

# Student groups at MIT unite against anti-Asian racist attack

## UA and Asian student groups host events for AAPI

By Grace Song

ASSOCIATE NEWS EDITOR

Several student groups at MIT issued statements, hosted events, and launched support initiatives for the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community in light of the Atlanta spa shootings on March 16.

Eight individuals were killed across three massage spas in the Atlanta area; six of those individuals were women of Asian descent. The suspect for the shootings, Robert Aaron Long, has since been charged with murder and aggravated assault.

President L. Rafael Reif wrote an email to the MIT community expressing “outrage and solidarity” in light of the shootings, and the recent surge in anti-Asian violence which he called “a cruel signature of this pandemic year” on March 18.

Danielle Geathers ’22, Undergraduate Association (UA) president, and Yu Jing Chen ’22, UA vice president, expressed solidarity shortly after, in an email on March 19.

“From the systemic fetishization and objectification of Asian women to the xenophobia attached to COVID-19 that has led to a rise

in hate crimes against Asian Americans, it is clear that there is much to be unpacked, a host of systemic problems baked into our education systems, governments, and a number of actors,” Geathers and Chen wrote.

They also wrote that the MIT community can “expect to hear more from the UA in the coming weeks” regarding support initiatives. These initiatives have been led by members across the UA committees, and in particular, the UA Diversity Council (UADC).

AAPI Support, Page 2



FRANKIE SCHULTE—THE TECH

Students organized a candlelit vigil outside of Kresge last Saturday to stand against the hatred and racism experienced by the AAPI community.

# Institute shares draft of five-year strategic action plan for diversity

## Finalized plan expected to be released in end of Spring

By Alina Sarmiento

Provost Martin Schmidt PhD ’88 emailed a draft of MIT’s five-year strategic action plan for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) to the MIT community on March 30, 2021. The email, which introduced both the 15-page draft document and a link to a community feedback form, expressed the importance of unity to enable “meaningful change together.”

Schmidt emphasized that the plan is a set of explicit *actions* for the Institute. The DEI team hopes that the plan can be considered as “an encouraging step that can help

make your local efforts more lasting and effective.” The comment period on the draft is open until April 30 via email or the feedback form at [dei.actionplan@mit.edu](mailto:dei.actionplan@mit.edu), and an invitation to an upcoming community engagement session will be sent soon.

The action plan draft is composed of three main pillars: Composition, Belonging, and Achievement. Each has associated “commitments,” with six commitments in total.

### Pillar 1: Composition

The Composition pillar focuses on the diversity of MIT’s community and student body.

The first commitment focuses on underrepresented graduate students, postdocs, staff, and faculty. This segment outlines a goal of providing bias, diversity, recruitment, and outreach training for graduate student/postdoc admissions staff as well as hiring managers for staff and faculty searches.

Other goals include supporting recruitment and yield activities for underrepresented graduate students, focusing on bridge programs such as MSRP (MIT Summer Research Program), cultivating and enhancing alliances with

DEI, Page 2



FRANKIE SCHULTE—THE TECH

The weather is beginning to warm, and the MIT sailing pavilion is seeing more activity as people set sail on the Charles River.

## IN SHORT

Rising sophomore, juniors, and seniors should share their fall housing plans by completing the **Fall 2021 Undergraduate Housing Intent & Preference Form** on the MyHousing portal by April 9.

**Building switch lottery applications** are also available on the portal until April 9.

Fourth quarter **physical education classes** begin April 12.

**Campus Preview Weekend** will take place April 15–18.

MIT community members living in Massachusetts should **pre-register for COVID-19 vaccines** and update their vaccine status at [covidvaccine.mit.edu](https://covidvaccine.mit.edu).

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# MIT, Harvard, Massachusetts General Hospital to host joint webinar on vaccines and COVID-19

*Webinar will include Q&A about MIT’s vaccine planning and highlight collaborative efforts between MIT and the Ragon Institute on vaccine development and immunity*

By Caitlin Fukumoto

STAFF REPORTER

Members of the Ragon Institute of Massachusetts General Hospital, MIT, and Harvard will host a webinar entitled “COVID-19: Vaccines and prospects for ending the evolving pandemic” on April 8 at 4 p.m.

The webinar will feature Bruce Walker, the founding director of the Ragon Institute, along with Galit Alter, Dan Barouch, and Bryan Bryson, SB ’07, PhD ’13.

President L. Rafael Reif wrote the webinar will explore “how an extraordinary collaboration across research disciplines, government and industry” has brought us to

where we are in the vaccine rollout and “where we go from here,” in an email to the MIT community April 1.

Reif wrote that topics covered in the webinar will include why “viruses pose such a threat to humanity,” how “vaccines are designed,” what new viral variants “mean in terms of ending the pandemic,” and what “we can do now to prevent future pandemics.”

In an email to *The Tech*, Bryson wrote that members of the MIT community planning on attending the webinar “should expect to learn about SARS-CoV-2 pathogenesis, vaccination, and the consequences of viral evolution” and “to see how

the collaborative spirit of MIT and the Ragon Institute was deployed to address this pandemic.”

