

MIT declines Graduate Student Union recognition without an election conducted by NLRB

GSU: admin excluding 'graduate workers funded by fellowships' made it 'impossible to reach an agreement'

By Caitlin Fukumoto
EDITOR

MIT will not recognize a graduate student union without an independent election conducted by the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), MIT Chancellor Melissa Nobles and Provost Martin A. Schmidt PhD '88 wrote in a letter to MIT graduate students Feb. 1. Nobles and Schmidt shared the update with the MIT community at large in an email later the same day.

Nobles and Schmidt wrote that "all eligible graduate students" will have the opportunity to vote. The NLRB has not yet scheduled a date for the election.

The MIT Graduate Student Union (GSU) announced that a majority of MIT's graduate student-workers had signed union authorization cards in a press release on the GSU website Dec. 13. The press release stated that "graduate employees submitted a letter" to MIT

President Rafael Reif requesting that he "voluntarily recognize their union" the same day.

The GSU announced that they "filed thousands of union cards" with the NLRB to initiate the union election process in a press release Feb. 1, the same day Nobles and Schmidt sent emails to graduate students and the MIT community.

MIT declined the GSU's request for voluntary recognition in January 2021. The GSU's Dec. 13 press release stated that in this situation, graduate student-workers "have the right to file for an NLRB election to secure union representation and a start to contract negotiations."

Voluntary recognition of the union by MIT would have been followed by a verification of majority support for unionization through a third-party card count. The process would not have included an election.

The GSU spent January "working to collaborate with the MIT administration" over the terms of the union

election instead of "filing with the NLRB the moment that voluntary recognition was off the table," stating that they "wanted to give MIT admin the chance to show leadership."

The GSU stated that "the MIT administration has insisted on excluding graduate workers funded by fellowships" from the union, making it "impossible to reach an agreement."

In their email to graduate students, Nobles and Schmidt said that "MIT's senior leaders believe that all eligible students should have the chance to choose for themselves, through an independent election, whether unionization is in their best interests."

Nobles and Schmidt wrote that they wanted "to share MIT's senior leaders' perspective on graduate student unionization" and "highlight what's at stake in this election," describing voting as "critical."

Nobles and Schmidt proceeded to present their reasons for be-

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FRANKIE SCHULTE—THE TECH

Students walking towards Lobby 7 on the first day of spring classes, Monday.

IN SHORT

Spring registration deadline is Feb. 4.

Deadline for second-term juniors to submit their HASS Concentration Proposal Form is Feb. 4.

Deadline for final-term seniors to submit their HASS Concentration Completion Form is Feb. 4.

Third quarter PE classes begin Feb. 7.

Feb. 11 is the last day to add half-term subjects offered in the first half of term and to change grading options for these subjects.

Class of 2024 Ring Premiere is Feb. 11.

Interested in joining The Tech? Email join@tech.mit.edu.

Send news and tips to news@tech.mit.edu.

Judge approves federal motion to dismiss China Initiative fraud case against Professor Gang Chen

The case was dismissed 'in the interests of justice' based on new information obtained by the US Attorney's Office

By Wenbo Wu
EDITOR IN CHIEF

A judge approved federal prosecutors' motion to dismiss the case against Mechanical Engineering Professor Gang Chen Jan. 20.

The case alleged that Chen committed wire fraud, failed to file a

foreign bank account report, and made a false statement in a tax return. Chen was arrested Jan. 14, 2021 and pleaded not guilty to all charges.

U.S. Attorney Rachel Collins wrote in a statement that "additional information pertaining to the materiality of Professor Chen's alleged omissions

in the context of the grant review process" had "recently" been obtained by the U.S. Attorney's Office of the District of Massachusetts. After "careful assessment," prosecutors concluded that they could no longer meet their "burden of proof at trial" and de-

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Ad hoc working group charged to review free speech

Working group made after Carlson Lecture cancellation will present first findings end of term

By Kristina Chen
PUBLISHER

The Institute has charged an ad hoc working group on free expression, according to a Jan. 27 email to the MIT community from President L. Rafael Reif.

Co-chaired by Professor of Biology Sallie "Penny" Chisholm and Professor of Urban Studies and Planning Phillip Clay PhD '75, the working group's membership also

includes the President-Elect of the MIT Alumni Association Stephen Baker MArch '88 and President of the MIT Alumni Association and member of the MIT Corporation Annalisa Weigel PhD '02, along with additional professors, Institute staff, and students.

The working group is expected to present its preliminary findings by the end of the Spring 2022 semester.

The creation of the working group was prompted by controversy over

MIT's decision to cancel the 2021 Carlson Lecture sponsored by the Department of Earth, Atmospheric, and Planetary Sciences over statements made by the planned speaker, University of Chicago Professor Dorian Abbot. According to Reif's email, the cancellation caused "significant concern and contention" within MIT's community over issues of censorship and free expression.

Charged by Reif, Provost Martin A. Schmidt PhD '88, Chancellor Me-

lissa Nobles, and Chair of the Faculty Lily Tsai, the working group will review MIT's existing statements on the free and open exchange of ideas; consider relevant scholarship, cases, and statements on free speech-related issues, particularly at institutions of higher education; and review input gathered from faculty, alumni, staff, students, and Corporation members through emails, reports, and forums.

In addition, the working group will work with MIT's Values State-

ment Committee to incorporate input that the committee has received from the community.

The working group will also address four questions written in its charge: "Does MIT need to revise or update its statements regarding academic freedom, freedom of expression, and/or pluralism?," "How should we define these and other related fundamental princi-

Free Expression, Page 2

WHO AM I?

Getting over an obsession with grades is actually harder than I made it seem.

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CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Advocating for healthier work environments through a union. OPINION, p. 5

MOVING INTO FOCUS

The train is closing in. CAMPUS LIFE, p. 7

LAST FIRST

My life is so full of love now; I'm terrified to watch it go. CAMPUS LIFE, p. 6

ASIAN/AMERICAN MENTAL HEALTH

Representation and cultural competence are necessary resources. OPINION, p. 4

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WEATHER

A snowy campus welcomes the spring semester!

