, our governments (federal and state) have increasingly abandoned their commitment to both public and private education, as well as to science and the arts. We have no choice but to rely – as we do – on the generosity of philanthropists: individuals, families, foundations and corporations.

I have heard some make the argument that taking money from Epstein is no different than taking money from the Kochs. The Kochs harm more people with their philosophies and political activity, some suggest. Others think we should not take money from these alumni for cancer research because they also spend their money disseminating false and misleading information about the effects of fossil fuels on the earth’s atmosphere and also because they use their wealth, and its consequent power, to build organizations that impede the progress of science, knowledge and a more equitable and just world (which is what we say we are doing and tell our donors). Some think we should not take money from authoritarian governments that engage in what appears to be genocide of their population or their neighbors.

I do not like the Kochs or their politics, and I am willing to debate the tenets of their political philosophies and the value of their philanthropy.

But, there can be no debate about sex trafficking of children. It is beyond reason, truly unspeakable. There is no defense.

If we cannot see the difference between the Kochs and Jeffrey Epstein, we are indeed in trouble. We are good at making distinctions; that is what scholars do. This is the heart of the issue, I think. So, how did we come to this place?

We are mistaken if we think what happened is simply a breakdown in process. No process – thorough or cursory – should have resulted in taking money from a person who is and was at the time a registered sex offender, known for prostituting minors, and had a reputation for such at the time MIT engaged with him.

Misunderstanding this as a process issue instead of a judgment issue is symptomatic of serious problems deep in the organizational structure of MIT as well as cognitive and intellectual failures characteristic of the MIT culture.

First, the organizational and structural problem. What explains the failure of due diligence that enabled a donation from Jeffrey Epstein? I imagine, frankly, that there was limited or no attention to the case. I imagine that a list of current and prospective donors went past a group of senior administrators, like many such lists and no one paid much attention. Why?

Why no significant discussion and inquiry? Most likely, it is a consequence of organizational overload. MIT loves to be lean, so people cut corners. Issues are treated as they are presented, already framed and packaged without sufficient time, or without a diverse group of advisors with multiple perspectives. Debate is unproductive, not lean. Thus, Epstein's involvement was not seen for what it was. It was not noticed as a problem because there was neither time to discuss nor a sufficient range of persons with expertise and sensitivity to know better. The group lacked the cognitive ability and experiential variability to identify the harm Epstein's donation and involvement with MIT would cause, to see the wolf in sheep's clothing.

The volume and velocity of issues for which the leadership of an organization of this size and expanse are responsible – its global reach with budget of billions of dollars – undermines leaders' ability to know what is actually going on. When leaders are surrounded by a relatively homogeneous group of like-thinking colleagues, they are less likely to be offered contrary interpretations of the situation, only compounding the organizational overload. Managing size and complexity, plus the absence of diverse points of view generates less conversation, not more, about the issues to be decided, impeding recognition of what may turn out to be a critical, game-changing decision.

There are other organizational and structural features that threaten the governance of MIT. To take one very fundamental yet determinative example: we use the accounting procedures of a profit-making organization for a non-profit organization. As such, we try to balance revenue and costs: income (from tuition, research grants and contracts, endowment and philanthropy) and expenses (education, research, physical plant, administration, development etc.). This accounting model obscures the fact that this is an expense generating organization where there is no limit to what could be an expense, no limit to what we might dream to do (e.g. starting online education, inventing new courses for prospective students, enhancing our teaching of ethics, expanding quality of life for students and staff as well as faculty, creating new schools, developing new research programs). This is a faculty of over 1000 persons with abundant creativity and an endless capacity for imagining what we could do, if we only had the money.

Over the last five years, we raised 5+ billion dollars, and are in no better position than where we were to begin because our bottom line needs have escalated. We pursue the money to feed endless growth. The data on the increasing size of the faculty, the staff, the number of graduate students, and the square footage of the physical plant all attest to this exuberant but potentially calamitous growth.

For an organization this size, governance structures are thin, not deep, a very shallow pyramid, where issues that rise up must be taken as given, lest we devolve – as it is regularly feared – into

argumentation in setting the Institute's agenda, goals, enacting basic values. The alternative is thicker governance structures, but they might generate inefficient debate rather than moving fast. There are consequences to these alternative models.

And thus we come to the cultural problems. First, we appear to value growth above all, perhaps defining excellence by size and speed. Is this really who we are?

Second, this is not just an organizational and structural problem, but a deep cultural failure, which derives from and is enacted by prioritizing mechanical thinking and devaluing social knowledge and expertise. We regularly return to this at MIT. In the last two years we had to deal with misunderstanding of: IQ in setting up the quest for intelligence; the relations with Saudi Arabia and MBS; the invitation to Henry Kissinger for the opening of the college; the design of the college; and now Epstein. In each of these instances, mistakes were said to be unintended. But they are repeated and the injuries compounded because we have not understood that these issues are problems of social meaning. Intentions are not physical causes. Intentions enter the social world as words and actions that are interpreted by diverse audiences in multiple ways, which can be explained and are interpretable by the social and humanistic disciplines. The mistakes are repeated because those making them think intentions can be known and understood in singular ways, with a fixed meaning (and as good intentions) despite the words and actions being in fact received and experienced in many ways (some of them unfortunate).

Offering process as *the* explanation of and cure for these cultural failures reproduces the cultural failures. Technologies of decision-making – call this an algorithm or layers of review cannot overcome the necessity of exercising judgment within a social context at each step of the process – e.g., *making a choice* or choices.

Neither law nor machines eliminate the role of human judgment, which exists at every step of the governance structure. Legal and organizational processes provide back up, do-overs and appeals to help improve outcomes and move us toward more reliable and valid decisions that are acceptable to the community. But at every step of a process, a person or persons make a choice.