Barouch wrote in an email to *The Tech* that he hopes attendees will take away a “deeper understanding” of “COVID-19 immunity and vaccines.”

MIT Medical Director Cecilia Stuopis ’90 wrote to *The Tech* that “MIT is a data-driven place.”

“It’s not surprising that members of the community have questions about how these vaccines work, or concerns about their development. We want everyone in the community to understand the science behind the vaccines, and why they are safe. It’s my hope that the webinar

alleviates lingering concerns and convinces more people to get vaccinated, and also share what they learn with friends and family.”

Stuopis explained that by “getting vaccinated, we keep each other healthy, but it’s not just the community that benefits: Across the globe, MIT is a role model. Some of the technologies that made these vaccines possible were created right here. If our community gets the vaccine, we just may inspire others to do so.”

Stuopis will join the Ragon Institute members for questions after the presentations, and, according to Reif’s email, will “answer questions about MIT’s vaccine planning.”

## 160TH BIRTHDAY

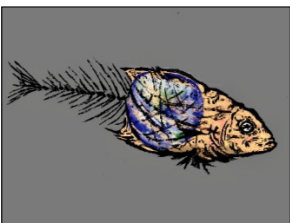
Our voices must also be a part of MIT’s strategic plan. **OPINION**, p. 6

## MORRISONIAN FICTION

Reading to understand justice. **OPINION**, p. 7

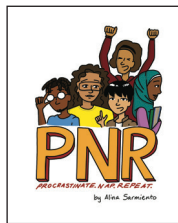
## SUMMER PLANNING

MIT must take responsibility for its policies. **OPINION**, p. 7



## LITTLE CREEK

Glub, glub. **CAMPUS LIFE**, p. 5



## PNR

Well rounded. **FUN**, p. 4

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WEATHER

Wow, it’s actually nice out!

