

# Newly renovated BC reopens to residents after 2 year closure

*Devasia: Staying together as a community was 'really hard' during the COVID-19 pandemic and renovation*

**By Wenbo Wu**  
EDITOR IN CHIEF

Burton Conner reopened to residents this semester after closing for renovations June 2020.

## Seniors move back

Among former BC residents from the senior Class of 2023, "lots of people were excited to move back," BC President Sarah Aaronson '23 said in an interview with *The Tech*. She added that there were some seniors who "would have loved to move back, but just couldn't justify the expense." There "wasn't too much I could offer them, there was no compromising from Housing & Residential Services" (HRS) about the Tier 1 pricing.

Most of the Class of 2023 stayed together "on their own" because they experienced "the bond" of BC and

came back because "they knew what they were coming back to."

## Recruitment of new residents

According to Aaronson, recruiting people over Zoom was "tricky." Floors had varying success recruiting members of the Class of 2024 in Fall 2020 as part of the Support Community for First Years (SCUFFY). "But we had some SCUFFY people who really really got attached just during that singular virtual semester, so much" so that some who joined through SCUFFY ran for BC leadership positions during elections.

During SCUFFY, Ankita Devasia '23, former vice president of BC, recalled in an interview with *The Tech* that BC "hosted some really good events." Residents put "a lot of time and effort" to ensure that the events were "interactive" and "interesting,"

which enabled BC to stand out.

Aaronson said that overall, some floors had structured SCUFFY activities while people from other floors "made friends" and would "just casually bring them to events."

Aaronson added that Fall 2021 Floor Exploration for the Class of 2025 was exciting "because it was the first moment we had everyone" in BC "back in one place." There was another publicity event in February 2022. All of these events had "good turnout," Aaronson said.

Finally, BC's CPW events were also popular among the first-year Class of 2026, especially now that they had a physical "anchor point" with the BC lounge in the Stratton Student Center. Additionally, funds have been pulled

**Burton Conner, Page 2**



CADY BORONKAY—THE TECH

**East Campus built and operated** their traditional wooden roller coaster during REX for the first time in four years.



CADY BORONKAY—THE TECH

**Burton Connor students host a karaoke night** for first-years orientation in the newly renovated dorm, August 30.

# Revised statement on freedom of expression drafted and proposed

*Along with the proposed statement, report that includes call for stronger commitment to freedom of expression released*

**By Srinidhi Narayanan**  
NEWS EDITOR

The Ad Hoc Working Group on Free Expression has proposed a statement of principle on freedom of expression and academic expression; the statement was released to the MIT community Sept. 1.

The statement notes that "free expression is a necessary, though not sufficient, condition of a diverse and inclusive community." It points out that MIT "does not protect direct threats, harassment, plagiarism, or other speech that falls outside the boundaries of the First Amendment" and that "the time, place, and manner of protected expression, including organized protests, may be restrained so as not to disrupt the essential activities of the Institute." The statement also says that "a com-

mitment to free expression includes hearing and hosting speakers, including those whose views or opinions may not be shared by many members of the MIT community and may be harmful to some."

The formation of the working group was catalyzed by issues surrounding the 2021 Carlson Lecture. The group was charged to address several questions — whether MIT needed to update or revise its statements on academic freedom, freedom of expression, and/or pluralism; how those principles should be defined; how such statements could be given prominence in policies and the life of the institute; and what the processes for negotiating disagreements related to these issues was.

Along with the proposed statement, the working group released a report summarizing the process of

developing the statement draft.

Key to the report are the recommendations of the working group, which call on MIT to strengthen its commitments to freedom of expression and academic freedom.

As a specific example, the group recommends avoiding use of the terms "offensive" and "offense" in MIT's Mind & Hand Book section II [9], which includes the phrases "freedom from unreasonable and disruptive offense is essential to the university's mission"; "people who are offended by matters of speech or expression should consider speaking up promptly"; and that "people who have offended others by their manner of expression should consider immediately stopping the offense and apologizing," to name a few. The group proposes that "offense" be replaced with "conduct."

The report also recommends that all Institute faculty affirm and celebrate the Institute's commitment to freedom of expression and academic freedom, with suggestions including organizing series of lunches for community members to practice discussing hard issues; and dedicating (on a trial basis) Constitution Day (Sept. 17) to celebrating a controversial or historical episode relating to free expression.

According to the report, rescinding an invitation to deliver protected speech, "as defined and explained in this report," conflicts with freedom of expression.

In addition to the recommendations, the report underscores the distinction between freedom of expression and academic freedom; it also states that while the group was commissioned in response

to the Carlson Lecture, it was not charged with assessing that case in particular.

The report establishes legal background, saying that MIT is not bound by the First Amendment as a private institution; however, the report says, as a matter of institutional policy, MIT can and should assure members of the community that they have similar protection as students in state universities (which are bound by the First Amendment).