And thus this was not solely an error of process, wherever in the institutional hierarchy the decisions were made; it was an error of judgment. At some point people at this institute agreed that it was permissible to take Epstein's money, and at another point in time or in the hierarchy people decided to invite and welcome Epstein into this place. Those were choices. Processes are choice engines, and if a process is too narrowly conceived, it invites bad choices.

Misunderstanding this as a process problem instead of a judgment problem offends all of us who know that when we do business with predators, and we agree to give him even an ounce of pleasure by doing business with us, we fail to condemn his acts and fail to ostracize the person from the community.

If we cannot recognize a problem for what it is, we cannot exercise good judgment, but we also cannot even begin to solve the problem. Misunderstanding this as solely a process problem instead of a judgment problem prevents us from even beginning to see that the problem has been too narrowly framed. This applies to the particular decision process that allowed us to take money from a sexual predator, and it also applies now to the response to this failure by looking

for a new or improved process. What we have here is deep cultural failure, of which processes are a small piece.

The way to fix judgment is to change culture that nurtures and informs judgment. However, and importantly, I urge us, as strongly as I can, not to see or say simply “the culture is to blame.” That is too facile. We must ask what aspects – practices and messages – of our culture led to the poor process and failure to deliver a good decision. This is my message.

What we need at MIT is a full-throated commitment to changing our culture, which for too long has normalized misogyny while accepting and exacerbating hierarchies among human knowledge – the disciplines. The fast and blinkered decision-making and narrow choices need not be the only way to govern. The messiness of social action and human decisions is the subject of fields of study researched and taught here at the Institute, but these are devalued in the technological culture of disruptive entrepreneurship and big science. This has isolated the disciplines and experts in the social sciences and the humanities (where there are higher proportions of women) who understand and can explain how culture develops and is sustained, how judgments are made and justified and sometimes obfuscated. When you devalue scholars who bring that more complicated, complex and contextualized understanding to issues essential to education, the organization of science, and of technological invention, you shut out colleagues whose expertise could expand and enrich the range and quality of the Institute’s choices.

The inability to recognize a problem is a consequence of insularity, ignorance, lack of sufficient references and associated context to identify and interpret the phenomena or situation and thus recognize a problem when it stares you in the face.

It is not only normalized misogyny, but the devaluing of what too many at MIT describe as soft, not hard knowledge. Even here there is a masculine picture of the world right down to our corporeal bodies. It is a matter of resources and respect.

We effectively enact our values, make words into action and over time into habitual practices when we reward celebrity instead of scholarship, distribute our material resources to those who succeed in the marketplace not of ideas but of commerce, and fail to see the actual and added value that social and humanistic knowledge brings.

What is to be concluded about our enacted values when we allow men at MIT to advertise ‘hot girls’ on their office doors and no one does anything about it? And what does it say about our values when someone who removes murals of naked women and references to sexual assault from the walls of dormitories is called fascist? The students justify their action promoting the murals as protected speech (which it is not) and local culture. Is it any wonder that our students develop AI that cannot recognize women’s or black persons’ faces, and our students populate Silicon Valley, building an internet awash with pornography and destructive social media threatening constitutional democracies?

What choices are they making? Where did they learn to make those choices? Or do they think that they have no choices to make? To many social scientists, these are all explainable consequence of a culture that thrives at MIT.

Culture is not just a set of words on official documents – it is what circulates every day in the smallest exchanges. It is what is said, what is written, what is rewarded, what is included and excluded. Cultural analysts spend time and energy identifying the patterns in what may look to the unreflective and poorly educated as a random assortment of individualistic preferences. It is not a randomized ether of signs and practices. And exactly because it is not random, we are able to live in communities of large numbers, interact relatively smoothly with strangers as well as those we know well.

Because culture is what circulates and is practiced daily and variably, it is why culture is so hard to nail down, put in a box and tie a ribbon around it. Most of the time culture changes very slowly, and programmed change is hard, taking a long time.

Yet we must change our culture if we are to do better.

But, we must ask ourselves, what kind of culture intends to do good but takes money from and invites a sexual predator to campus? Someone who had a choice to make and likely used a cost benefit analysis and not a bright line moral judgment where pedophilia is to be condemned absolutely. Someone made a calculation that maybe “it's worth it” to take the money from even a donor like him. It's worth it because we can do really good things with the money. No one intended to hurt anyone or do wrong; decision-makers thought they were doing the right thing. But that is the problem because they did not understand what they were doing.

The obvious failing with this argument is the calculation of worth. Is it worth the potential for reputational damage? Worth the hostility and injury to women and girls expressed by taking money from a sex trafficker? Worth whatever comfort MIT gives to a pedophile? Worth the cultural degradation MIT suffers from having Epstein around campus for a while? Worth the hostile environment it causes those who have to suffer in his presence? Worth having students make presents for a sex trafficker?

We are collectively ashamed because it looks like MIT cares more about taking money than we care about the harm specific people have caused to women and children. No matter how you consider it, we were balancing some sum of money against something most of us would think has no price.

The only reason to take the money is if we did not know what we were doing. And so we have to figure out how such *not knowing* can be prevented. We need cultural change for sure, but we also cannot let the invocation of culture blind us from a more robust process. Putting culture and process together, we must be able to recognize bright lines, as well as debatable choices. Thus, we need more diverse decision-making structures with a wider array of perspectives and voices that enables us to focus on what is a core mission – to educate and create knowledge that makes a better world. Perhaps also we begin to forgo perpetual growth and endless search for new money to shore up this core mission.

We say that we want to teach about ethical conduct. This is a moment to show what that means.