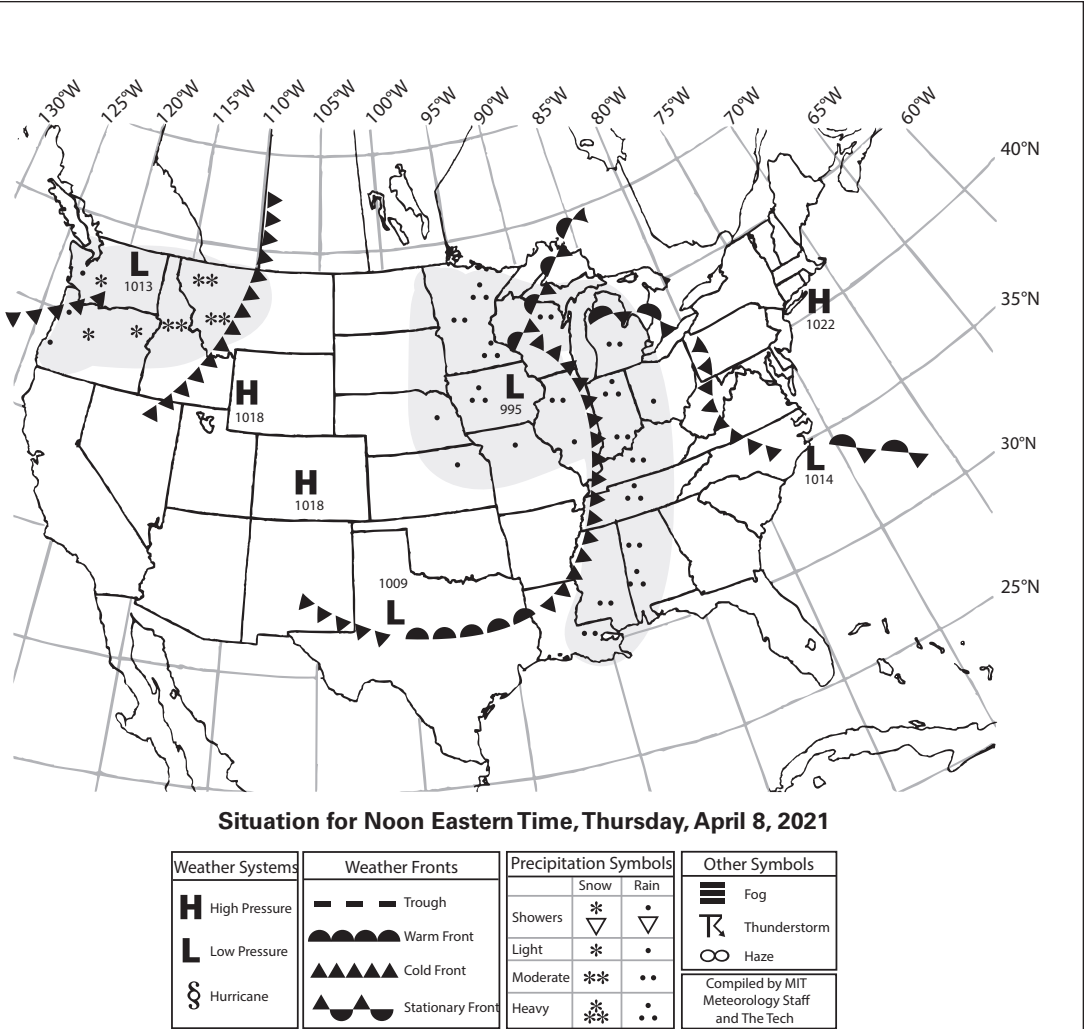
By Sarah Weidman  
STAFF METEOROLOGIST

It’s not so often that I get to say this, but the weather is looking very nice this week! Of course, this is all a matter of opinion, but after a dark and cold winter, a weekend with mild temperatures and a nonzero amount of sun sounds fantastic. Even the classically strong Boston winds seem to be dying down for the next few days, making the prospect of a bike ride or long walk seem even more pleasant. Birds are chattering and deciduous trees are starting to bloom with gorgeous spring flowers. Try to close your computer and put away your psets for a few hours this weekend to

enjoy the (likely fleeting) beautiful spring weather. The big question remains: is spring here for good? Can we put away our thick winter coats? Well, the high variability of New England spring makes me worried to go on the record and claim that only warm temperatures are ahead. It’s not unheard of to see snowflakes through mid April, and the phrase “April showers” is certainly an apt descriptor for Boston. However, as the days grow longer and sunlight gets stronger, the last tendrils of winter are losing their grasp, and any lingering snowfalls will likely be short-lived. You’re likely to need sunscreen more than heavy snow-boots for the coming season.

Extended Forecast

**Today:** Partly sunny. High around 54°F (12°C). North wind around 6-10 mph.  
**Tonight:** Partly cloudy. Low around 44°F (7°C). East wind around 5-7 mph.  
**Tomorrow:** Mostly sunny. High around 60°F (16°C) and low around 45°F (7°C). East wind around 5-8 mph.  
**Saturday:** Mostly sunny. High around 66°F (19°C) and low around 47°F (8°C). Southwest wind around 3-7 mph.  
**Sunday:** Mostly cloudy with chance showers in the afternoon. High around 60°F (16°C).



Vigils for AAPI community held at Kresge and Killian to mourn and reflect lives lost

AAPI Support, from Page 1

The UA has been working with MIT’s leadership in encouraging faculty to offer support resources and extend deadlines for students, Chen said in an interview with *The Tech*. The UA has also added a “Stop AAPI Hate” page on their website sharing information on community events and opportunities for getting involved. Chen said that for the future, the UA is planning a day or week of events challenging people to take part in supporting the Asian community in the Cambridge and Boston area. UA Assistant Officer on Diversity Kelvin Green II ’22 wrote in an email to *The Tech* that the UADC is looking to publish a statement later this week “denouncing anti-Asian racism and [showing] solidarity amongst a diverse set of student organizations with the Asian members of the MIT community.” Several AAPI student groups at MIT joined forces to offer an AAPI Community Discussion on March 22 open to all MIT students. The event was hosted by the Asian American Association, Asian American Initiative (AAI), Association of Taiwanese Students, Chinese Students Club (CSC), and the South Asian Association of Students. About 50 students attended, AAI exec member Kathryn Tso ’22 said in an interview with *The Tech*. The discussion began with a moment of silence, followed by answers to prompt questions made by the CSC on the digital canvas platform Padlet. Questions included “What was your initial reaction to the Atlanta shootings?” and “How do you see your Asian identity intersecting with the other parts of your identity?” Students were then sent to smaller breakout rooms to discuss. AAI also hosted an internal discussion the previous week covering similar topics. Both discussions were “special” to Chen in different ways: the internal discussion “resonated... because it was with the people I saw more frequently,” while the community discussion had “people coming from all over different clubs,” she said.

As an Asian American organization based on advocacy and civic engagement, AAI has been working on other AAPI support initiatives, several of which are through a group called Team Stop AAPI Hate. Prior to the discussion, AAI joined an intercollegiate Asian Pacific Islander Desi American coalition, where several U.S. colleges worked on an institute demands statement, raised money, and hosted a speaker panel. AAI is now working on publishing an MIT-specific Institute demands document advocating for “more robust Asian American studies classes” and the creation of an “Asian American space” on campus, Chen said. Chen, along with Lily Zedler G, Jennifer Leung SM ’20, Chloe Lim G, Nhat Nguyen ’21, and Trai-wat Trairatvorakul G, also recently hosted multiple MIT Stop Asian Hate candlelight installations on April 2 and April 3. The first installation on Killian Court served as an “artistic symbol with the MIT dome,” Zedler wrote in an email to *The Tech*. The second installation on Kresge Oval served as a vigil “for the AAPI community at MIT to come mourn together and reflect.” Zedler wrote that an estimated 120 people attended on April 3 to see the display of 3,795 candles, meant to represent the “3,795 reported hate incidents against AAPIs in the last year alone.” “The candles reflect the magnitude of what the AAPI community has experienced but also the strength they exhibit,” Zedler wrote. Those seeking Institute support can contact Student Support Services, GradSupport, and MIT Medical’s Mental Health and Counseling Services. Those interested in supporting the AAPI community can learn more at Stop AAPI Hate. The Institute Community and Equity Office is also hosting two Bystander Intervention Trainings on April 22 and 29 through Hollaback. AAI meets weekly on Wednesday and Friday to discuss and work on projects related to social justice; community members may email [aa-exec@mit.edu](mailto:aa-exec@mit.edu) to get involved.