The report also reflects on the efforts on college campuses in the 1990s to forbid hate speech, and concludes that the category of hate speech "has been considered so subjective and hard to define that campus speech codes have been

**Free Expression, Page 2**

# Reif welcomes Class of 2026 with Convocation speech as part of first year orientation festivities

*The speech is the last commencement address Reif will deliver as the Institute's president*

**By Srinidhi Narayanan**  
NEWS EDITOR

President L. Rafael Reif welcomed the Class of 2026 to MIT with a Convocation address Monday, Aug. 29. The Convocation ceremony was hosted on the Kresge lawn in front of the Stratton Student Center.

The Class of 2026 consists of 1,139 students, selected from an applicant pool of 33,796. It will also be the last class Reif addresses at Con-

vocation, as he is stepping down as MIT president at the end of the year.

Reif asserted in his address that Convocation "is one of the gatherings I will miss the most." He reflected on his own time as an undergraduate and an international student from Venezuela, describing anxieties that subsided when he joined and connected with MIT's community of students, faculty, and staff who "were intense, passionate, and cared

about helping each other and helping society."

He emphasized to the students that "you are here because you belong here."

Marco Rodriguez '26 wrote in an email to *The Tech* that Reif's address was a highlight for him. "I met him briefly during the Sin LiMiTe program. It is unfortunate that this was his last commencement speech but he really made a connection with my stressed mother, who was glad to see

Latinx administration at MIT," Rodriguez shared.

Reif also introduced students to members of MIT's senior academic leadership — Provost Cynthia Barnhart PhD '88, Chancellor Melissa Nobles, and Vice Chancellor and Dean for Student Life Suzy Nelson — who all serve in student-focused roles. Reif encouraged students to reach out to them and their offices.

**Convocation, Page 2**

## BAD PERIODS

Innovation around the diseases specifically afflicting women has lagged behind. **OPINION, p. 6**

## EXPLORATION

The rapidly eroding freedom at MIT. **OPINION, p. 6**



## ACTIVITIES MIDWAY

First-years explore. **PHOTO, p. 4**

## DISCUSSION

More feedback is needed regarding MIT's closed campus. **OPINION, p. 6**

## SECTIONS

Fun Pages . . . . . 3  
Photo . . . . . 4  
Opinion . . . . . 6



WEATHER

# Cloudy Skies Welcome Fall Semester

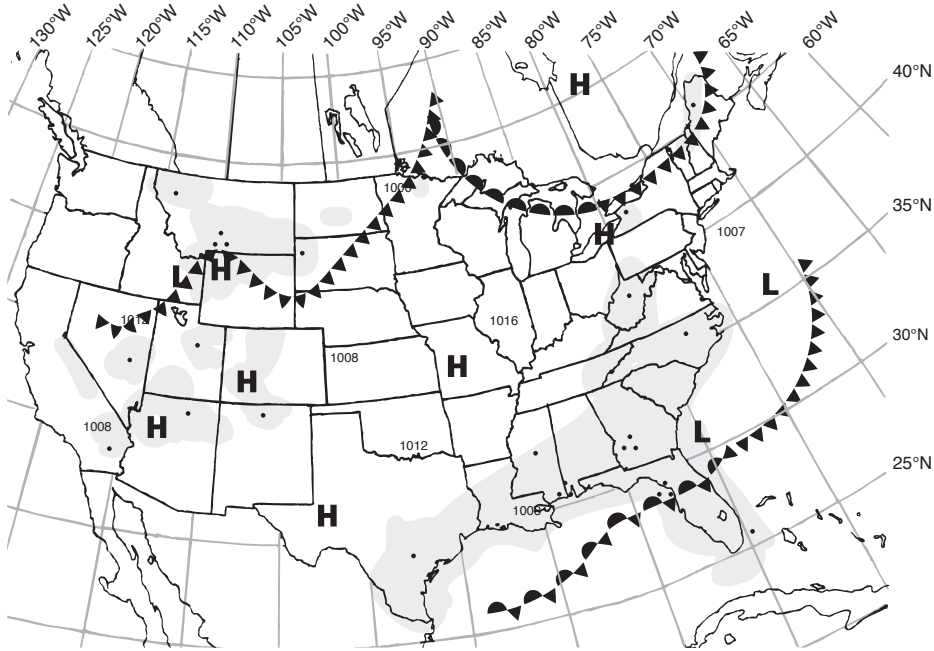
By Trinity Manuelito  
STAFF METEOROLOGIST

Students are rushing to find classes and see their friends. First years are attending their very first classes at MIT while some are celebrating their last first day of school. It is the first week of the fall semester. MIT’s campus is alive once again. There are mostly sunny skies today and will continue through the week-end. It will be a comfortably walk to class. Some may prefer

to bring a light sweater for the breeze or cold air-conditioned classrooms! Be sure to take a break from class and get some fresh air. The semester will go by quick, so be sure to relax and enjoy yourself. There are many places to hang out outside on campus. It is the time of the year to sit on Killian between classes. Hopefully, the nice weather will ease the transition to classwork. Maybe take a walk around Boston this weekend to enjoy the sunny weather!