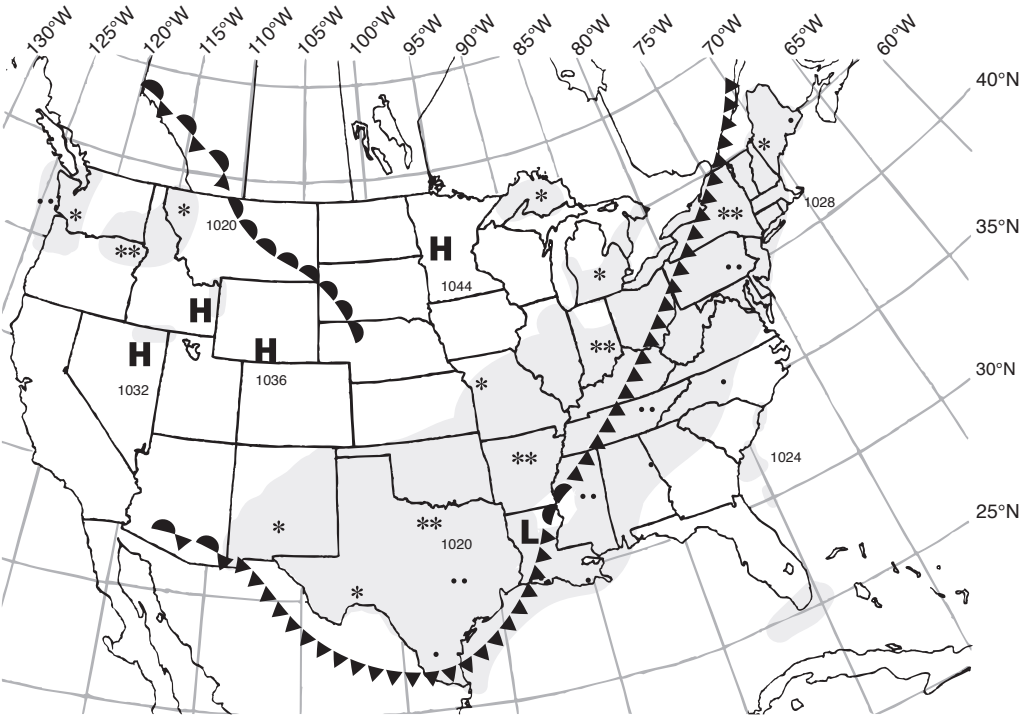
By Trinity Manuelito
STAFF METEOROLOGIST

Campus is alive and bustling with students heading to their classes once again. There is still snow around campus from last weekend’s blizzard. On Briggs Field and Killian you can see where students have gone out to enjoy the snow. Make sure to wear your jacket when heading to class.

















Yesterday was Groundhog Day and well, it’s an uncertain forecast. Two different groundhogs had conflicting predictions. Punxsutawney Phil from Pennsylvania predicted six more weeks of winter. Meanwhile, in New York, Staten Island Chuck saw his shadow and predicted an early spring. Either way, we are in for some more rain and possible snow today and tomorrow. Don’t worry, there is relief this weekend with sunny conditions!

Extended Forecast

Today: Cloudy with a chance of rain. High around 44°F (7°C). Southwest winds around 8 mph.
Tonight: Rain. Low around 30°F (-1°C). Southwest winds around 6-10 mph.
Tomorrow: Rain, snow, and sleet. High around 35°F (2°C) and low around 15°F (-9°C). North wind around 14 mph.
Saturday: Mostly sunny and clear. High around 23°F (-5°C) and low around 9°F (-13°C). Northwest winds 10-14 mph.
Sunday: Partly sunny. High around 31°F (-1°C) and low around 22°F (-6°C). Northwest winds around 6 mph.



Situation for Noon Eastern Time, Thursday, February 3, 2022

Weather Systems	Weather Fronts		Precipitation Symbols		Other Symbols
H High Pressure	 Trough		<div>Snow</div> 	<div>Rain</div> 	 Fog
L Low Pressure	 Warm Front		<div>Light</div> 		 Thunderstorm
 Hurricane	 Cold Front		<div>Moderate</div> 		 Haze
	 Stationary Front		<div>Heavy</div> 		
Compiled by MIT Meteorology Staff and <i>The Tech</i>					

Chen’s case has ‘caused ongoing distress’ for those ‘of Chinese descent,’ Reif wrote Jan. 20

Gang Chen, from Page 1

cided to dismiss the case “in the interests of justice.” Robert Fisher, Chen’s lawyer in the case, said in a statement Jan. 20 that the “government finally acknowledged what we have said all along: [Chen] is an innocent man.” In an opinion piece to *The Boston Globe* Jan. 21, Chen wrote that he had known he “was under investigation by the Department of Justice under its China Initiative” established under Donald Trump’s presidency. According to the Department of Justice website, the China Initiative “reflects the strategic priority of countering Chinese national security threats and reinforces [Trump’s] overall national security strategy.” The website adds that its goals include identifying “prior-

ity trade secret theft cases” and “bringing enforcement actions when appropriate” to “unregistered agents seeking to advance China’s political agenda.” Chen wrote in his piece that the indictment had been “rushed” and that both the indictment and complaint “were riddled with basic factual errors.” Chen added that his arrest occurred during Trump’s last week in office, which meant that Andrew Lelling, the then-federal prosecutor in Boston who helped create the China Initiative and announced Chen’s arrest, “was about to leave office.” Lelling wrote in a LinkedIn post December 2021 that the China Initiative “has drifted and, in some significant ways, lost its focus.” Chen also wrote that he and his family “went through a living hell” for “371 days,” adding that there is “no winner” in what

appeared to him as “a politically and racially motivated prosecution.” The prosecution “managed to blunt” one of the U.S.’s “great strengths,” its “rich history of academic research and collaboration,” Chen wrote. President L. Rafael Reif wrote in an email to the MIT community Jan. 20 that Chen’s case has “caused ongoing distress” for “those across MIT and elsewhere who are of Chinese descent.” According to a Dec. 2, 2021 report by the *MIT Technology Review*, 88% of individuals charged under the China Initiative were of Chinese heritage. “Having had faith in [Chen] from the beginning, we can all be grateful that a just outcome of a damaging process is on the horizon,” Reif wrote. “We are eager for [Chen’s] full return to our community,” he concluded.

Eight op-eds supportive of the grad union omitted from site

GSU, from Page 1

lieving “that MIT’s long-standing partnership with graduate students is a better path forward than unionization.” In both their email to graduate students and their email to the MIT community, Nobles and Schmidt shared the website *grad-union.mit.edu*. In their email to graduate students, Nobles and Schmidt noted that all “graduate students should cast an informed vote after considering both sides in this debate and visiting *grad-union.mit.edu*.”

The *grad-union.mit.edu* menu includes a “student voices” tab, linked to an FAQ page titled “Student concerns about unionization.” In response to the question, “What have students said in opposition to the current unionization effort?” the page features three op-eds published in *The Tech* between Oct. 6 and Nov. 3, 2021. *The Tech* has published eight other student-written op-eds on the topic of graduate student unionization that are not featured on *grad-union.mit.edu*. These articles speak favorably of unionization and the GSU.

Working group to determine decision-making processes

Free Expression, from Page 1

ples?,” “How can we give such statements prominence in our policies and the life of the Institute?,” “What are processes for negotiating disagreements and making decisions on these and related issues so that we can accept the outcome even when we disagree with the decision?” Following its review and consideration of these questions, the

working group will recommend “any changes needed to existing Institute statements or guidance,” the charge writes. The group will also suggest principles and processes for decision making, “particularly with respect to how and when issues should be brought to or decided by the central administration.” MIT community members can share feedback on the working group’s work by emailing *working-group@mit.edu*.