DEI team welcomes community input and feedback for final version of strategic plan

DEI, from Page 1

minority-serving institutions and HBCUs, and using Affirmative Action data and goals in staffing categories including leadership and management. The second commitment aims to “assess and strengthen our recruitment of underrepresented undergraduate students” by evaluating STEM outreach and pipeline programs as well as enhancing recruiting efforts for underrepresented undergraduates. **Pillar 2: Belonging** The Belonging pillar focuses on strengthening the interpersonal relationships in the MIT community to foster a sense of belonging for underrepresented community members. The first commitment aims to “critically engage with and empower the MIT community on the value of diversity, equity, and inclusion” through public values statement, accessible repository of DEI resources, methods of recognition for contributions to DEI, and community led programs and events that encourage examination and integration of DEI issues and solutions. The second commitment is to “reinforce positive interactions among members of the MIT community to foster and promote an enduring sense of belonging” and includes goals such as implementing a mentoring program that uses “culturally-responsive” training, creating a Wellbeing Lab and developing messaging about self-care, compassion, resiliency, and respect, and promoting cultural student groups.

An in-progress section states a goal to meet urgent student financial needs and address food insecurity. This section also states a goal to address toxic power imbalances in the workplace and hold faculty accountable for creating healthy interpersonal relationships with students and each other. The third commitment aims to support academic research, scholarship, and collaborations regarding DEI. This commitment alludes to President Reif’s letter from July 2020 which announced immediate investments in antiracist research totaling \$1 million as well as an effort to seek additional sources. **Pillar 3: Achievement** The Achievement pillar focuses on the success and opportunity afforded to underrepresented groups. The first commitment under this pillar aims to “close achievement gaps and advance equity” among all underrepresented populations. Some of the goals listed in the section are to launch an undergraduate advising program that emphasizes support of a wider set of backgrounds, expand the 5th-week flag (early alert) system beyond the first-year core, analyze potential differences in participation and outcomes in experiential learning programs, provide transitional funding for graduate students to facilitate success during periods between sources of funding/advisors, address inequity in graduate program progression, study salary and promotion equity among staff, and revise the existing tenure and promotion criteria.

MIT declined to comment on past efforts to address DEI concerns in the FAQ, and wrote instead that the plan is “about what MIT is going to do to reinforce its value and interest in being a leading voice in creating and sustaining more diverse, equitable, and inclusive communities.” In response to the question of who would hold the Institute accountable for this plan, the website wrote that it is “likely that the Committee on Race and Diversity will continue to play an oversight role in the monitoring and implementation of the plan” while the president and senior leadership of MIT “are [the plan’s] ultimate owners.” A final plan addressing diversity, equity, and inclusion is expected to be produced by the end of the semester. MIT’s Minority Introduction to Engineering and Science (MITES) program administrator Adriana Espinal reached out to *The Tech*, writing that she “participated in the open forums organized by the Steering team, and this first draft shows they are actively listening to the community and incorporating our feedback and thoughts.” “I am hopeful for the next stages of this plan, and developing concrete goals, metrics and accountability practices that will move us forward as a community.” MIT community members are encouraged to reach out to the DEI team with feedback and thoughts on the plan. Feedback can be submitted via email to [provost-reply@mit.edu](mailto:provost-reply@mit.edu) or via the feedback textbox.

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Photo: Justin Knight

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**Solution to Argon**  
from page 4

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**Solution to Spikeball**  
from page 4

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2	5	6	9	4	3	7	1	8
8	3	1	5	6	7	2	4	9
5	6	4	1	7	8	9	2	3
3	8	2	4	5	9	6	7	1
7	1	9	3	2	6	5	8	4

**Solution to Cornhole**  
from page 4

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# Cornhole

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# ARGON by S.N.

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60					61	62					63		64	
65				66		67					68			
69						70					71			
72						73					74			

# Well Rounded by Alina Sarmiento



What do you mean, I'm in the Centrohexaindane Appreciation Society because benzene rings are near and dear to me >:(



## WENBO'S WALKS

# Ardent salmon tales

# Finding a sense of home is hard

**By Wenbo Wu**  
*EXECUTIVE EDITOR*

My hair falls like candle wax. The winter sun dips below the horizon and drips onto the tray beneath; metallic clangs ripple through the spring air. I stand on the moss-covered rocks and look out across the ocean, the beautiful Atlantic I'd never inhaled before. The fire rises to my feet and crashes against the desolate beach. It must be high tide.