### Extended Forecast

**Today:** Mostly Sunny. High around 71°F (21°C). East wind around 7-10 mph.  
**Tonight:** Partly cloudy, then patchy fog. Low around 58°F (14°C). Northeast wind around 6-8 mph.  
**Tomorrow:** Mostly sunny and clear. High around 72°F (22°C). Low around 60°F (15°C). Northeast wind around 7-10 mph.  
**Saturday:** Sunny. High around 79°F (°C). Low around 62°F (16°C). Northeast wind around 5-7 mph.  
**Sunday:** Mostly sunny. High around 80°F (26°C). Low around 65°F (18°C). West wind around 6 mph.



Situation for Noon Eastern Time, Thursday, September 8, 2022

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

# Aaronson: all-white walls with no murals mean ‘there are no landmarks’

Burton Conner, from Page 1

out of BC’s “reserve fund [for floors] to do some bonding events the first week of having” their new first-years. Only six first-years squatted in their initial room assignments, which Aaronson said was “really validating” because this meant the new class understood “the importance of the floor placement process and actively wanted to find a floor that” best fits their “personality.”

### Keeping community and culture alive

The “semester and a half” Aaronson spent in BC prior to the COVID-19 pandemic “was just incredibly impactful,” she recalled. She had been excited about BC prior to her matriculation, calling the “2019 i3 [Interactive Introduction to the Institute] video a work of art that showcased” BC’s “incredibly lively community.” She “immediately” felt like part of the community after moving there with no real “transition period.”

During the COVID-19 pandemic and dorm renovations, staying together as a community was “really hard,” Devasia said. The challenges inherent to keeping a community together were “exacerbated by the pandemic.” After BC was shut down, many residents continued to live together. Devasia said that her floor was “scattered throughout East Campus” and “not wanting to infringe on other communities’ spaces,” the floor would “hang out” in other spaces.

Michael Lu ’23 added in an email to *The Tech* that “floor-wide events would be held every couple of months. It was pretty [nice] seeing BC friends every so often” even “without a dorm to keep us together, though there’s only so much you can do.”

Devasia described moving out of BC in such an “expedited way” due to

the pandemic as “heart-wrenching.” “How much easier would it have been if we had a full year in BC?” Devasia wondered. “And what if we had the time to ... store all of our historical objects and document all our art better,” or to “have alumni help us, ... guide this transition of the community” off campus?

When moving back into BC, Aaronson said that being able to form staple groups helped preserve some of the pre-renovation culture. Other attempts to preserve culture included special CP★ events that called back to unique features of the dorm and the continuation of traditions of pre-renovation BC, which include ranking Starburst flavors, first-day-of-class photos, and exchanging holiday poems and gifts.

Aaronson said that keeping her own first-year experiences in mind and wanting similar experiences for others motivated her to work toward keeping the BC community and culture alive. She was also excited by “getting to shape” the place she’d go back to as a senior.

“Even during the times when I felt as though I wasn’t doing anything to keep the community together, I think that the community wanted to be together,” Aaronson said.

“Overwhelmingly, I’m happy to be back,” Devasia said.

### Preserving old murals, creating new art

Prior to the renovation, Devasia said that for those that stepped onto her floor, “it was very evident that students had the ability to maintain a high level of self expression.” However, “currently, the walls are very white... it feels like a laboratory.”

Similarly, Aaronson cited the murals that used to exist on every floor as what she misses most: in the renovated building, the all-white walls mean that “there are no landmarks.”

Aaronson said that coming to

the decision of no longer allowing murals was “very complicated” This decision “wasn’t coming from” HRS but “was instead coming from above them.” Putting nails in the walls without submitting a formal approval is also forbidden due to asbestos.

“When we were inquiring about pushing back more, we were directed to the Associate Provost Krystyn Van Vliet, who is now leaving MIT,” Aaronson said. “The administrators we were working with were not the ones who we could negotiate with, and to go further was going to take up all of my mental energy”; working with the administrators became unfeasible.

Both Aaronson and Devasia mentioned that as a replacement for the murals, picture rails have been installed on walls along which temporary canvases could be displayed.

Even the canvases proved to be challenging, especially with the Massachusetts Fire Code’s rules on “what percentage of the wall can be covered and what counts as fire safe,” Aaronson said. While this issue was eventually resolved, Aaronson said that by disallowing residents to paint directly on walls, the decision-makers have “taken away the thing that’s nice and easy for us to do and now given us a dozen more hoops to jump through.”

Aaronson said that there are current plans to collaborate with the MIT List Visual Arts Center to obtain some art to hang along the rails. Additionally, some of the displayed canvases will contain “high-resolution” photographs of former murals. However, Aaronson noted that these photographic prints cannot showcase all the “time and care” put into the original work.