Meet your fellow tech staff.
(aka, your new 3 a.m. pset support group)



join@tech.mit.edu
W20-483, 617-253-1541

101 THINGS TO DO BEFORE YOU GRADUATE

32. Take a stroll through Little Italy in the North End

Join the Arts department at *The Tech* and write restaurant reviews.
(And get reimbursed for your meal!)



HELLO!

WE MAKE *THE TECH*, MIT'S
STUDENT NEWSPAPER!

If you like writing, graphic design,
photography, business, technology,
(or pretty much anything else)

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for you here!

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you just want to see what we
do, **join us for dinner** in our
office on the fourth floor of the
Student Center (**W20-483**) on
Sundays at 6 pm, or email us at
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NO EXPERIENCE
NECESSARY!

NOTES



Chloe McCreery '23

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SYD ROBINSON — THE TECH

A growing choir of healthcare and counseling professionals and clients are calling for more cultural competence in the clinic. To be culturally competent means that providers are continuously introspecting and building awareness on their personal biases, interactional patterns, and value systems given the culture they were brought up in. Only after a personal journey can therapists begin to approach conversations related to race with their clients, according to Dr. Helen

“Going to a predominantly white institution has caused issues like facing racism,

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When surveying the Asian/American community at MIT, we asked respondents what prevents them from seeking support on-campus:

- **Time and effort:** Many respondents mentioned a lack of time and/or energy to reach out or that it is not a priority.
- **Inaccessibility of setting up an appointment:** Currently, the only way to schedule an initial appointment is through a phone call, which can be inconvenient and is a barrier to those with social anxiety.
- **Long wait times:** Many reported either experiencing firsthand or hearing from others about the long wait times to get an appointment, sometimes exceeding a month.
- **Distrust of professionals:** Multiple students felt rushed to start medication, leading to general distrust of professional support. Others reported doubt surrounding the effectiveness of treatment, some stemming from negative past experiences with therapists.
- **Cost and confidentiality:** Many reported being unsure about whether insurance covers the bill or not. Multiple also reported cost as an issue, likely stemming from misinformation surrounding insurance policies. Additionally, confidentiality is a significant concern, including mandatory reporting law and visibility of insurance bills.
- **Stigma and lack of perceived need:** Multiple students reported feeling weak or experiencing difficulty acknowledging that they need help.
- **Difficulty with teletherapy:** Common challenges of teletherapy include difficulty in finding a private space to take sessions, which is especially an issue for students with roommates.

"I've heard wait times can be really long. [But] also the stigma that seeking help for mental health means that you're weak."

"I felt that stereotypes were being projected onto me due to being East Asian. When I hesitated to go on medication for a multitude of reasons, one being my parents' valid distrust of Western medicine, my psychiatrist would only focus on whether or not I had talked to my parents, rather than ask if other factors were bothering me."

When it comes to seeking mental health, the process should be as accessible and low-effort as possible. Students facing mental health challenges already struggle to set up

GUEST COLUMN

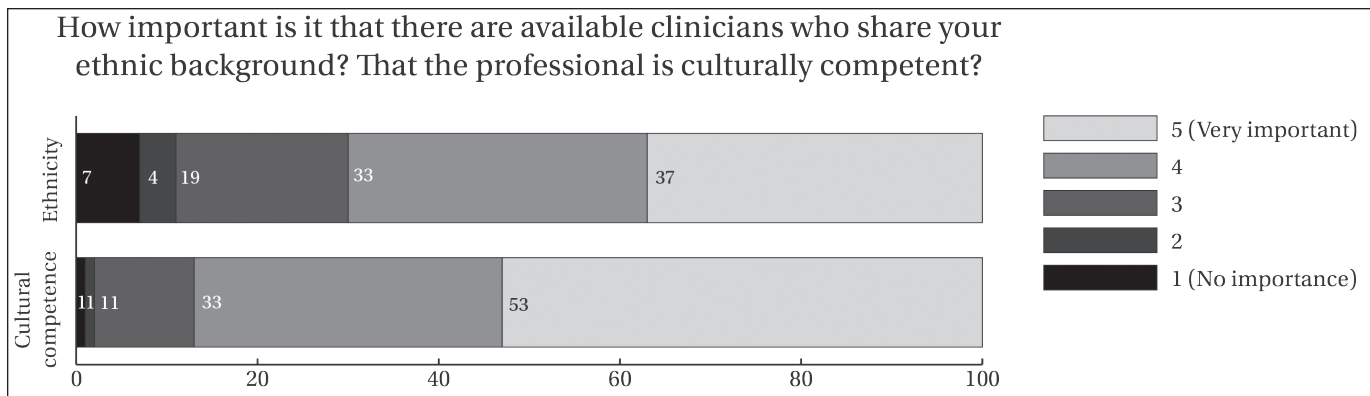
Unionize for a grievance procedure that puts students first

Every graduate student deserves fair treatment and a healthy lab environment

By Erin Reynolds, Maddie Dery, and
Kaylee McCormack

I enjoyed my first nine months in my lab without incident — I got along with my PI and was nearing completion on a body of work that would result in a first-author publication. But one October evening, things changed. My PI sent an email accusing me of breaking equipment that I hadn't touched in weeks. When I tried to defend myself, she called me "combative" and called my communication style "unprofessional." She told me that I was a bad lab citizen, even though as lab safety officer I devoted hours every week to managing lab waste and keeping my labmates safe. My PI made several unreasonable demands in the following weeks, including that we work at least 60 hours per week and respond to Slack messages within one hour during the workday, a rule that completely disregards the fact that students have classes and experiments that prohibit swift responses at all times. When I tried to communicate my concerns, I was again accused of "giving pushback" and being disrespectful.

To resolve our “communication issues,” my PI set up a meeting mediated by a “neutral” third party from the Office of Graduate Education (OGE). Unfortunately, the mediator had already talked to my PI and was biased in favor of her perspective. The mediator tried to frame the situation as if I were an obstinate student who did not respect authority, when the reality was that I was communicating realistic work expectations and advocating for myself in a healthy way. I understand healthy communication because I spent two years at a biotech company under several different managing scientists. My managers confirmed that my communication style was professional and often solicited feedback from me. I was shocked to find that here at MIT, healthy dialogue was apparently unacceptable: the “resolution” of the mediated meeting was that I would obey my PI without communicating concerns or of-



SYD ROBINSON — THE TECH

A majority of respondents indicated the importance of having therapists that share their ethnic background (70%) and are culturally competent (86%).

appointments; this struggle is further compounded for Asian/American students due to stigma surrounding mental health and distrust of professionals.

Bettering mental health support on campus

"I hope that MIT administration and those with power will listen to our desperate call to improve mental health resources for students. This means putting in the money."

This survey is far from the first time that MIT students have called for improved mental health resources. To probe the most pertinent and pressing needs, we asked respondents about how MIT can better support their mental health. In this section, 38% of respondents demanded that more money be invested in mental health resources, with specific calls to expand availability, reduce wait times, and increase therapist salaries to promote retention. Additionally, many students requested that MIT hire more Asian (or other non-white) counselors in order to provide better care for marginalized groups.