*Co-authored by:*

Rosalind Picard, Media Lab and Media Arts & Sciences; Linda Griffith, Biological Engineering; and Cynthia Breazeal, Media Lab and Media Arts & Sciences

*Read by:*

Rosalind Picard, accompanied by Linda Griffith

---

Dear President Rafael Reif and Provost Marty Schmidt,

We write as faculty of MIT to share our community's thoughts about the MIT-Epstein revelations. We write also to support our community efforts to uncover the truth about and learn from the current crisis, and to offer guidance in decisions going forward.

While fact-finding is ongoing, given what we know today, we believe that MIT's relationship with Epstein was a grave mistake.

Tragically, the results have caused a lot of our community members pain and suffering, especially for those who are survivors of sexual assault, rape, and/or sexual abuse, many of whom now feel undervalued, vulnerable, exploited, or unsafe. The results have caused concern about how we as an institution treat women and girls.

We appreciate that MIT leadership regularly describes and celebrates the fact that our values and diversity are essential to building a better world. We now know we have to do more than that.

How would we like to see MIT respond?

We wish to see MIT conduct open conversations about how funding decisions are made. What benefits can anonymous donors receive? When can money be taken from a suspect donor? When is it worth it? When can money never be taken under any circumstances? When is it never worth it?

Some of the questions do not have easy answers. We recommend that MIT openly discuss values and put in place better guidance and policies.

We would also like to see processes that ensure diverse members of our community participate in decisions around these questions, especially including people who identify as victims of crimes that may be associated with a visitor or potential donor.

We would like to see more MIT support in our community for the many people who have suffered from injustices and abuses such as those propagated by individuals like Epstein, and better prevention of future abuse.

Finally, we would like to see support from MIT in dealing with the press during times of crisis, including asking the press to make corrections when they spread false statements about MIT

faculty and leaders. Some, who are judged by false assumptions and misinformation, are also suffering.

One of MIT's strengths is its belief that all members of our community have equal value as human beings, and yet all of us can learn and improve. As we move together toward the aim of healing and becoming stronger and better, we would like to challenge each other to try to believe the best in each other, to not permanently condemn one another when someone makes a mistake, and to keep alive the hope of redemption and beneficial change in our community. MIT is strong, and this series of painful events can make us stronger if we keep our eyes focused on what is good, and work together to identify and improve what also needs to be better.

What will our administration do to promote healing and progress? We would like to hear your plans to make MIT better.

*This letter is available for signature at <https://bit.ly/2IVqsj6>. The list of signatories is not publically available.*

Angelika Amon  
Department of Biology

---

From your latest letter it is now clear that you and your senior administration knew about the gifts and that you made efforts conceal these gifts. To me this indicates a lack of moral standards in your administration. The buck stops with you, President Reif. In my view the way to restore MIT's reputation and to regain the trust of the community is for you and your senior administration to accept responsibility and to resign.

*Read by:*

Cesar McDowell, Department of Urban Studies and Planning  
Ruth Perry, Literature Section

---

### **A Motion to Establish an Ad Hoc Faculty Committee to Protect Academic Integrity**

**Whereas,** The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) is committed to developing and maintaining an ethical environment in which faculty, students and staff are able to truly advance its mission of working ‘for the betterment of humankind’; and

**Whereas,** The recent revelations concerning funds received by the Media Lab from Mr. Jeffrey Epstein, from the Saudi Arabian government and its agencies, along with other past and ongoing donors, require clarifying MIT’s values, and establishing a meaningful due diligence process for ensuring transparency and accountability in all fundraising activities; and

**Whereas,** MIT strives to be an institution guided by scientific temper and objectivity, with a commitment to facts and the rule of law, and therefore exhibits the courage to correct its mistakes, as when MIT acknowledged the need to improve the treatment of women faculty in the 1990s; and

**Whereas,** The values that guide MIT’s faculty, students and staff should never be traded or sacrificed for short term monetary gains or vague promises of future benefits; and

**Whereas,** The MIT community, especially the Faculty, needs to have greater voice in reviewing fundraising and investment decisions at MIT with a view to ensuring that they are fully aligned with MIT’s goals and values; and

**Whereas,** There will be increasing damage to MIT’s standing as a leading educational and research institution if current trends involving fundraising continue without significant changes;

#### **Therefore be it Resolved:**

That the MIT Faculty establish an Ad-hoc Committee of the Faculty on Protecting Academic Integrity, composed of Faculty volunteers independent of the Administration, to draft a statement of MIT values and standards, reflecting the responsibilities incumbent upon MIT as a global university, and the procedures to be followed by the Institute in receiving outside funding.

The mission of the Committee shall include the establishment of a robust due diligence process for review of all fundraising at MIT including a review of ongoing relationships in the light of MIT values, and establishment of standards for Institute agreements with outside agencies, governments and individuals, drawing on examples of best practices around the world.

**And be it further Resolved,** That the standards, policies and procedures include:

- a) Compliance at all times with applicable local, state, and federal civil and criminal

- laws and to ensure adherence to applicable rules of international law in all their external and financial engagements.
- b) Revised conflict of interest rules to ensure that Faculty members or researchers at MIT do not leverage fundraising for MIT-based research when it is for their personal gain unrelated to benefit for the MIT community or the public;
  - c) Protections and safeguards for whistleblowers that reveal wrongdoings or violations of policies.
  - d) Public notification of any proposed gift or engagement with a donor above \$100,000, with comments invited from the MIT community within a reasonable period.

**And be it further Resolved,** That the MIT Faculty requests the Chair of the Faculty to ensure implementation of this resolution, in order to achieve the above goals; and further urges the Chair to ensure that the Committee is provided adequate funds for staff support, and that it reports regularly to the MIT Faculty, and the Faculty Policy Committee, on the measures to be adopted as urged in this motion.