“I think there are many adults and many, many administration members who have been extremely supportive of this whole process,”

Devasia said. For example, she said that BC Heads of House Janelle Knox-Hayes and Jarrod Hayes have “helped [students] tremendously” in terms of advocacy, including pushing for the wall installation of a board on each floor where residents could paint their floor logos.

### Student advocacy efforts

Despite the challenges surrounding many of the renovation decisions, Aaronson said that “if you could clarify exactly what you wanted to ask and really have a specific proposal,” getting ideas approved was actually “very easy.”

“We got exactly the plan for bringing people back [to BC] that we wanted,” Aaronson said. The plan included letting all the former Class of 2023 residents return; allowing all the officers to live in the dorm, even those who “for some reason [would typically be] ineligible for housing”; and letting residents form staple groups which enabled the building to be “filled with people who were really passionate about” BC.

Aaronson added that BC is also funded “very well,” although to obtain funding administrators “ask for a budget proposal,” which is “difficult to come up with when you don’t have an idea of what you’re working with.”

Regarding building decisions, some things like room furnishings “were kind of done” and “we didn’t get any say,” Aaronson said. On the other hand, while the initially-proposed common space furniture “just looked so corporate,” “luckily the lead architect was a [BC] alum” and “was pretty sympathetic.”

Upon sending her pictures of the old suite lounges, the administration was able to locate “fire-safe, corporate” furniture to make the spaces feel “a little more home-y” with furnishings that look “somewhat similar to the old furniture, which is really

nice.”

Another major decision that students successfully advocated for was maintaining a number of triples in BC. Aaronson said that triples are important to BC’s culture and have historically set first-years up with a “smaller friend group,” an arrangement that has “worked really well” for many people.

Having triples also distributes first-years among BC’s suites, which “almost guarantees that they will get upperclassmen interactions.” Although these triples are only present on the Burton side of BC, “the fact that [MIT administration] did take another look” and revised their initial proposal is something that Aaronson gives them “credit for.”

Aaronson also noted other instances where MIT administrators took student feedback “to heart,” such as ensuring that the placement of the Associate Heads of House apartment “is not super intrusive.”

### Closing remarks

Daisy Wang ’24, a junior in BC, wrote in an email to *The Tech* that while she had never seen “the pre-renovation BC,” the renovated dorm “seems clean yet full of character,” with individual floors “also taking the space and transforming/decorating it to suit their vibes.” Additionally, Wang wrote that BC’s suite housing format facilitates “a community where [she] could leave [her] room and feel comfortable to hang out with people.”

Devasia praised the BC underclassmen: “they are so committed, ... so dedicated to making the space something that they can call their own,” and she has “no doubts that BC will [continue to] thrive.”

“It’s been a long two-and-a-half years, it’s been a lot of ups and downs, but it has been very, very rewarding,” Aaronson said. “Being back in this space... it’s amazing!”

# MIT Free Speech Alliance ‘appluads’ administration for creating report

Free Expression, from Page 1

consistently ruled legally unenforceable.” As a result, the report writes, most institutions have shifted focus to “conduct-based regulations.”

The working group seeks to create a statement endorsed by the faculty; to that end, two online forums will be hosted on Sept. 8 and Sept. 22 for faculty to share their thoughts. Those who can’t attend the forums are asked to share their

thoughts at [freexresponses@mit.edu](mailto:freexresponses@mit.edu).

The MIT Free Speech Alliance (MFSA), a group of almost 900 MIT alumni and community members that formed in Fall 2021, wrote in a Sept. 6 press release

that it “applauds the MIT administration” for creating the report. The MFSA press release writes that the proposed statement on free speech is similar to the Chicago Principles of the University of Chicago. The press release also

expresses “concerns about MIT Administration’s commitment to putting the” report “into practice,” prompting the MFSA to work on an “in-depth response” to the report, “with particular attention to its recommendations.”

# Three faculty and former MIT undergrads reflected on their experiences

Convocation, from Page 1

Reif then introduced three members of the MIT faculty who are graduates of the Institute: Deb Roy SM ’95, PhD ’99; Laura Kiessling ’83; and Bryan Bryson ’07, PD ’13, PhD ’13. These faculty members addressed students and spoke about their own MIT experience.

Roy spoke about his passion for

learning and experimentation, recalling that “when I joined MIT as a graduate student in the Media Lab, I found a home for my inner child.” He “encouraged students to reach out to those who share a common passion, and to connect their passion to a noble purpose.”

Kiessling spoke about imposter syndrome, recommending that students stretch their perspective by pursuing new areas and research

opportunities. She also encouraged students to let themselves fail and grow, and to leave time to bond with peers.