"Please get more therapists, preferably more non-white therapists too."

Numerous respondents pressed for an easier way to set up appointments, such as an online portal or text-based scheduling system. Citing personal and second-hand experiences, several students described waiting up to a month to secure an appointment, only to receive a phone call from MIT Mental Health while in class or another inconvenient setting where they may not be comfortable setting up a mental health appointment. Moreover, even after the first appointment is scheduled, therapists sometimes do not even show up. A phone-free scheduling system would mitigate

the exasperation faced by many students trying to schedule a first appointment, lowering a major barrier to seeking support.

Students called for better advertising of available mental health resources and information regarding common concerns (such as confidentiality, cost, expectation of low appointment frequency), more effective guidance towards internal and external therapy options, and the creation of more resources for neurodivergent students. These as well as the aforementioned changes (increasing the availability of appointments and therapists of color, and creating a streamlined, phone-free scheduling system) are all necessary steps towards better supporting the mental health of not only Asian/American students, but every member of the MIT community.

"We are constantly referred to MIT Mental Health as a beacon of hope for our problems by administrators and faculty whenever we are struggling. This was the case after the massage parlor shootings in 2021. But many of us face immense barriers [to] even getting an appointment and the consistent, basic care that we need."

Call to action

By probing the most pressing problems and pertinent solutions, we aim to amplify the collective voice of Asian/American students as we call out to MIT to improve mental health support for all.

To summarize, a majority of respondents expressed the following sentiments: a) more therapists (preferably Asian and POC) should be hired, as ethnic representation and cultural competency are important for their therapy experience; b) inconvenience and unresponsiveness are experienced when placing ap-

fering feedback. I felt silenced and powerless.

My relationship with my PI continued to deteriorate, and eventually I decided that it was time to find a healthier lab environment. I could no longer even discuss science critically without being told I was disrespectful, making it impossible for me to grow as a scientist. I negotiated the process of transitioning labs over several meetings with my PI and another faculty member. Judging from the experiences of others in my department, I expected to wrap up and leave in two weeks. However, my PI demanded that I stay until I completed a long list of tasks and refused to commit to a concrete deadline until the faculty mediator intervened. They decided I would stay for six weeks. Unfortunately, I had already set up a rotation in the lab I wanted to join. For six weeks I worked in two labs at once, often staying until 10 or 11 p.m. to finish my experiments. I was physically exhausted and frequently felt depressed.

Adding to my distress, my PI cut me out of the writing process for the paper based on my work. We had a mediated meeting to negotiate authorship, but it turned out not to be a negotiation at all. My PI declared that I would be the third author, after the postdoc who would finish the experiments and another postdoc who had performed a single preliminary experiment. I responded that I felt this was unfair, given that I had engineered the strains, developed the assays, and obtained the key results. Furthermore, I was on good terms with the postdoc who was to finish the work, and she agreed that it would be fair to do a co-first authorship. Nevertheless, the conclusion of the meeting was that my PI would have complete control over authorship.

My experiences with MIT's current processes for conflict resolution and lab transition were strongly negative: I was powerless to resolve the conflict with my PI and I struggled to advocate for myself during the transition period. I support unionization and signed my union card because **I believe our union is es-**

essential for correcting the systemic power imbalance between students and PIs.

The current avenues available for students to resolve advisor conflicts are woefully inadequate. Students can resolve issues one-on-one with their advisors, or they can have meetings mediated by “neutral” mediators from OGE or Ombuds or by another faculty member. In cases involving harassment or discrimination, conflicts can be reported to the Institute Discrimination and Harassment Response Office. However, all of these “neutral” entities are **administered by MIT and are thus incentivized to prioritize the interests of the institution over the interests of individual graduate students.** As a result, exploitative and abusive PIs remain in their positions with no incentive to change their behavior, while students are treated as dispensable and may need to switch labs or even drop out of their program to escape toxic situations.

Unionization will change this paradigm by introducing a more student-oriented grievance procedure to resolve conflicts with PIs. We can win a union contract that contains protections regarding work expectations, harassment and discrimination, and retaliation concerns. If a PI violates our contract, we can file an official grievance. For example, I could have filed a grievance about my PI's 60-hour/week demand. Once a grievance is filed, mediation meetings can be used to resolve the conflict. If desired, a union representative (UR) can be present at these meetings to advocate exclusively for the student's interests and provide support. I believe that the meetings about my advisor conflict and lab transition would have been more positive and resulted in fairer outcomes if a UR had been at my side. In the case that the grievance cannot be resolved through mediation, it can be brought to a truly neutral third-party arbitrator. Excitingly, Columbia's graduate student union recently won the right to neutral, third-party arbitration in cases involving harassment and discrimination.

pointments by phone, and lack of follow-up or attendance of therapists are large concerns — instead, an online scheduling portal is desired; and c) respondents feel distrust, exasperation, and impatience when dealing with MIT's mental health support services.

We acknowledge and appreciate the efforts of MIT's mental health resources to improve support for its students thus far, including currently recruiting and interviewing clinicians, keeping in mind diverse backgrounds and cultural competency. MIT Medical has previously hired a director of diversity, equity and inclusion and appointed clinicians with experience in multicultural outreach in accordance with the MIT Black Students' Union and Black Graduate Student Association's 2015 recommendations. These BSU/BGSA recommendations also spurred the genesis of anti-oppression training in MIT counseling services and a graduate Black women's support group, laying the groundwork for a more equitable campus. However, as clearly demonstrated through the results of this survey, there is more work to be done. Our community is suffering, and we need change now.

"More therapists need to be hired, specifically POC and women/non-binary folks so that people with marginalized identities feel comfortable reaching out to these resources in the first place. I hope our call is not ignored, as it has been time and again."

This article was written by Alana Chandler '22, Jason Li '24, and Elaine Wu '22, members of the MIT Asian American Initiative, a student-run organization for Asian American advocacy, allyship, and civic engagement. Contact them at aai-exec@mit.edu or on their Instagram @mit.aai.

In addition to flawed conflict resolution processes, transitioning labs is a messy process that leaves students vulnerable to exploitation by PIs. Recently, the RISE campaign won new guidelines around lab transitions including guaranteed transitional funding and time limits on wrap-up and hand-off duties. Transitional funding decreases the power that a PI holds over a student; I received transitional funding, and it is hard to express the magnitude of relief this gave me. Unfortunately, MIT can revoke these protections at any time. Our union can guarantee that we keep these protections by including them in a contract and can extend these protections to students who choose to switch labs for reasons other than an unhealthy advising relationship.

Graduate students and PIs share a common goal of producing top-tier research. Currently, the processes for resolving disputes are one-sided and do not promote fair or cooperative resolution. A union grievance process is negotiated and agreed upon by both parties — graduate student workers and supervisors — and ultimately ratified by graduate students as a part of our contract. Fair conflict resolution is essential for a healthy workplace, and every student deserves a lab environment where they can learn and reach their full potential.