**And be it Further Resolved,** That this Motion will be discussed and voted on at the October regular meeting of the MIT Faculty.

*Respectfully submitted: Robert Berwick, Christopher Cummins, Sally Haslanger, Jean Jackson, Jonathan King, Ceasar McDowell, Ruth Perry, Nasser Rabbat, Balakrishnan Rajagopal.*

---

*An annotated version is available and will be circulated with the agenda for the October 16, 2019 Faculty meeting.*

Yossi Sheffi  
Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering  
MIT Center for Transportation and Logistics

---

It was difficult for me to see the expressed pain felt by many faculty colleagues. However, I take issue with the sweeping statements about the culture of MIT. First and foremost, it is clear that MIT did nothing illegal and this is an important distinction. Evidently mistakes in process and judgement were made and regardless of the reason for them, MIT will have to correct what went wrong. MIT is already on its way for doing this.

Colleagues argue that there is a “money problem” at MIT. Surely, taking money from Epstein and inviting him on campus was wrong but this is an obvious judgement knowing what we know now (and should have known earlier). The moral and pragmatic question is where to raise the money that it takes to conduct state-of-the-art research and subsidize MIT’s education. US universities and MIT take money from Russia (which murders journalists and influences elections in the West), China (which holds a million Muslims in concentration camps), Singapore (with autocratic regime), and the US (enabling the bombing of Yemen children and separating families at the Mexican border), among others. While Epstein’s doing is disgustingly beyond the pale, there are very few angels among big-time donors and other organizations who fund research. So the question of where is the line, assuming that money is needed, is something that each one of us on the faculty, as well as MIT, have to answer.

I was also stricken by the comparison raised by several colleagues to Koch, whose “sin” was that he had a different opinion from many faculty members. It was disheartening for me to see the vilification of dissenting opinions at MIT. Epstein was a convicted pedophile and child molester. The lowest of the low. Koch was not convicted of anything, aside from supporting causes he believed in, including cancer research at MIT. So let’s have some perspective.

Next, the complaint that the Epstein debacle shows that MIT undervalues women sounded strange to me. The MIT that I know goes out of its ways to hire and promote women and under-represented-minorities. I think that the main criteria of judging whether women and others at MIT are valued (or not) is demonstrated in the process and considerations of hiring, promotion, tenure, pay, etc. This is what the administration controls and MIT has been in the forefront on these issues. I was sad to hear that some of my female colleague encountered bad male behavior but this is not institutional. In a group of over 1,000 individuals there will be bad apples. And, of course, in bad cases, one can go to the police; one does not have to rely on the MIT administration if one does not trust them.

I am also concerned that some of the cures contemplated and announced will over-reach. MIT became what it is through the entrepreneurship and hustle of its faculty and staff members. So, while institutional money raising and institutional projects (such as Singapore, Russia, etc.) as well as large donations are issues that may merit an enhanced process, I hope the administration will not put constraints on the research fund raising activities of individual faculty, but trust the faculty’s moral compass.

Finally, I wanted to add – since somebody called for Rafael’s resignation – that I have known Rafael for decades. About 10 years ago I had a contract with the government of Panama to open a CTL center there. The project would have paid CTL over \$20 million – mostly in unrestricted funds. The negotiations took almost a year, but after we had an agreement, I found out (following discussions at the US embassy in Panama) that the entire Panamanian administration I was dealing with was corrupt to the core, defrauding the Panamanian people. I decided not to go ahead with the project but I wanted some “cover” before giving up such a big sum of money. While some administrators had doubts, Rafael, who was the Provost at the time, was the one who said “go ahead, your instinct is right; cancel the contract – I am proud of you.” While Rafael may not remember it, this is the Rafael that I know.

Edmund Bertschinger  
Department of Physics  
Faculty affiliate, Program in Women's and Gender Studies

---

It is difficult to know what to do. The senior leadership team must have found it difficult to balance pros and cons of taking money from Epstein, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and other bad actors. They must have struggled with comparing tangible benefits with intangible costs, with deciding where to draw the line, and with the choice to cross over that line without appearing to do so. I'm heartbroken that the senior team apparently spent more time discussing concerns about Epstein's reputation than about MIT's, when they took the drastic step of accepting money from a disqualified donor.

How many other times has this happened? Who are the other disqualified donors? Was money taken from them? Has the leadership team consulted with community members outside their privileged circle, including sexual assault victims, to understand the impact of their decisions? What happened to those people who expressed concerns?

The new College of Computing has adopted a mission statement calling it to address the social and ethical aspects of computing. That is putting the cart before the horse. We need to address the social and ethical aspects of leadership. We want our students to take ethics classes, but what about our leaders? How many of our senior team understood that taking dirty money to do clean work means destroying the community's trust? What do excellence, integrity, meritocracy, boldness, and humility mean now? Whose responsibility is it to make the world a better place? To my friends who want to focus on the positive—for everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose. I don't feel ready to focus entirely on the positive, and I am not alone. Listen to the words of Martin Luther King, Jr., who said that the greatest stumbling block for African Americans is not the Ku Klux Klanner, "but the white moderate, who is more devoted to order than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice."

It is difficult to know what to do. But it is not difficult to know when one's personal values, and a community's stated values, have been violated.

Jacob White  
Department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science

---

My feeling is that whatever policies and procedures get developed, and no matter how talented our handful of senior administrators are, there is no way they are going to keep 1,000 faculty out of trouble. I made a lot of mistakes in the early part of my career. It was my colleagues' willingness to call me out on those mistakes that kept them from becoming career-ending disasters. And I ask myself, in the light of what has come out, whether I am living up to that standard. Am I looking out for others the way others have looked out for me?