Bryson spoke about openness: “there is almost certainly something for you to learn everywhere you turn at MIT.” He also stressed the importance of “feeling empowered to make new connections” and “seeing humanity in others,” saying “the magic of MIT is all of you.

And it is deeply connected to your humanity.”

Akarsh Aurora ’26 reflected on the faculty speeches in an email to *The Tech*, writing “Professor Kiessling’s humorous story about failing her chemistry exam stuck with me. She convinced us that failure and success are two sides of the same coin because, either way, the opportunity to learn is certain. And that’s an idea that MIT embraces and fosters.”

Aurora also mentioned Roy’s speech, noting that “coming to MIT can be daunting. All of us are jumping into water from the firehose undeclared, unsure of how the next four years will unfold. Professor Roy’s speech offered consolation and guidance; he urged us to make the most of our undergraduate education by connecting it to a noble cause that serves the world beyond just the MIT community.”

Rush

Solution, page 6

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

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.

Recruitment

Solution, page 6

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

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.

Message For Some People Solving This Crossword ;)

by Wayne Zhao

Solution, page 6

ACROSS

- 1 Old Russian ruler
- 5 Neuter
- 9 Critical dates
- 14 Target of some face washes
- 15 Otherwise
- 16 Synonym of Western no one uses anymore
- 17 Some Jewish celebrations
- 19 Bad signs
- 20 Madly in love
- 21 Reach the top
- 23 Openly discuss, as grievances
- 24 Type of checkers piece
- 25 Beam of light
- 28 Current age of the universe (dominated by stars)
- 33 Word to follow chicken or small
- 34 A gender identity
- 35 "Eww!"
- 36 Furrows
- 38 Thickness
- 41 Pixar movie where the main character goes to the Land of the Dead (O\_O)
- 42 Like a loud crowd
- 44 Chain that temporarily changed its last letter to "b"

- 46 "I'm a cow"
- 47 Message for some people solving this crossword ;)
- 51 Mormons (abbr.)
- 52 Asian percussion instrument
- 53 Switch predecessor
- 54 Russian parliament
- 55 Not even close
- 59 British brand of yeast extract
- 62 Video editing technique
- 64 Legendary anime film set in a dystopian future now past
- 65 They have Villarcue circles
- 66 At any point
- 67 Spokes of a wheel, say
- 68 Bat (at)
- 69 Abbrs. at the ends of proofs

DOWN

- 1 A window might have several
- 2 Con
- 3 Against
- 4 Cancellation of penalty
- 5 Cutting off
- 6 Blueprint, e.g.
- 7 Shade of grey

- 8 Assent to a superior
- 9 Titular demon-hunting video game space marine
- 10 Angry interjection
- 11 Had a bite
- 12 Currency once divided into 100 sen
- 13 Many fourth-years
- 18 A Scrabble bag only has one, even though tripling it would produce a valid word
- 22 \_\_\_ reverse card
- 24 Where a penlight might be attached
- 25 Double down
- 26 Inverse trig function
- 27 Website that was once the most-visited in the world
- 28 Urban \_\_\_\_\_
- 29 Went like a band or soldier
- 30 Praises
- 31 The X-Files organization
- 32 1/604,800th of a wk.
- 37 Biological bag
- 39 Most common English word
- 40 Question to someone coming back from an event
- 43 Common sci-fi enemy

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			
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51					52					53				
				54					55			56	57	58
59	60	61				62	63							
64						65					66			
67						68					69			

- 45 Low poker hands
- 48 May honoree
- 49 Makes into law
- 50 Math class that usually comes after multi
- 54 Mendelev who created the periodic table
- 55 Discussion boards
- 56 Party usually associated with electronic music
- 57 Took too much
- 58 What the deep grooves on some chess pieces represent
- 59 Tarnish
- 60 Letters before an alternate name
- 61 Free (of)
- 56 One of a thousand in a default Google Sheet

[2658] Coffee Cup Holes

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

Q:

HOW MANY HOLES ARE THERE IN A COFFEE CUP?

TOPOLOGIST

ONE.

NORMAL PERSON

IDK, DOES THE OPENING COUNT AS A HOLE?

PHILOSOPHER

TO ANSWER THAT QUESTION, CONSIDER ANOTHER: IF WE DRILL A HOLE IN THE SIDE, HOW MANY HOLES ARE THERE NOW?

CHEMIST

10<sup>21</sup> IN THE CAFFEINE ALONE

Theoretical physicist: At the Planck length, uncountably many.



# ACTIVITIES

*First-years meet various student groups and watch*



CADY BORONKAY—THE TECH



CADY BORONKAY—THE TECH



CADY BORONKAY—THE TECH



CADY BORONKAY—THE TECH



CADY BORONKAY—THE TECH

## If it can happen at MIT, it can happen anywhere

In a Fall 2021 survey, 52% of the participating faculty indicated that they felt their voice, or the voices of their colleagues, are constrained at MIT on an everyday basis. Moreover, 77% indicated that they were worried that the current atmosphere in society is jeopardizing their voice.