The heart of the flicker waves calmly at me. I stare into it and feel everything yet nothing at all. When I look into the ember, I feel like the most powerful and most vulnerable being at the same time. Feeling powerful does not make one invulnerable, nor should vulnerability convey a lack of power, I suppose.

The stone-laden sand crunches below my feet. The ocean is far too beautiful to be my domain. One day I want to live by the ocean. I want to feel the waves crash into the planks of my existence. I suppose eventually we'll all end up with the ocean, just particles of silt drifting off to some new destination. Won't we?

But maybe I want to live by a creek instead, the kind that cuts shrewdly through a grassland field. Maybe I'd listen to the river calmly chipping away at the stones below the surface in my rocking chair, knowing that it will eventually cut its way through any obstacle that dares to come its way, however slowly. But alas, the freshwater cannot be mine. It's far too transient... like a candle flame.

The thing is, I truly am no greater than the almighty salmon: master of freshwater and saltwater alike. I meander carefully over a particularly large stone in my path. Maybe I'm a bit like a creek myself.

I'm a wanderer. If the premise of this column does not make that abundantly clear, I wish to clarify further. I feel like I've never quite settled down. I had moved

about six times before entering middle school. Sometimes, there are certain childhood experiences that one cannot seem to outlive; this is mine.

I don't have any friends stretching all the way back to the beginnings of my childhood, because I never stuck around long enough for most of them, or so I'd like to think. Most of my best friends in elementary school were as transient as a candle flame, vanishing in the passing smoke of a U-Haul.

I am afraid. I am afraid that my friends will drop away like the hairs on my scalp. I am afraid that I will wake up alone one day and realize that people only tolerated my presence, that once people discover my limited number of facets, I would become disposable. I am afraid that none of my best friends consider me to be one of their best friends. Would I even consider myself to be my own best friend? I'm not so sure. I'm afraid I sound desperate.

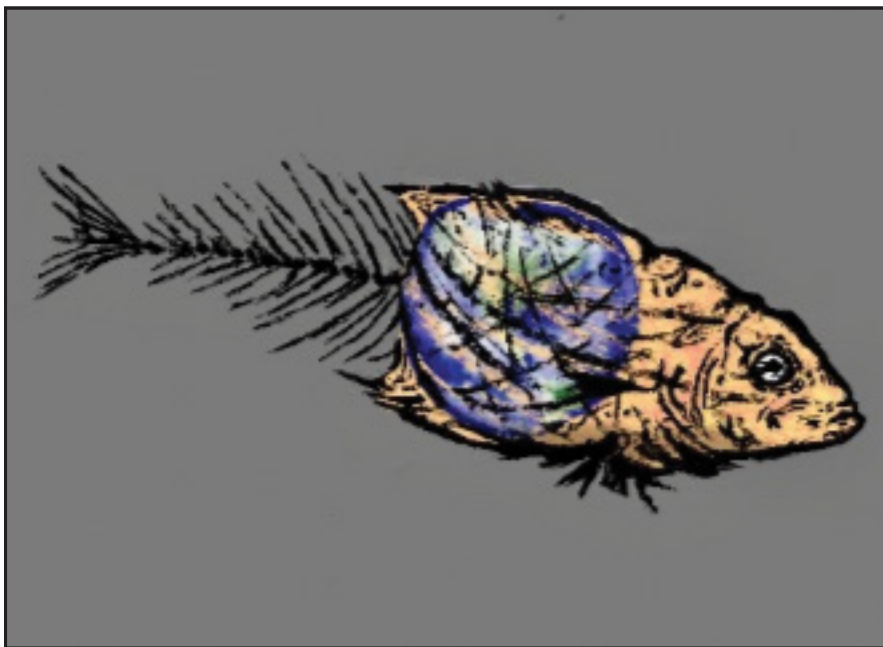
I've lived everywhere from Texas to Virginia to Massachusetts, but each time, I feel like a visitor. My immediate family is in Virginia, so why does the state feel so foreign to me? Where is my real home?

The thing about the salmon is that *all it cares about is finding its home*. After it leaves the freshwater for the sea, it will always, no matter how far it has traveled, somehow know where it was born and return to that spot to spawn the next generation. Failure is not an option.

The dusk is settling in over Winthrop. I should return to Random.

I feel lonely on the return trip even in the presence of the two friends who I had traveled with. This has always been *Wenbo's* Walks. These walks have always been just mine. Sure, I reference the friends in my life as parts of stories or even recurring motifs, but I remain alone in the literary present.

I want to be more *present* with others, whatever that means during a pandemic. Over the past year, I've been terrible with



FARIN TAVACOLI—THE TECH

**Failure is** not an option.

keeping in touch with many of my friends. This is nobody's fault but mine. I keep making excuses, telling myself that I'm just prioritizing "useful actionables" over "unproductive small talk" or that I'm simply "too stressed." But that doesn't make me a better person or even a greater contributor to society. It only makes me a worse friend.