I have discovered that the answer is no. I recently served on the DAPER Advisory Board, which supervises the athletic facilities on the MIT campus, and the discussion on that committee turned to refurbishing a shooting gallery in the basement of one of the athletic facilities. Now, I personally believe that MIT has no business putting guns in the hands of students, let alone teaching them how to shoot. But rather than engaging the committee in that discussion, I quietly resigned. I thought a mistake was being made and I, a tenured faculty member with very little to lose, chose to look the other way.

When I read about the Epstein saga, I'm not thinking about who signed what, when. I'm not thinking about what procedures got put into place. I'm thinking about the fact that I now understand what I was putting at risk by not doing my job, by not looking out for others the way others have looked out for me. And I am deeply ashamed. I'm trying to do better.

Sasha Costanza-Chock  
Department of Comparative Media Studies and Writing  
Faculty affiliate, Program in Women's and Gender Studies

---

I'm Associate Professor of Civic Media in Comparative Media Studies and Writing. I'm affiliated with Women's and Gender Studies, and I have been affiliated with the Center for Civic Media at the Media Lab. I think it's a difficult and dark moment for all of us, but that one of the points of light that's guiding me through all of this is the courage of the students, and in particular of the graduate students at the Media Lab, and now increasingly at other parts of the Institute who are stepping up and stepping forward to hold us all to account to be the best version of MIT that we can be.

And so, to respect them, I don't have a tightly-prepared statement but I wanted to convey, from the many, many conversations that I've been having personally with students who have been involved, as well as staff and others around the epicenter of this, I wanted to convey a couple of the points that people have been sharing with me, that they think we need to do to move forward. And I'll reserve most of my time for a couple that I don't think have been mentioned yet, because many of them have already been raised.

So, for example, the students are very interested in insuring that going forward there's transparency, there's auditing of the money that's come into the Media Lab and into the broader Institute, that there's accountability, and that there are concrete steps that taken to address the harms in this situation. Let me just say a little bit more about that. I don't think, and many of those I'm in conversation with don't believe, that it's enough to simply donate or return money to "non-profits that focus on supporting survivors of trafficking." I think people are looking for a concrete action that will be taken to support the young women and girls that were specifically harmed by Epstein in this case. And if there are other cases that we find violate the ethics or the principles that we hold as an Institute, how will we redress harms, concretely, of those individuals that are harmed?

The ethical screen we're going to be having a lot of conversations about, so I won't say more about that. But I'll just add one last point, which is that whatever the set of values that we do determine, that this ad hoc committee determines, or if there's a process that comes out of the motion that was introduced by Prof. McDowell, that those principles should apply not only as an ethical screen for incoming funds and new donors, but that we should think about the harm that's being done by the bulk of our resources, which is our \$17.44 billion endowment. We should think about how to screen our investments and the activities that we're actively supporting with that money, which is the bulk of the resources that we control as an Institute and that we could be allocating to socially responsible investment funds or to other funds that are consistent with the value statement that we develop.

Leigh Royden  
Department of Earth, Atmospheric, and Planetary Sciences

---

*Summary of remarks:*

Professor Royden spoke about her personal experiences as a member of the MIT faculty for 35 years. She served with Professor Nancy Hopkins on the committee that reviewed discrimination against women faculty in the School of Science. She has also seen numerous examples of a small minority of powerful faculty exhibiting uncollegial and unethical behavior toward vulnerable individuals, including other faculty members. A number of these incidents were called to the attention of MIT's senior administration – including President Reif, during his tenure as provost and as president – and by and large the Institute has done nothing. Overall, her sense is that this is an issue about ethical behavior within MIT, not only about taking money from sources MIT would not like to be associated with, and not only an issue about the treatment of women, girls, and female faculty. She concluded by stating that the buck stops with President Reif – and also with her fellow faculty.

Pattie Maes  
Media Lab and Program in Media Arts and Sciences

---

I would like to say a few words on behalf of the Media Lab. We all agree that decisions were made here that we wish hadn't. We hope the investigation will reveal the facts in the case and what the respective roles were of Media Lab staff and past leadership versus MIT administration. And what the circumstances were in which these decisions were made. I would like request that all of you stop referring to this as the Media Lab issue.

Two years prior to the Media Lab taking funds from Epstein, funds had been accepted by a faculty member in the Department of Mechanical Engineering. In addition, President Reif's recent email already confirms that the decision to accept funds for the Media Lab and to do so anonymously happened in full consultation and with the guidance of the MIT administration. At the Media Lab, we are of course deeply affected by this whole series of events. But already we have turned the page. And we see this, actually, as an opportunity to work on some important issues that have not received enough attention, both at the Media Lab and at MIT, issues such as equity, inclusion, the climate for women, and ways in which our whole community can be involved in governance and making smart decisions.

A second request I want to ask is that people resist viewing what happened as indicative of a larger problem with the Media Lab. The press, some press definitely, is positioning it that way. Our research and academic programs are strong. Our faculty continue to receive prestigious awards at exceptional rates. And the students that we produce are equally successful. They are selected as tenure-track faculty at the top universities worldwide. They start successful companies, including a unicorn recently. They win awards in arts and design and they become leaders in the social and civic sector.

President Reif, in his remarks, said that he's proud of this institution. Well, we are also proud of the Media Lab. And I hope you will decide that you can be as well.

Alexander Slocum  
Department of Mechanical Engineering

---

In the continual quest for milk and honey  
We sadly traded our principles for money  
And now we must strengthen our fundamental roots  
And grow & nurture new blossoms and shoots

The truth eventually we all will come to know  
So let us all promise to continually reflect, evolve and grow  
We must look out and care for each other  
With the love of a father & mother

For too often actions are ok'd with a legal wink and nod  
that later come to light and make us exclaim "Oh My God!"  
And in response some will propose many a well-meaning contrivance  
Let us now gather them in a new all-important Office of Moral Guidance

Mahi Elango '20  
President, Undergraduate Association

---

I feel sad because of the message our actions have sent to victims of human trafficking and sexual abuse, to women around the world, and to current and future members of our community. I feel angry because I expected the best from MIT. I trusted MIT leaders to be exemplars of how scientists, engineers, and humanitarians should conduct themselves and engage with the world.