Help win a fair grievance procedure by signing your union card and voting yes to form our union.

Erin Reynolds is a third-year graduate student-worker in Chemical Engineering and an organizer for the MIT Graduate Student Union.

Maddie Dery is a fifth-year graduate student-worker in Chemical Engineering and an organizer for the MIT Graduate Student Union.

Kaylee McCormack is a fourth-year graduate student-worker in Chemical Engineering and an organizer for the MIT Graduate Student Union.

CURSED THOUGHTS

To you. Yes. You.

Living out my new year’s resolutions

By Ana Reyes Sánchez
EDITOR

I woke up today and thought about how it’s my last first day, felt anxiety grip me in sweat and thought, *how, how, how; is this it?* I woke up today and I reread some of the messages I sent you last night. I’m listening to a very specific playlist, even though I probably don’t understand all the songs quite right.

I sat up in bed and cried, because it’s my last first day. I thought about how much I’ll miss you and how close and far you are and how you, too, have that power to recontextualize things for me.

I’m scared, but more ashamed that our situation seems like an insurmountable hurdle. It’s not easy for me to hear how I’m loved, when circumstances necessitate that I won’t be able to feel it.

I got out of bed slightly too late, and texted you for a granola bar, and I walked to class thinking of you. I was distracted in class, despite the fact that it’s my last first class. I called my parents on the way home, but couldn’t speak right, and I felt something of substance hollowed out inside myself.

You said parallels; you said narratives. About the playlist and the spreadsheet and the dumplings we’d planned for today and how we’re living our lasts this semester.

It is my last first day, and I am looking to the future and knowing that I will be lonely without you.

I texted you that my head felt stuffed full of little paper scraps, and we ate breakfast together and I kept *thinking, thinking, thinking*. It hurt.

Today is my last first day, and I went to get coffee with you, but we ended up eating tortas in an alleyway instead. I wanted to share something that belonged to me, but you picked up the bill. I’ll get it next time; the days are so short; one more round of coffee.

We went on a walk throughout Porter Square and I thought about how happy I was to be there with you. Grateful, even, that I woke up today in the mood to ride the T for three hours.

My life is so full of love now; I’m terrified to watch it go.

But I don’t say “I love you” enough, do I? I don’t say I love you enough because sometimes I can only back away from the intensity. Sometimes “I love you” makes me feel backed into a corner, because there is so much substance in those words. It stings to see how much power I hold and how much power is held over me.

I won’t be gone, because I don’t want to be gone, but I don’t brush my teeth every night with Ruth anymore. And we don’t make breakfast together the way we always say we will. And we drive each other crazy, sometimes, and I’m sorry.

I don’t say “I love you” enough and you thought this article would be about someone else.

But it’s me, it’s me, it’s me; I will do better in the morning.

It’s my last first day, and I keep listening to the playlist I made last night. The songs on that playlist feel like they belong to other people. Many things in my life belong to others:

- the blanket covering me,
- the plushie at the head of my bed,
- the bags of things that once belonged to you but will belong to the kids,
- the trenchcoat hanging over my chair,
- the pride flag you gave me after that summer program,
- the notebook tucked into my shelf that you made me,
- the pin on my jeans,
- the notes on my wall,
- the lights you put up in my room,
- the kraken on my table,
- the Mexican mug on top of my dresser,

- the letter you wrote for my birthday and
- the letter you had written,
- the post it note you gave me in high school,
- the poster you got for me that I look at when my dresser is open,
- the gender signs on the doors of my wardrobe,
- the mug we painted together in the Cheney room,
- the scarf on my door handle, wrapped around me with the promise of giving it back later.

I want to hide from them, but I can’t because I love you. Yes. You.

I keep thinking about what you said in that Zoom room: “*while you all are experiencing so many lasts, I’m getting many of my firsts.*” And I said thank you, right? For sharing those firsts with me?

It’s my last first day, but it’s different because it’s no longer the last “first day” of a semester, but it’s my “last-first” the same way that “sorry-grateful” and “laugh-shrimp” fit together like puzzle pieces in my head. It’s my first day of classes, and the last time it’ll happen this way, but the first time that we’ve made dumplings together in the kitchen.

- I keep making a list of last-first things:
- You told me — last sister week, as we sat in the philosophy lounge — that I remind you of your older sister. And yesterday you sent me a snapchat of your window frozen over, and I thought, *oh sweetie, how’d you forget to close your window? Put on a sweater.*
 - I sat around a table at Flour with you, the four of you, and you didn’t get your sandwich so you took half of someone else’s. And I explained the activity, because it was your first time doing it but my last. You filled in some of the gaps that I had left behind, purposefully or not. And we made the same jokes that we’ve gotten used to making. I’ve forgotten the inside jokes behind my high school friend’s contact names, but I don’t want to forget these.
 - You looked very cute, laying in the snow tunnel in those pictures. I’ll post it on instagram, I promise, even if you don’t read these words. You are spectacular, and intimidating because of it, and I will do my part to bully you more this semester.
 - Eventually, there will be a last “hello” message. Ruth told me, weeks ago, that you used to text her at 2 a.m., but you’ve stopped doing that since last semester started. And I tried to stop myself from the thought that I’ve been having lately: *you will suffer when I’m gone, but eventually you will replace me.*
 - I’ve said this before, but have another thank you. For what you did that summer after sophomore year, but also for everything that has come after that. You’re my favorite roommate, still, and I hope you read the text I sent you soon because it’s really funny. I’ll tell you all about it later.
 - I wrote this in the end-of-year letter (the one I posted in the-most-ridiculous-place with the-most-ridiculous-name): I don’t remember a lot of our lasts the way I remember our firsts. Maybe it was because so many lasts have been taken from us. We all know how loving ends, and I’m so scared about the mandarins. That “one-dimensional” day, I was scared to eat it. When I finally did, it was a little tangy, a little dry, and delicious. *I ate the plums that were in the ice box; at lunchtime I bought a huge orange — the size of it made us all laugh; leave something of sweetness and substance in the mouth of the world.*
 - I was so scared in that emergency room because you were in pain and I didn’t know how to fix it. But there was also something consuming about that environment, and the way that I gave you my sweater, pretending it wasn’t cold.