<https://www.mitfreespeech.org>

Do you feel bullied into silence?  
We're here to help.  
<https://www.mitfreespeech.org/hotline>





# S MIDWAY

ch performances at the Activities Midway, Friday.



CADY BORONKAY—THE TECH




CADY BORONKAY—THE TECH



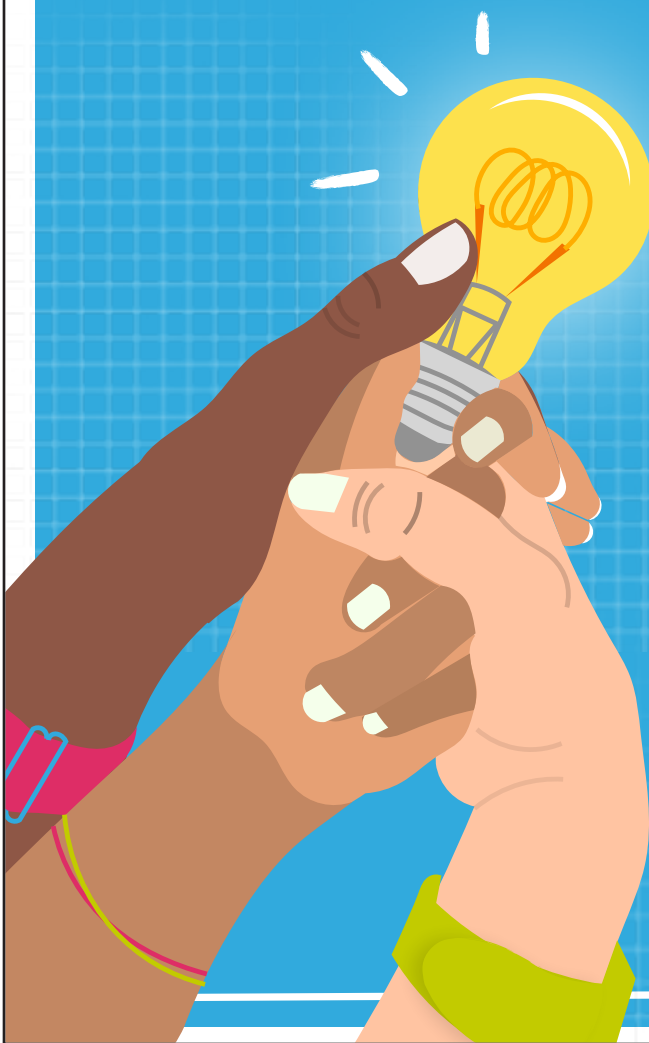
CADY BORONKAY—THE TECH

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## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

# MIT and local input needed on open-campus reversal

To the editor,

As both a longtime MIT staff member and longtime Cambridge resident, I am dismayed at the news that MIT's emergency closed-campus policy, which was instituted for the pandemic, is now slated to be permanent.

My work at MIT focuses on community engagement and social impact. The new policy of keeping the broader community out of the campus is antithetical to much that this

work stands for. Having recently attended a meeting of MIT faculty and instructors where the plan was revealed, I believe that I'm far from alone in feeling this way.

As a Cambridge resident, I'm also disturbed. MIT owns and controls an enormous amount of land and property in the city that I call home. One benefit the Institute gave to the city and other local communities was access to the central portion of campus — an inspiration for local young people and an

educational resource for many.

If this access is removed, then we have ourselves an ivory tower.

I appeal to the Institute to allow a real process of MIT and local input into this decision and to be open to reverting to an open campus.

Sincerely,  
Alison Hynd  
Assistant Dean, Priscilla King Gray Public Service Center

## OPEN LETTER

# MIT's attempts to reduce risk also stifles exploration and opportunity

In 1978, just two years before I began my MIT journey, I was interested in American postal history. While I was visiting Washington, D.C., I stopped by the L'Enfant Plaza headquarters of the U.S. Postal Service. I wanted to explore their library. While the treasure trove of books and artifacts was set up largely for postal employees, there were no obstacles to a 15-year-old simply walking into the building, taking the elevator to the desired floor, and spending many hours among the stacks and shelves. My work there that day led to a project which resulted in my doing volunteer work at the United Nations, and that work in turn led to a significant topic discussed at my MIT admissions interview.

A few months before the pandemic began, I had a chance to stay at a hotel right next door to the USPS headquarters. I headed over to see if the library was still there. At the front door, I was eyed with suspicion. Yes, there's a library, and yes, it remains open to the public, but one cannot actually walk into the building to get there. Someone needs to come down from the library to fetch you. After waiting ten minutes, the librarian appeared to escort me upstairs. He, too, looked at me suspiciously. When I reached the library, I realized why. There were no other people there. The librarian shared that I was the first non-postal employee to come to the library in months, largely because no one can get in unless he happens to be free to come downstairs. But he simultaneously followed me everywhere, still concerned that I might be there for nefarious purposes.