I'm worried that what comes from this will address only this particular situation and fail to change the unjust power structures in which we are complicit. I'm worried that we won't demand answers to difficult questions about who we are and who we want to be. I'm worried that the proliferation of working groups and committees will be a substitute for including everyone in these critical conversations, and therefore real structural and cultural change. And I worry that even after we have weathered this storm, the same voices whose silencing has led us to this point will continue to be silenced.

We must be willing to wholeheartedly accept that we have utterly failed in our values and responsibilities, and we must hold ourselves accountable for the consequences. This is our moral tipping point.

I have faith in our community. I'm optimistic that we will emerge clearer in our values and stronger in our commitment to them because we are willing to have difficult conversations. As students, we look to you, our faculty, to lead these conversations. Let's ask ourselves: How, as individual members of the community, do we meet our responsibilities to the Institute? Who is the Institute responsible to? What are those responsibilities?

If months or years from now, one victim looks back at our response, and feels recognized and confident that MIT is lifting those who have been disempowered, then we have risen to this moral challenge. Thank you, and we look forward to these conversations in the coming weeks and months.

Kieran Setiya  
Department of Linguistics and Philosophy

---

*Summary of remarks:*

Professor Setiya spoke about feeling conflicted and ambivalent about MIT. Despite the extraordinary privilege of being at MIT, he has longstanding concerns about the ethics of funding and of investment at the Institute. In addition to the current case of the Epstein donations, he pointed out the long history of MIT's relationship with David Koch, whose name is on several MIT buildings – yet whose funding of climate change denial is one of the most extensive attacks on science and whose fight against climate change mitigation has already done and will continue to do inestimable harm to many billions of people over many decades. Professor Setiya urged the administration to take a broader view of what it means for MIT to be a moral institution.

Alex Joerger  
Vice President, Graduate Student Council

---

## **A Comment of the Graduate Student Council on Behalf of MIT's Students**

“MIT’s community is defined by its values.”<sup>1</sup> Two of those values are excellence and a strong desire to do good for society.

What is excellence? And what does it mean, “to do good for society?”

“The mission of MIT is to advance knowledge and educate students in science, technology, and other areas of scholarship that will best serve the nation and the world in the 21st century. [ ... ] We seek to develop in each member of the MIT community the ability and passion to work wisely, creatively, and effectively for the betterment of humankind.”<sup>2</sup>

These are not our words. We borrowed them from the MIT website.

But we students like to believe that MIT always seeks to work toward the betterment of humankind. So does this answer the two questions? From our perspective, the mission by itself raises more questions than it answers.

What does it mean to work “for the betterment of humankind?” And how do we make sure that we are on track?

We do not have answers to these questions. As so often in life, we have to admit that it depends. However, our values should always be our moral compass. That same moral compass should guide the decisions of the Institute.

Today’s students are the leaders of tomorrow. To better humankind, we need to learn what’s right and what’s wrong. For that, we students need help from you: Our PIs, MIT’s senior administration, and all faculty in general.

You are our North stars. We look towards you when we need guidance. We want to learn from you. We need you to teach us about your values.

Can you answer those two questions? What is excellence? What does it mean, “to do good for society?” And more broadly, are these values enough to honestly drive a Campaign for a Better World?

We understand that these questions are hard. Answers cannot be found by a single person. And our values cannot be forced onto us.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.mit.edu/building-a-better-world/>, 09/18/19

<sup>2</sup> <http://mit.edu/about/>, 09/18/19

Values have to develop and be shared amongst all of the MIT community to stick and to guide our future actions. All of us need to come together and discuss what our current values are and what our future values should be. Are we satisfied with the status quo, or do our values have to change?

These are turbulent times. World leaders are running crazy. The nation is divided. It sometimes feels like a lot of people are guided by the motto “Me first.” Even MIT is not unaffected. Funding from Saudi Arabia and the current Epstein scandal put pressure on MIT, its faculty, AND its students.

However, all of these are just symptoms. Symptoms to a much larger problem within MIT’s culture. The problem is a lack of shared values to guide our actions.

This problem brings us back to our very first statement. MIT’s community is defined by its values.

Right now, it is unclear to us what MIT’s values are. That has to change if we want to make a better tomorrow.

We, the MIT community, including faculty, staff, and students, have to jointly define MIT’s common values.

The conversation should start now. At the moment, we students feel lost. Please, be our North stars.

W. Craig Carter  
Department of Materials Science and Engineering

---

I'd like to speak to the issue of faculty involvement in this sordid affair. Our faculty are given the luxury and responsibility to be representatives of MIT. This is a serious responsibility.

To take money from Epstein shows a serious lack of judgement. It is an example of the loss of a moral compass.

To keep the receipt of the money secret and to take measures to hide it, to take the cynical view that it could only matter if one gets caught, is reprehensible. To use MIT resources to make a gift to a sexual predator is a horrible violation of trust.

The most egregious thing, however, was to invite Epstein to campus. To keep it secret when many of our women students are roughly the same age as Epstein's victims; to not inform the MIT police when he was invited not 200 yards from the child care center, was a case of unspeakable and perhaps criminal irresponsibility. Something must be done.