- I wrote this before, but I’ll always put your hat on for you. Giggle more often, it’s very cute.
- You told us we were family in the math lounge and I didn’t know how to respond because you’re always so genuine in your existence and I often feel scared. You remind me of Ash and me, sometimes, the way that we used to be together when I was in high school. Don’t lose those traits in the shuffle of life, please.
 - The last time we ate at Simmons together and I told you about the trenchcoat and how much it means, I also thought about how much you’ve grown since the time I met you. You’re so much older already; keep writing your short stories and creating narratives and texting me my articles, even if they won’t be articles soon.
 - We walked to Toscanini’s in the freezing cold, even though they didn’t have anything warm like you promised. And I listened to you talk, even though it was a little bit windy and hard to hear. We’ll get McDonald’s later and recreate some moments, I promise.
 - We still have chayotes to make in the fridge; I want to prepare them for you the same way my mom does for me. We’ll heat up Nesquik and drink it together. I still think that I was right for keeping that guava jam, both because I still have some for us to share and also because it’s a memory, kiddo, not a jam. There’s a limited number of guavas now that my neighbor has cut down the tree, but I’ll still share future ones with you.
 - We’re going to spend so much time this semester in your narratively circular New House single. Believe me, I have already blocked out the hours to make more pancakes and drink more oat milk on the fuzziest rug in the world.
 - Favorite memories are so strange. You could have never guessed the significance of that day walking back in the rain, or why I gave you my coat. You left before you saw me shivering in the rain, thinking of how glad I was that you were warm. But you’re right, of course, that it’s the insignificance of that moment that makes it linger. I can’t remember if I told you, especially with everything that’s happened, but my New Year’s resolution just meant I wanted to linger with you. I’m sorry; I still want to hold your hand this semester, even though I know I won’t be able to.
 - “Hasta la Raíz” is playing and I’m remembering the *Song Explorer* episode I watched with Ruth and how one day we won’t be family — shouldn’t be, when I’m an alum — but you will still have cast your roots in me. It’s been hard watching the gap I’m going to leave in you, but I hope you manage to fill them with light anyway. *A secret hidden in plain sight*, I wrote two years ago, *let’s love so much that we light up the world*. The email’s still probably somewhere in the drive, if you want to read it.
- It’s my last-first day and I’ve been on the T for three hours now. I’m trying to live in memories and hope for the future and remain in the present moment; impossibly I think I might actually be doing it, but not enough — never as much as I want to.
- You told me to take the T across the river and I finally listened. And these are spoilers, but I already messaged most of them to you anyway.
- I realized, first, that you must hear “Kendall/MIT” so often. Do you ever think about getting off there? Did you used to have the instinct? Has it been a while since you considered it an option?
- And then we passed the stop and I waited with a playlist in my hand and I felt more than saw the light coming into the cabin.

The song changed to dodie’s “Arms Unfolding” and, stupidly I thought, *emerging: it was once dark but then it was light*.

The river was frozen over and the surface dusty. I could only think, *G*d I hope you see it too*. I thought about that Hozier song. I probably still don’t understand it quite right, but listening to it makes me think of you.

I imagined when you saw the river the first-last time, it was probably moving and the waves glistened. And it was too bright to look at directly and maybe that made it hard to see. Difficult to look at, in the same way that love is for us, but substantive.

And I think you probably thought I was thinking of someone else, but I could only think about how I hope you see it often. I want to watch it with you, but we will have all the time in the world.

Thank you for sharing that with me. I got back to New House late because I stayed a bit longer talking to you. It feels unfair to write it here before everything has been said, so I won’t write it yet. But I will work on not saying “kid,” especially because that care is not gone — it won’t be if I can help it.

When I got back home we messed up the recipe for dumplings and I played Tracy Chapman in the kitchen and I sang along to it a little, *did you hear me?* And you cracked my back the way we’ve been trying to do for a semester. It hurt but not physically. It hurt because it was last-first and because I don’t think you’ll understand this article, even though it’s for you.

And I almost cried, a couple of times really. The last-first of which was when you laid your head down on my arm like you do when you don’t know how to comfort me but still want to be there. Thank you for staying. I’m so proud of you, kiddo. I love you so much; I say that in many ways, but in words less often.

The dumplings tasted really good even though the shrimp was precooked and we had to improvise. That’s often how cooking goes for us. Don’t forget me next semester when you’re figuring out what to eat in the midst of classes and psets and meetings and stress.

I sent you a video of the dumplings and our kid trying them. I’m trying to make sure this isn’t the end. Maybe our lives are running in parallel, but that’s how the narratives work, love, each two inches to the left of the other. I want to delete that word “love” because we don’t speak like that to each other. But I’m leaking out to you — for you. I just want to say that I believe what I heard in those songs, and I’m oddly looking forward to our individual office hours tomorrow because it’s the last-first step towards something.

I finished the dumplings and started writing these paragraphs, but got interrupted because we ended up on the floor of my room swapping stories from the past week.

It was a type of fun I haven’t had in a while. I tried not to think about how last-first it felt because I want to have so many more of those moments. I thought about how you put up my fairy lights last semester, and how I can still see us there, balancing on the corner of a chair. But then I was in the present and we were giggling about my boss and I threw my body back into a full laugh.

And now, I’m in my room writing this and wondering if anyone other than you will understand these words, but also whether you will understand them yourself. But my stomach is full from the dumplings we shared and my bones are full of so much light they’re going to burst along the cracks.

I think, I will fall asleep happy tonight.

Have a cursed thought, question, or piece of feedback/comment that you'd like to share? Email cursed-thoughts@the-tech.mit.edu. If you want updates on new articles under Cursed Thoughts, add your email to tinyurl.com/cursed-thoughts.