I must go to the place where any smoke left in the wake of a flame must always return; I must ground myself. Maybe my home isn't a fixed location at all. As bromide as it sounds, perhaps my home is wherever my friends are. And maybe I've just been so afraid of losing my friends in the smoke that I never allow myself to feel at home.

I love my friends, and in much the same way they have supported me, I must do my part to support them too, even if that just means checking in on them every once in a while. Although it's been a year since I gave

my heart to someone I deeply love, there's always plenty of love to spare. It's like that Kacey Musgraves song: "Anywhere beside you is a place that I'll call home." Romantic or platonic, I think there's significant truth to that.

And so I will find my home like the salmon. I will be a better friend. While there is an infinite amount of “productive” academic or vocational things I could do, the time I spend with my friends, however infinite it seems, is ultimately finite, which makes it all the more valuable. That isn’t to say that I’ll drop everything to talk with a friend under any circumstance whatsoever, of course, but it does mean that I’ll do everything in my power to adjust my perspective on what I value most.

I take a breath and step into my dorm.  
Tonight the moon begins anew; tomorrow  
is a new day.

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# Blurred vision

## By Kelvin Green II

In America, being a place that welcomes justice has proven to be a challenge. I do not discount the community-led spaces of justice that exist within the borders of the United States now, nor do I discredit those who are excellent in advancing the cause for justice by meeting the physical, spiritual, social, and political needs of the oppressed, who give us evidence that justice is attainable if we fight for it. I merely remark that the last time justice knew this land and vice versa was before Europeans arrived here. Despite so much national rhetoric about justice, justice itself seems to be a slick baby ungraspable by Americans and slipping through the hands of MIT, too.

What the senior leadership of MIT admitted in their recent “strategic plan” are three key pieces of information: MIT is not a place adequately composed nor commensurate with national racial and gender data; MIT is not a place where students feel comfortable to thrive and develop safely as a person; MIT is not a place of equity, which is to say that MIT is a place with inequities that directly stifle the achievement of its students and other groups affiliated with MIT. This “strategic plan” also outlines commitments and efforts to correct the aforementioned deficiencies.

In reflection of MIT's 160th birthday approaching this Saturday, I have been pondering what has become of the school founded by a slaveholder in 1861. Thus, I have been pondering this plan. My first thoughts are of all the students and staff and faculty and friends of past decades who worked tirelessly to influence the Institute's senior leadership and raise the community understanding of justice, these trailblazers who gave us a language for describing this goal for MIT — the petitions signed, the recommendations given, the demands made, the ultimatums stated, the righteous anger sustained, the strikes executed, the activism practiced, the community engaged, and the hurt endured.

**If MIT does all it is committing to do in this plan, it will be a better place.**

I think secondly about the language used in the plan purposing to guide MIT through 2026. In the first nine words I find three which deserve critical consideration — “Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion,” or DEI. Like “hello” or “bye,” these words and letters show up in all rooms for folks to engage without saying “justice.” It is a complexifying metonym that America commonly practices to distort meaning. Out of 4,000 words in this plan, “justice” shows up twice. This only works to show that “DEI” is a perversion to justice, despite its attractiveness and lexical palatability. The very

language of the strategic plan reveals that the Institute has succumbed ultimately to distraction on the order of 99.995% from justice. Instead we are left to look at the dancing shadows of diversity, equity, and inclusion, which provide clues to justice yet forfeit the right to tell more and to be proactive, rather than disappointingly reactive, to our current problems of inequity, exclusivity, and striking homogeneity.

**I am concerned that we will remain trapped in the cycle of our own undoing, despite our focused energy and efforts.**

I think thirdly of a question rather than a thought — where is MIT looking to go? The nature of a “strategic plan” elucidates that strategy provides direction and the plan dictates arrival, yet both together are designed to bring success. This wisdom is ancestral. Sun Tzu said, “Strategy without tactics is the slowest route to victory. Tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat.” If working for justice can be described as a “fight” (which it has been), then the field of justice is a field of war. I will first assess the strategy of the “strategic plan,” then I will attempt to comment on its tactics.

The strategy for the plan is clearly outlined along three “strategic points” — composition (diversity), belonging (inclusion), and achievement (equity). Based on my previous analyses of DEI, I will take the liberty to only remind you of how this serves as a distraction. However, it may not be so clear as to why. One can better understand my assertion by transforming the three strategic points into a line of questioning. If MIT increased the number of Black, Latinx, and Indigenous people at the Institute, and created a welcoming environment for all community members, and ensured the achievement of all community members, then will MIT have done enough? Although I feel I might have given the strategic plan more confidence than it boasts, I also think it is important to entertain this question. Will MIT have done enough? A quick yes or a quick no would be ignorant. A delayed yes or a delayed no would be a quitted thought. Silence, a question, or a thoughtful answer are most likely the responses that can approximate truth.