Elly Nedivi  
Departments of Brain & Cognitive Sciences, and Biology

---

Given the comments so far, I see consensus regarding the need to 1) review past fundraising procedures; 2) articulate a list of moral and ethical standards; 3) set guidelines for implementing new procedures and standards. However, there is a cognitive dissonance for me in charging a leadership that failed us with overseeing review and remediation of the very things they failed at. While I am willing to reserve judgment until the findings of Goodwin Procter are made public, once this happens I see no credible way forward where anyone involved in the Epstein affair and its cover up remains in a position of power, either in MIT central administration or the Media Lab.

*Professor Nedivi submitted additional comments to the facultycomments email address following the meeting. These can be found in the relevant section of the appendix.*

*Co-authored by:*

Heather Lechtman and Dorothy Hosler  
Department of Materials Science and Engineering

*Read by:*

Heather Lechtman

---

We are here to discuss consequences – consequences that follow the ugly Epstein episode. MIT is not a victim. The victims are the young, traumatized females exploited by Epstein. That exploitation is linked directly to MIT's willingness to accept donations from Epstein after his conviction as a sexual predator and sex trafficker. It is not sufficient for MIT to donate funds to some 'appropriate' organization that might handle retribution, in some form, to these girls/young women. We, as an institution, are implicated in the immoral behavior perpetrated by Epstein. MIT has to find ways to seek and find these young women, then attend to their rehabilitation and needs.

Jonathan King  
Department of Biology

---

*Summary of remarks:*

Professor King noted first that MIT is a long-term client of the law firm hired to conduct the fact-finding investigation of the Epstein gifts to the Institute, and as such there is a deep conflict of interest. The motion to establish an ad hoc committee on academic integrity was developed as a response to issues such as this so that a faculty committee independent of the administration could be formed.

He then commented on the importance placed on income to MIT as compared to research, academic, and student needs. He stated that this was not particular to the Epstein case and provided several additional examples: the construction in Kendall Square of commercial buildings when there are other critical needs on campus such as graduate student housing; MIT's relationships with Saudi Arabia; and MIT's relationship with alumnus David Koch. He noted that decisions regarding these were not discussed at an Institute Faculty meeting, and concluded by stating that selling the Institute in these ways needs to stop.

Gigliola Staffilani  
Department of Mathematics

---

The fact that some of my male colleagues decided to entertain on campus and associate themselves with an individual convicted of sex trafficking and a pedophile, who probably at that time valued women less than objects, makes me really wonder how much I will be valued by my male colleagues next time I serve on a random committee at MIT. I concluded that one possible way of moving forward in a small scale, and for us women to regain some confidence in this institute, could be to show better appreciation for us, and our male colleagues could just signal this by explicitly telling us that we are doing a great job and we certainly belong at MIT.

Dean Hashim Sarkis  
School of Architecture and Planning

---

I want to take the opportunity of this high concentration of colleagues to ask two favors of you. We're ashamed. We're angry. We're upset. But you should look at the Media Lab community. And for that I would really ask you to extend your hand to them and say, "How are you doing?" And reach out to the people you know there or those you don't, to help, to show them that we're part of the big community.

The second favor I want to ask you is to extend your support to the new leadership of the Media Lab. It takes really brave and selfless people to step up to this. And I really want to thank Professors Pattie Maes, Tod Machover, and Deb Roy, Vice President for Research Maria Zuber, and Vice President for Human Resources Ramona Allen for rising to this occasion. Judging by what Pattie said, and her disposition, I hope you agree with me that the Media Lab is in good hands.

## **APPENDIX**

**Comments Received by Email Following the September 18, 2019  
Institute Faculty Meeting**

Arthur Bahr  
Literature Section

---

Dear President Reif:

In your letter to the MIT community of September 12, you wrote that Epstein's gifts were kept anonymous "[b]ecause the members of my team believed it was important that Epstein not use gifts to MIT for publicity or to enhance his own reputation..." That may be true, but it cannot be the whole truth. Surely it is also the case that your team believed it was important to keep Epstein's gifts secret because to do otherwise would reflect badly on MIT and you. To coin a phrase, you wanted to have your cake and eat it anonymously, too. Whether it was conscious or unconscious, your omission of that crucial component of the decision to keep Epstein's gifts secret is deeply troubling: if conscious, because it casts doubt on your honesty; if unconscious, because it casts doubt on your self-awareness. And all of us will need those qualities in abundance in order to effect the kind of systemic cultural change within MIT that you and others have rightly identified as necessary.

Janet Conrad  
Department of Physics

---

Thank you for inviting comments.

I would like to request an external review of the status of female faculty at MIT. This need not be a legal review. There are firms that specialize in issues of women in science that are not law firms.

This is an action that the administration could immediately take that could help move the discussion on all sides forward in a productive manner.

Thank you for your consideration.

Marah Gubar  
Literature Section

---

Dear President Reif,

I want to draw your attention to a moment in the faculty meeting today that illustrates the severity of the problem we are facing with regard to MIT's culture. A female professor from the Math department, in tears, called on you to speak in support of women at MIT. Her call went unanswered. You simply moved on to the next speaker, without responding to her evident distress.

I understand that it is hard to be put on the spot. I, too, often find myself at a loss for words when confronted by other people's pain or anger. A lot of pain and anger was expressed today, and it cannot have been easy to stand up there and listen to it. Still, what this moment called for was a simple response: "Thank you so much for your bravery in raising this important issue. I wish I could speak to it right now in a way that would address your concerns. I can't. But I pledge to think hard and take action to support MIT's female faculty better in the future."