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BEAVER BLITZ			
THURSDAY 3	FRIDAY 4		
Phi Sigma Rho Clay Penguins 6 p.m., 5-134	MIT Resonance Auditions 5 p.m., 4-162	MIT Nriya: Spring Dance Series Auditions 1 p.m., T Club Lounge	MIT Consulting Group: Meet the Team 7 p.m., 2-190
MIT LSC: <i>Moonfall</i> Screening and Q&A 7 p.m., 26-100	MIT Centrifuges Auditions 6 p.m., 4-159	ET Hidden Traitor Games 1:30 p.m., 35-308	ET Fermi Questions and Estimathon 7 p.m., at ET
AEPHi AEPHijinks (Game Night) 7 p.m., VIRTUAL	MIT Ohms Auditions 6 p.m., 4-149	AEPHi Puzzle Hunt 2 p.m.	ET Origami 9 p.m., at ET
MIT Ballroom Dancing Club: West Coast Swing 8 p.m., W20-407	MIT Syncopasian Auditions 6 p.m., 4-270	Smash UltiMIT Tournament 2 p.m., 56-169	MONDAY 7
MIT MTG: <i>Pippin</i> 8 p.m., La Sala	MIT Muses Audition 6:30 p.m., 4-370	MIT Resonance Auditions 2 p.m., 4-162	MIT Consulting Group: DEI Hot Chocolate Chats 9 a.m.
MIT Poker Club: Study Break 8 p.m., 2-146	MIT LOST Spring Show Audition: <i>The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime</i> 7 p.m., 1-132	Sakata Afrique 2 p.m., McCormick Dance Studio	MIT Centrifuges Auditions 11 a.m., 4-261
	MIT Nriya: Freedom 7 p.m., Kresge Little Theater	MIT HSC: Vasanta Panchami 5:30 p.m., MIT Chapel	AEPHi Pset Party 7 p.m.
	MIT LSC: <i>Dune</i> Screening 8 p.m.	MIT Centrifuges Auditions 6 p.m., 4-159	MIT Consulting Group: Hot Chocolate Chats 8 p.m.
	MIT MTG: <i>Pippin</i> 8 p.m., La Sala	MIT MTG: <i>Pippin</i> 6 p.m., La Sala	TUESDAY 8
	SATURDAY 5	ET Factorio 7 p.m., at ET	MIT Consulting Group: Resume Review 9 a.m., 2-190
	MIT Asian Dance Team Auditions 11 a.m., Lobby 13	MIT LOST Spring Show Audition: <i>The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime</i> 7 p.m., 1-132	Korean Cultural Association GBM 5 p.m., 10-105 (Bush Room)
	MIT DanceTroupe Auditions: Choreographer Showcase 11 a.m., Kresge Little Theatre	SUNDAY 6	MIT MTG Spring Production: Into the Woods Auditions 7 p.m., W20-491
	MIT Muses Audition 11 a.m., 4-370	MIT Asian Dance Team Auditions 8 a.m., Lobby 13	MIT LSC: <i>I Want You Back</i> Screening 8 p.m.
	MIT Ohms Auditions 11 a.m., 4-149	MIT DanceTroupe Auditions: Contemp 11 a.m., DuPont Basketball Courts	WEDNESDAY 9
	MIT Syncopasian Auditions 11 a.m., 4-270	MIT DanceTroupe Auditions: Tap 1 p.m., DuPont Basketball Courts	Korean Cultural Association GBM 5 p.m., 10-105 (Bush Room)
	MIT Video Game Orchestra: Spring 2022 Auditions 12 p.m.	ET Board Games 1:30 p.m., 35-308	Engineers Without Borders GBM 6 p.m.
	Pear VC: How to pitch to VCs 12 p.m., VIRTUAL	MIT DanceTroupe Auditions: Hip-Hop 2 p.m., DuPont Basketball Courts	MIT MTG Spring Production: <i>Into the Woods</i> Auditions 7 p.m., PDR 1 and 2 (W20-301 and 302)
		MIT Concert Band: First Meeting 6 p.m., W20-407	To have your student group's event featured in <i>The Tech</i> , email cl@tech.mit.edu .

AM

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Flurry

Solution, page 12

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

Instructions: Fill in the grid so that each column, row, and 3 by 3 grid contains exactly one of each of the digits 1 through 9.

Snow

Solution, page 12

6x	120x			180x	
		20x			1
120x			12x		5+
		6		8x	
12x			6		20x
6			2-		

Instructions: Fill in the grid so that each column and row contains exactly one of each of the numbers 1–6. Follow the mathematical operations for each box.

Informal Eateries

by Doug Peterson

Solution, page 12

ACROSS

- 1 Boston’s state: Abbr.
5 Female parents, informally
9 Boca __, Florida
14 Neighborhood
15 Cincinnati’s state
16 Marry on the run
17 Window ledge
18 Wizard’s stick
19 No-nos to avoid
20 Room where high schoolers have lunch
22 Piece of paper
23 Bikini top
24 Surface for chess or checkers
25 Female choir voices
28 Scary dinosaur, for short
30 With no decorations
31 A Great Lake
32 Creative thought
36 Place to buy snacks at a football game
39 Hide-and-go-__
40 Scheduled dental visit: Abbr.
41 Groups of cattle
42 Quaint hotels

- 43 61 Across citrus fruits
44 Bee’s attack
47 __ for the course (about average)
48 Pop, as a balloon
49 Outdoor meal seller in a vehicle
55 Wipe clean
56 Cain’s younger brother
57 “Author unknown”: Abbr.
58 Happen regularly
59 Capital of Italy
60 Just hanging around
61 Color of shamrocks
62 Untidy scene
63 Short message

DOWN

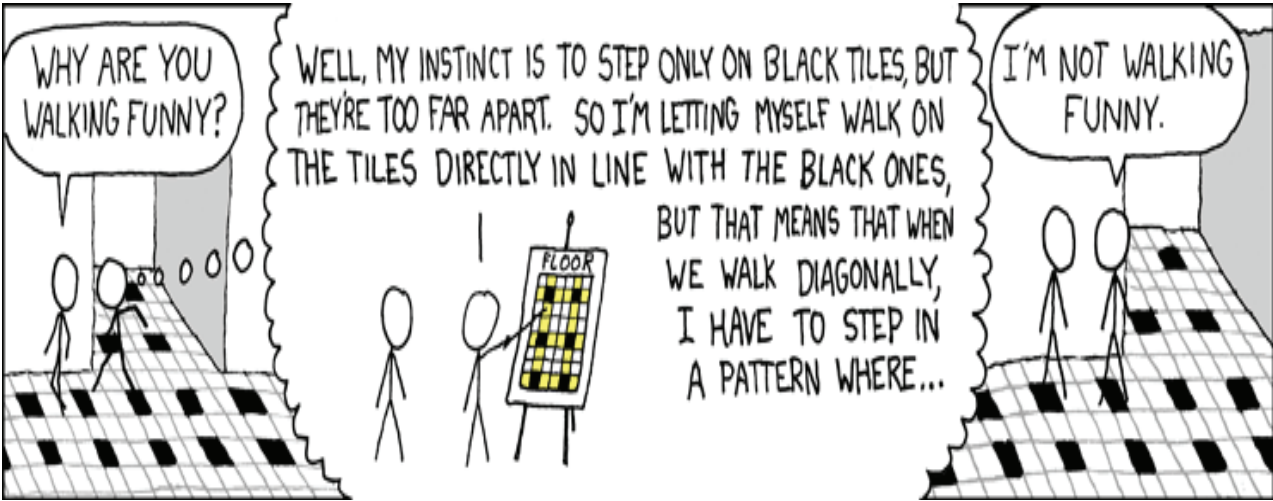
- 1 Opposite of feminine: Abbr.
2 Opera solo
3 __-addressed stamped envelope
4 Money-saving store event
5 Lawn-cutting machines
6 Scarlett of Gone With the Wind
7 Short skirt

- 8 Club __ (bar mixer)
9 Boston baseball team
10 Hawaiian “hello”
11 Powder in a printer
12 __ for (chose)
13 Robin’s home of twigs
21 Steakhouse cut
24 “Have you __ waiting long?”
25 Soothing lotion ingredient
26 Narrow walkway
27 Clock sound
28 Vacation excursions
29 Very funny person
30 Alternatives to Mac desktops, for short
31 Sports cable network
32 Big-ticket __ (major purchase)
33 Act boldly
34 Conclusions
35 Billboard postings
37 Performed a tune
38 Garment behind a necktie
42 Office apprentice
43 Soup-serving utensils
44 More confident

1	2	3	4		5	6	7	8		9	10	11	12	13
14					15					16				
17					18					19				
20					21					22				
				23				24						
	25	26	27				28	29						
30						31				32	33	34	35	
36						37				38				
39						40				41				
				42				43						
	44	45	46					47						
48						49	50			51	52	53	54	
55						56				57				
58						59				60				
61						62				63				

- 45 Slight amount
46 Magazine edition
47 Sonnets and limericks
48 Arctic ice mass
49 Where crops are grown
50 Woodwind instrument
51 Showery weather
52 Loosen, as shoelaces
53 Young stallion
54 Leg joint

[245] Floor Tiles



The worst part is when sidewalk cracks are out-of-sync with your natural stride.