If a 15-year-old were to show up at the headquarters now, I'm afraid that individual wouldn't have a chance of getting in, certainly wouldn't be given unfettered access, and perhaps would never end up following a career path which otherwise would have been productive and enjoyable.

While at MIT, one of my favorite activities was to walk around campus, often late at night, just to see what there was. What labs existed that I didn't know about? What bulletin board postings told of lectures or meetings outside my usual stomping ground? What students might also be roaming about and eager for a late night talk? In my years as an alum, I have often stopped by campus just to make the rounds and to see what new experiences might be possible. Writing about all the activities and experiences of my life which began with such walks would take pages.

I'm sad to see MIT following in the footsteps of our rapidly eroding freedom, all in the name of reducing risk. Showing an ID, dealing with limited access, and going through security checks have all become the norm. Not being allowed to explore is now the routine. Our nation has become so dangerous, so risk-averse, and so suspicious that we have erected the equivalent of barbed wire around the heart of our Institute. I'm sad to think of the young people who don't have the opportunities that used to be so abundant. I'm sad that even those of us who are part of the MIT community have restrictions that were never previously perceived as necessary. And I wonder ... how do we get our freedom back?

Stuart Gitlow, '84

## OPEN LETTER

# MIT can address this elephant in the room: Bad periods!

We are writing to share a "secret" about our lives as women faculty members at MIT. First, the not-so-secret part. As members of the informal "Happy Women at MIT" club, with a collective 50 years absorbing, contributing to, and reveling in the "Mens et Manus" mindset, the infusion of new students each fall reminds us that

we have the best jobs in the world. Like so many of our colleagues at MIT, we grew up in working-class families, attended neighborhood high schools, and blissfully absorbed the power of math, science, and analytical thinking. We somehow ended up in top-tier graduate programs, a dream, and then as faculty at MIT, the quintes-

sential home for nerdy (and outspoken) problem solvers.

For us, MIT has been a grand adventure. We continuously learn from brilliant colleagues and equally brilliant and creative students. We work in teams that are inspired to solve some of society's toughest challenges, such as understanding how to

## CORRECTIONS

A news article in last week's issue of *The Tech* featured an error in stating when restrictions to campus access began (2020, not 2019). Additionally, there has been further clarification on the process of announcing additional building openings in an updated version of the article, viewable at [thetech.com](http://thetech.com).

## OPINION POLICY

**Editorials** are the official opinion of *The Tech*. They are written by the Editorial Board, which consists of Publisher Kristina Chen, Editor in Chief Wenbo Wu, Managing Editor William Xu, Executive Editor Chloe McCreery, and the opinion editor, a position that is currently vacant.

**Dissents** are the signed opinions of editorial board members choosing to publish their disagreement with the editorial.

**Letters to the editor, columns, and editorial cartoons** are written by individuals and represent the opinion of the author, not necessarily that of the newspaper. Electronic submissions are encouraged and should be sent to [letters@tech.mit.edu](mailto:letters@tech.mit.edu). Hard copy submissions should be addressed to *The Tech*, P.O. Box 397029, Cambridge, Mass. 02139-7029, or sent by interdepartmental mail to Room W20-483. All submissions are due by noon four (4) calendar days before the date of publication.

Letters, columns, and cartoons must bear the authors' signatures, addresses, and phone numbers. Unsigned letters will not be accepted. *The Tech* reserves the right to edit or condense letters; shorter letters will be given higher priority.

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**Guest columns** are opinion articles submitted by members of the MIT or local community.

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alleviate poverty in Africa or building tools to aid pharma in identifying and developing new drug targets for complex diseases.

Over the years, we have watched the MIT administration, in collaboration with scores of faculty advisors, rise in pragmatic fashion to address many challenges faced by women in our community, especially around work-life balance. For example: introducing on-site day care, a term off from the tenure clock for junior faculty, and outstanding resources to help women navigate care of elderly or otherwise compromised family members.

At the same time, we have been quietly dealing with an elephant in the room — bad periods! As a “secret illness of women,” bad periods are a pervasive drain on the lives of roughly 20% of women. Yet, they’re rarely discussed in our professional environment. Several peer-reviewed studies have shown that, on top of having extra work taking care of children and elderly parents, women miss work more often than men because they themselves are sick more often than men are. An economist might ask: Does this difference contribute significantly to the “wage gap?”

Each of this article’s co-authors has juggled conferences, grant deadlines, teaching class, and other professional responsibilities while either in excruciating pain or taking brief time off for major surgery to address a gynecological disorder we have in common. We both suffer from endometriosis (more details on Linda’s experiences are published elsewhere.).