Your non-response was emblematic of the ways in which MIT routinely fails to respond adequately to concerns raised by female faculty (and their allies) about how women and minorities get treated at MIT. I have studied and worked at several different academic institutions. MIT is the only one at which I have repeatedly been treated in ways that I consider to be sexist. Several junior women faculty members and staff have shared with me their experiences of being sexually harassed and bullied by male MIT professors. I have subjected to such bullying myself on two occasions. I have also personally witnessed how women who try to report such sexist bullying get ignored, and their male colleagues' behavior gets excused or brushed aside as not that problematic (e.g. "You think it's bad now? You should have been here 20 years ago"). I think the reason so many women expressed so much pain and anger today is that we are tired of not being listened to on this subject and angry that we are still having to cope with sexist behavior by male faculty members, which drains our mental and emotional energy and time so that we have less of it to devote to other things, including the research on which promotion depends.

I would urge you to reconvene and support the work of Gender Equity Committees across all schools at MIT. I would also urge you to revise the sexual harassment training that all faculty receive at MIT. The current training video takes for granted that faculty are the good guys and just need to be taught how to report it when an undergraduate comes to them saying they have been sexually assaulted. We need a new and more comprehensive training program that teaches male faculty how not to create a hostile work environment for women and minorities – a program that addresses things like microaggressions, bullying, and so on. Those are two concrete steps you could take to better support female faculty at MIT. Thank you very much for your time and attention.

Elly Nedivi  
Departments of Brain & Cognitive Sciences, and Biology

---

Further, the Media Lab needs to undergo not just an internal restructuring, but a serious review of whether it even belongs at MIT. While there are clearly excellent people there (that could be placed in academic departments), there is something very wrong with a structure that is so heavily dependent on funding from corporate sources within an academic setting. The opening for corruption of academic and ethical values there is just too big. The lack of peer review is also an opening for charlatans and bad actors, some of whom (in addition to Ito) have been negatively featured in the news (i.e. grow box and dumping toxic waste). Perhaps it's time to separate the Media Lab from MIT the way Draper Lab was in the past, which was also in response to concerns about activities incompatible with the academic mission of MIT. In the case of the Media Lab evaluation too, there can be no involvement of anyone named as complicit in the Epstein affair and its cover up, either in the review process or the implementation of new guidelines and procedures.

Raúl Radovitzky  
Aeronautics and Astronautics

---

Dear Mr. President,

I wholeheartedly agree with all the values and principles clearly articulated by our colleagues at the faculty meeting, as well as with the seriousness of the situation and the need to address it.

But I take a serious exception when we question your integrity.

I have had the privilege of working with you in a number of initiatives and circumstances related to Residential Student Life and I have gotten to know your values and character enough to consider you an honorable man of great integrity and profound humanity.

I have been humbled by your unprecedented commitment to – and by how much you care about – the health of our community and our students in particular. In my eighteen years at MIT I cannot think of any other person who has done as much as you have to humanize this campus.

Your standing at the podium in front of a thousand of us, alone, to take full responsibility for the situation; and to willingly and deliberately subject yourself to public lynching denotes great character and leadership.

As our president, I can hold you fully responsible for erroneous and dreadful decisions even if they were made by others in your administration, and I will expect your leadership and swift action to correct past mistakes and to make sure they never happen again. But I will not put in doubt your integrity and call you “complicit”.

Mr. President you don't need to regain my trust, you never lost it, and it will take more than an honest mistake, no matter how serious, for you to lose it.

This campus needs you today more than ever. Don't give up.

Laura Schulz  
Department of Brain and Cognitive Sciences

---

Dear Colleagues,

These are thoughts I shared with Rafael at a meeting of the senior women faculty so I'm sending them on here.

I believe our problem is not just where money comes from. It is where money goes and how those decisions get made.

Like many of you, I have been called to sit sat numerous panels to give talks to donors, to be part of moonshots and brainstorming sessions and capital campaigns. My name and work has been affiliated with Quests for Intelligence and Schwarzman centers and PK-12 projects, and MIT Integrated Learning Initiatives and World Education Laboratories. I am very often called on to be involved in fund-raising. But I haven't the least idea what happens thereafter.

Of course, I know of initiatives giving away small internal grants (\$20K-\$100K) by fair open peer review. But I can't tell you if that is all the money we raised? A small fraction of the money? Interest on the money? A small fraction of the interest? Because I don't know basic facts like – how much money did we raise? And where did it go? And who decided? And how?

And that means I can't ask basic questions about equity like – is it being given equally to women and men? To junior and senior faculty? Is it being given away according to the effort of the people who raised it? Is it being given away in alignment with the cause for which we raised it?

To be clear, I'm not complaining about access to money. If I complain for a while, especially to powerful senior male faculty, money often enough comes my way.

I am talking about access to power.

If I have a role in raising money but no role in deciding how it is spent, I can't start initiatives – even ones deeply aligned with the campaign's mission or MIT's mission. I can't plan projects or hire personnel. And when I try to ask, how much money have we raised what the disbursement process – and I've asked on every campaign I've been involved in – I get stonewalled. All I can do is beg people who I think have influence.

And even when I benefit from the fundraising, the experience of participating is humiliating and frustrating. Maybe other people have better ideas. Maybe they have smarter, more far reaching, more interesting goals. Maybe I just don't understand university financing. But the cultural message is perilously close to, "Don't worry your pretty little head about it".

And again to be clear, and this is a fundamental point – what I am not asking for is a seat at those tables. I don't feel left out. I don't want into those dark rooms. I want to turn on the lights.

We are a not for profit organization. I want to align our process with our collective mission. I want to be able to be fiscally responsible and accountable. I want to be able to know and report in *The Tech* not just where every dollar we raise comes from and where it goes but the process by which we decided. I want to open the books.

Then we will no doubt have all kinds of healthy arguments about our funding priorities and who makes the decision on what basis. But we will all be able to be part of that discussion because we will all know what we are talking about.

So that's it. I want to know where our money comes from, where it goes, and most importantly, how those decisions get made.