Is it enough? Enough for what? *Where are we going?* How will we know we've gotten there and what is enough in what context? All these questions naturally present themselves in the scope of assessing a strategy or vision. I do not believe the "strategic plan" adequately answers these questions. I refer to the plan as a plan rather than a "strategic plan" (as it is written), because I struggle to find its strategy. If anything, at best it is a plan and at worst it is a to-

do list. Because of this, I hypothesize we will be writing another plan later and later and later. Without a clear strategy that utilizes diversity, equity, and inclusion as its conduits for success and not its aim, then we will continue to return to the drawing board and delay justice.

As Sun Tzu has stated, without substantive strategy guiding proposed tactics, the result is "noise" that precedes defeat. I do not mean that if MIT were to accomplish what it has stated in the plan that it would not be a more equitable, more diverse, more inclusive place. If MIT does all it is committing to do in this plan, it will be a better place. However, this assessment is relative to our current condition. More is better, but not necessarily complete or enough. Without any strategy provided in the plan to outline this distinction, I am concerned that we will remain trapped in the cycle of our own undoing, despite our focused energy and efforts. And yet the tactics offered in the plan delay our path to justice, in a time where there has been decades of literature which would tell us we do not have infinite time to get this right. We must be intentional now, and one way to check ourselves is to ask if we are satisfied with slow movement not toward diversity, equity, and inclusion, but toward justice. I am not.

**Coming on the eve of its 160th birthday, this plan is a testament to the moral distance traveled since MIT's racist founding.**

It is good to see MIT dedicate time (though I believe it needed much more) to crafting a plan focused on efforts of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Coming on the eve of its 160th birthday, this plan is a testament to the moral distance traveled since MIT's racist founding. However, I think this plan has missed an opportunity, unless we use our voices and opportunity as members of the MIT community to speak up and out about what we believe is missing in the plan, what we believe is important to the plan, and what change we want to see in the implementation of this plan. The Institute Community & Equity Office is not solely responsible for this plan. The 34 people privileged to sit on the steering committee are not solely responsible, either. We are all responsible for this plan, and it will only go forth if we say so. If this plan has blurred vision, then it is on all of us to be a prescriptive lens.

*Kelvin Green II '22 is a member of Chocolate City and the Rho Nu Chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. and is the Assistant Officer on Diversity for the Undergraduate Association.*

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```
from new_skills import *  
  
def learnMarketableJobSkills():  
    return linux, OSX, javascript, applescript, perl, python, PHP  
  