Endometriosis is a gynecological disorder where the lining of the uterus, the endometrium, is found growing outside the uterus — in the abdominal cavity. It often invades the bowel, the intestines, the bladder, and even burrows through the diaphragm to the lungs. Endometriosis afflicts about 1 in 10 women around the world, often with onset of symptoms right at the first menstrual period and lasting well past menopause. The symptoms include

debilitating pain, infertility, and excessive menstrual bleeding that can lead to anemia and a host of other problems.

While some patients respond to hormonal therapies that suppress estrogen — including an increasingly popular family of drugs that cause menopause — a vast proportion do not respond to these therapies or suffer intolerable side effects. Surgery to remove lesions remains the gold standard treatment for endometriosis. Many patients have repeated surgeries for symptom recurrence. A sister disease, adenomyosis, involves invasion of the endometrial lining into the muscle of the uterus and likely afflicts about 10% of women — but we don’t really know, since it cannot be seen during surgery for endometriosis. Most physicians do not know how to screen for adenomyosis, and there is barely any research on it. And this is just one disease contributing to the sobering statistic that one in three women in the U.S. over age 60 has had a hysterectomy.

If PubMed citations are used as a proxy for research intensity, integrating all activity in academia and the private sector, the magnitude of the problem is revealed when comparing research on Crohn’s disease (afflicts about one percent of the U.S. population, approximately equally between the sexes) to research on adenomyosis (estimated to afflict two to three percent of the overall US population): 63,000 publications on Crohn’s and 3,400 on adenomyosis, as of September 2022. Not surprisingly, according to the NIH Reporter database, the NIH has only funded two grants on adenomyosis in recent decades.

This wide deficit in research intensity for adenomyosis reflects the shockingly poor funding for research on this and other gynecological disorders and, more generally, the constellation of autoimmune and chronic inflammatory diseases, ranging from chronic Lyme disease to multiple sclerosis — diseases that skew strongly female.

As revealed in background research for the Congressionally-mandated conference on “Advancing NIH Research on the Health of Women” held in 2021, only about 50% of NIH research grants targeted to women’s health go through the flexible and structurally well-supported investigator-initiated route, compared to 80% of grants overall. Others go through “Funding Opportunity Announcements” (FOAs). Whereas the investigator-initiated route has three regular submission deadlines a year, opportunity to resubmit revised grants, and benefits from standing review panels with published compositions, FOAs have only one submission date (typically soon after the FOA is announced), no opportunity to resubmit, and highly-specified requirements for the work to be conducted. The poor support for research translates into a weak clinician-scientist research community, further exacerbating treatment gaps.

Historically, innovation around the diseases specifically afflicting women has lagged behind that of other diseases. An open question is whether the recent flurry of interest and activity in “Femtech” — much of it driven by women entrepreneurs — can succeed when the research infrastructure remains weak after so many decades of underinvestment.

Together, we realized: *MIT can do something about this.* In fact, we believe MIT is uniquely positioned to. We can marshal talent across all the disciplines, from the basic sciences to economics, needed to bring scientific awareness, societal respect, and increased funding for common gynecological (and other) disorders that affect the lives of tens of millions of women around the world. We can do this in much the same way these talents were joined and brought to bear on breast cancer decades ago. We already have infrastructure. The MIT Center for Gynepathology Research (CGR) was launched in 2009 by Linda, in collaboration with Dr. Keith Isaacson at Newton-Wellesley Hospital, as a nexus for clinicians, sci-

entists, engineers, and patients to engineer new directions in gynecology research. CGR research has been internationally recognized, so much so that MIT was chosen for the Boston-area screening of a new endometriosis documentary executive-produced by Hillary Clinton.

The film screening will be on Wednesday, Sept. 14. (Get tickets at <https://web.cvent.com/event/0026e938-538e-4ab3-a443-27d414ab2e93/summary>.) In conjunction, we are organizing a “Stand Up and Be Counted” event on Killian Court that afternoon starting at 4:45 p.m., inviting all MIT community members who care about debilitating gynecology disorders — and women’s health in general — to “Stand up and Be Counted.”

Perhaps it is time for MIT to consider a “Women’s Health Initiative” as a bold step ahead of other engineering schools in bringing practical Mens et Manus know-how to under-the-radar problems draining the energy from so many talented women. We have a community of creative and brilliant students. MIT alums have gone on to be some of the most important and impactful entrepreneurs in the world. At last count, MIT’s alumni entrepreneurs have created companies whose revenues are altogether nearly \$2 trillion, which is larger than the gross domestic product of the world’s 10th largest country. To us, there is no problem that MIT students, alumni and faculty cannot solve if they put their heads together. This should be one! Join us in Killian Court on Sept. 14 to raise your voice in support!

Linda Griffith  
Professor of Biological and Mechanical Engineering & Director, MIT Center for Gynepathology Research

Tavneet Suri  
Louis E. Seley Professor of Applied Economics, MIT Sloan School of Management

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By Opinion Writer  
STAFF REPORTER

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