Blizzard

Solution, page 12

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

Instructions: Fill in the grid so that each column, row, and 3 by 3 grid contains exactly one of each of the digits 1 through 9.



A WEBCOMIC OF ROMANCE, SARCASM, MATH, AND LANGUAGE by Randall Munroe

[332] Gyroscopes

DESPITE YEARS OF STUDYING PHYSICS, I STILL FIND GYROSCOPES A LITTLE FREAKY.



We didn't actually land on the moon – it just looked like we did because of precession. Also, gyroscopes caused 9/11.

SPORTS BLITZ

Friday, January 28

- **Women's Track and Field** obtained 18th (second in heat), 26th (first in heat), 29th (first in heat) and 39th (first in heat) for 400 meters; finished 5th in 4x400 relay; got 11th (first in heat), 38th and 42nd in the 5,000 meters; got 86th and 97th out of 143 competing in the mile; 61st and 72nd in the 3,000 meters at the John Thomas Terrier Classic.
- **Men's Volleyball** at Kean University was canceled.
- **Women's Basketball** dunked on Wellesley College 69-37.

Saturday, January 29

- **Men's Volleyball** against Misericordia University was canceled.
- **Men's Swimming and Diving** against Amherst College was canceled.
- **Women's Swimming and Diving** against Amherst College was canceled.
- **Men's Volleyball** against Alvernia University was canceled.
- **Squash** against Middlebury College was canceled.

Sunday, January 30

- **Squash** against Williams College was canceled.
- **Men's Fencing** at the Eric Sollee Invitational was canceled.
- **Women's Fencing** at the Eric Sollee Invitational was canceled.
- **Men's Track and Field** obtained 27th, 52nd, 71st and 72nd for 3,000 meters; got 17th and 40th in the 5,000 meters; won a heat in the mile; 30th, 41st, 47th and 52nd in the 800 at the John Thomas Terrier Classic.
- **Women's Track and Field** won first place out of 13 in the Branwen Smith-King Invitational.
- **Men's Track and Field** won third place out of 10 in the Branwen Smith-King Invitational.
- **Men's Basketball** dribbles the game away 74-79 against Clark University.
- **Men's Swimming and Diving** at the Intersquad Meet was canceled.
- **Women's Swimming and Diving** at the Intersquad Meet was canceled.

Monday, January 31

- **Women's Basketball** against Connecticut College was canceled.

Wednesday, February 2

- **Women's Basketball** dunks on University of Southern Maine 85-42.
- **Men's Basketball** clutched it against Springfield College 71-66.

Upcoming Sports Events

FRIDAY 4

Men's Swimming and Diving
BU Winter Open
6:00 p.m.

Women's Swimming and Diving
BU Winter Open
6:00 p.m.

Men's Volleyball
vs. Benedictine University
7:00 p.m.

SATURDAY 5

Women's Track and Field
Tufts Cupid Challenge

Men's Track and Field
Tufts Cupid Challenge

Men's Track and Field
Bruce Lehane Scarlet and White Invite
11:00 a.m.

Women's Track and Field
Bruce Lehane Scarlet and White Invite
11:00 a.m.

Squash
vs. University of Virginia
11:00 a.m.

Men's Volleyball
vs. Stevens
1:00 p.m.

Men's Basketball
vs. United States Coast Guard Academy
1:00 p.m.

Men's Swimming and Diving
BU Winter Open
1:30 p.m./ 7:00 p.m.

Women's Swimming and Diving
BU Winter Open
1:30 p.m./ 7:00 p.m.

Women's Basketball
Emerson College
3:00 p.m.

Squash
vs. Dickinson College
3:00 p.m.

Men's Volleyball
vs. Rivier University
6:00 p.m.

SUNDAY 6

Squash
MASC Round Robin

Rifle
vs. Schreiner University
10:00 a.m.

Rifle
vs. John Jay College
10:00 a.m.

TUESDAY 8

Men's Volleyball
vs. Emerson College
7:00 p.m.

WEDNESDAY 9

Men's Basketball
vs. Worcester Polytechnic Institute
7:00 p.m.

Women's Basketball
vs. Worcester Polytechnic Institute
7:00 p.m.

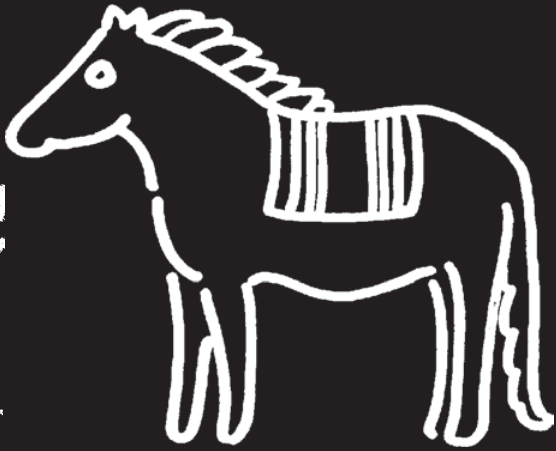
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Volume VVV, Number NNNN

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HOPE TO SEE YOU THERE

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Duis quis turpis in ipsum ornare sodales ut eu

dui. Praesent ullamcorper hendrerit dui, a auctor diam elementum a. Quisque bibendum elit sit amet felis euismod facilisis. In convallis enim vitae accumsan venenatis. Integer accumsan cursus est, eget

Etiam imperdiet pellentesque tellus, at ornare sem tincidunt vel. Morbi porta tempus sem, vitae convallis augue feugiat non. Mauris ut tincidunt metus, vitae consequat vel. Suspendisse non facilisis enim, in

Solution to Flurry

from page 9

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

Solution to Snow

from page 9

2	4	3	1	5	6
3	5	4	2	6	1
4	6	5	3	1	2
5	1	6	4	2	3
1	3	2	6	4	5
6	2	1	5	3	4

Solution to Sleet

from page 11

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

Solution to Blizzard

from page 10

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

Solution to Informal

from page 9

MASS	MOMS	RATON
AREA	OHIO	ELOPE
SILL	WAND	DONTS
CAFETERIA	SHEET	
BRA	BOARD	
ALTOS	TREX	
PLAIN	ERIE	IDEA
CONCESSION	STAND	
SEEK	APPT	HERDS
	INNS	LIMES
STING	PAR	
BURST	FOOD	TRUCK
ERASE	ABEL	ANON
RECUR	ROME	IDLE
GREEN	MESS	NOTE



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