if self.interest == True:  
    print "E-mail join@tech.mit.edu"
```



# African-American fiction

## *The everlasting criticality of Toni Morrison's work*

**By Kelvin Green II**

In the United States, *de jure* (and subsequent *de facto*) prohibition of teaching both reading and writing to its enslaved population (called 'Black') was both ubiquitous and fatally enforced. This inhumane (and racist) practice resulted in many unwritten stories and silenced voices of the enslaved African population. African-American fiction — fiction written by African-American writers — provides an intellectual landscape to understand their interior life in the context of their external world and in defiance of the efforts by the white population to erase Black voices and Black stories. It is the work of writers like Toni Morrison that has given us another chance to reimagine and retain their world — the world of ancestors who lived, laughed, loved, died, suffered, and survived so that we could be here.

**Simply put, the world I experience and understand has been corrected, like wearing a prescriptive lens by reading her work.**

It is no secret I am a fan of Toni Morrison. More than a fan, I am a student of hers. I read her fiction, her essays, her edited works; watch her interviews, her lectures, her speeches; read her opera, her short stories, and her poetry. However, what may not be clear is why I spend my limited time on this Earth doing so. I am not writing to justify

this practice of mine, but I do want to speak to the art of Black fiction (in America), and to do so in a responsible way, I must place Toni Morrison's work center stage. I do not mean to alienate the wealth of writings from other Black women writers whose work has also greatly influenced the world and this work. Yet Morrison's particular row of tilled literary soil is what I want to attempt to detail and outline.

I did not grow up reading Toni Morrison. I saw the bright orange binding of her *Song of Solomon* somewhere on my parents' bookshelf as a middle school child and thought its cover image of a black man in a white robe with a spiked, yellow sun behind him was interesting, but I did not know who Toni Morrison was, nor did I know what she did for the African-American, the world's literary imagination, or the canon of American literature. It was in the winter of my last year in high school when I first read her work, namely *Beloved*, and felt for the first time I was reading a story part of me already knew, but had yet to see materialize in written form with such efficacy. Since then, I have read five more of her eleven novels — *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula*, *Song of Solomon*, *Jazz*, and *Paradise* — and I'm currently reading *Tar Baby* and rereading *Sula*.

I do not presume to be a scholar of Morrisonian fiction, but I have spent much time thinking about the personal and extra-personal effects of reading her work. Simply put, the world I experience and understand has been corrected, like wearing a prescriptive lens by reading her work. Morrisonian fiction centers around the stories of African-American people, mostly African-American women who seldom play a central role in American literature; it is true to the African-

**I implore all to take  
initiative and read Toni  
Morrison.**

I did not mistakenly interpolate “truth” in my writing about Morrisonian fiction. Growing up in elementary school, I was taught that what distinguished nonfiction from fiction were facts, which, without careful explanation, implied that truth also distinguishes these two literary genres. This could not have been more wrong, especially in the context of the African-American. In an essay titled “The Site of Memory,” Morrison writes: “Therefore the crucial distinction for me is not the difference between fact and fiction, but the distinction between fact and truth. Because facts can exist without human intelligence, but truth cannot. So if I’m looking to find and expose a truth about the interior life of people who didn’t write it (which doesn’t mean that they didn’t have

it); if I'm trying to fill in the blanks that the slave narratives left to part the veil that was so frequently drawn, to implement the stories that I heard — then the approach that's most productive and most trustworthy for me is the recollection that moves from the image to the text. Not from the text to the image." Moving from image to text is the work of fiction.

I have only given a drop from the river of knowledge and wisdom that is Morrison's work, yet in the wake of civil unrest, in the presence of a trial for Derek Chauvin, and in the time of an American citizenry that seems to be more concerned with justice, with diversity, equity, and inclusion, I implore all to take initiative and read Toni Morrison. When I say read, I do not mean skim. Skimming is not simply reading quickly or skipping written portions to obtain near-perfect meaning — skimming is reading without receiving, and it is also reading without contemplating, or reading without giving ponderance to the feelings which arise within oneself. Skimming is what we usually do if we are not intentional about reading. When read and not skimmed, Morrisonian fiction promises to give new understanding, fresh thinking, and a cleaner heart. It is in the worlds she has imagined and written where we can confront our own fears, our own worries, our own prejudices, racist beliefs and trauma, and then work to move into new territory, new thinking, and a more honest understanding of our world, ourselves, and this country.

*Kelvin Green II '22 is a member of Chocolate City and the Rho Nu Chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. and is the Assistant Officer on Diversity for the Undergraduate Association.*

## STAFF COLUMN

# MIT must bear the same burdens it is placing on its students

*If students are forced to return from abroad, MIT can't cancel summer programs and housing*

**By Áron Ricardo Perez-Lopez**  
*SENIOR EDITOR V*

A month ago, on March 9, I was invited, along with other students involved with international student advocacy, to attend a meeting with Vice Chancellor Ian Waitz and staff from his office to discuss the remote appointment policies for the summer and the fall. The proposal — by now published — was clear: MIT wants to gradually return to life as normal by the start of the fall. This involves reducing the number of students residing abroad on MIT appointments (assistantships and fellowships) to effectively zero by September.

We, the students present at the meeting, let them know our concerns about the effects of such a policy, including the fact that many of the countries where students are currently residing will not reach herd immunity by the summer — unlike the U.S., which is predicted to have all of its (willing) adults vaccinated by May — so traveling for them would mean potentially becoming infected. The

final version of the policy includes a limited exception process for students who are prevented from entering the U.S. and those with medical conditions that make travel to the U.S. high risk. This is more restrictive than we would have wanted but by this point, we realized that MIT, like everyone else, wants to be back to normal as soon as feasible.

**These policy changes represent a complete U-turn from where MIT has been heading.**

Then on Wednesday, April 7, the MIT community received a different email regarding Institute policies for the summer. In it, we were told that MIT would take a very conservative approach and the summer would look very similar to the spring. Undergraduates will not be allowed to stay on campus or in FSILGs unless approved through SHARP, and most in-person sum-

## Why is MIT optimistic when it helps its bottom line but conservative when it comes to student needs?

These policy changes represent a complete U-turn from where MIT (and the rest of Massachusetts and the U.S.) has been heading. Why is it safe for several thousand undergraduates to stay on campus now, but not over the summer, when vaccination rates will be higher? Why are K-12 students more dangerous to MIT than to their own school districts, many of which are planning to reopen by the end of spring? We already know the devastating effects of virtual schooling on both the educational advancement and the mental health of children, so why are we denying them these opportunities?

What are undergraduates, who normally rely on MIT's summer housing to stay here and e.g. engage in UROPs, supposed to do in one of the most expensive cities in the world, a month and a half before the start of the summer? Why is MIT stripping FSILGs of their summer income again, which is usually how they can make up for, in effect, subsidizing student housing during the academic year?

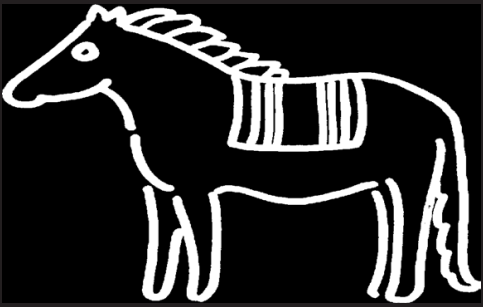
Beyond these rather obvious questions, another one presents itself, in light of the summer appointments policy: why is MIT optimistic when it helps its bottom line but conservative when it comes to student needs? It seems rather hypocritical that in one policy, the administration talks about how important it is for students to understand that we need to ramp up campus and research operations over the summer and go back to normal because things are going to get better real soon, while in another one, it says that students need to be kicked off campus when the semester ends — again.

Not cool MIT, not cool.

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