

Staff union rallies to protest MIT café closures

*Zinn: "It's because of us this
university functions."*

By Russel Ismael
STAFF WRITER

On Sept. 7, the Local 26 union, which represents MIT Dining staff, held a rally in front of the Strata Center to protest MIT's handling of the Steam and Koch café closures. Displaced staff, current workers, and supporters assembled to air their grievances with MIT Dining management.

Kevin Swindle, a dining employee, said that MIT did not even warn the employees of their plans to shut down the cafés. "Three to four weeks ago, we learned secondhand through the union that they were closing the Steam and Koch cafés, and eliminating nine positions," Swindle said during the rally. "MIT didn't even have the nerve to tell us—we learned secondhand."

In negotiations with MIT, the Local 26 union claimed that MIT laid off workers to reduce expenses after an external consultant recommended cost-cutting measures. Swindle said that the recent closures were not an isolated case, as he asserted that "there's a history of [MIT] closing cafés."

However, MIT Dining claimed that they have done their best to accommodate the laid off workers by relocating them to other dining halls or cafés.

Regardless, Swindle was still unsatisfied with MIT's plan because it would not give him steady work hours. "Personally, it's affecting me and my family because I'll have different days off," he said. "I also had a part-time job to supplement my income because my wife only works part time, and I had to give that up because of the changes in my schedule."

Jonah Zinn, one of the Local 26 rally

organizers, agreed. "The message to MIT is very clear," Zinn said. "Our work matters, and it's because of us that this university functions."

The Local 26 union also claimed that MIT Dining did not honor the new contract they had agreed upon. Zinn stated that "one week after [Local 26] ratified [their] contract in good faith, [MIT Dining] announced that they would be laying off 25 percent of the units of MIT retail."

But the café closures also go beyond the workers' job security—Zinn said that these shut downs will impact students as well. "It's a student issue because it means that students don't have access to as many options," Zinn stated. "To me, that's not very fair."

Aliyah Chutkan '26, expressed her frustration with the Steam and Koch cafés closing because of how students will be forced to buy into more expensive MIT meal plans.

"Last semester, I went to Steam at least once a week, sometimes twice, a couple times three times, because the workers there are the best," Chutkan said. "And now at the same time they're closing cafés on campus, they're forcing students in dining halls to take out more expensive meal plans."

Hannah Margolis, a graduate student in the Department of Biology, said that MIT's recent decisions regarding the closures will have disproportionate ramifications on the laid off workers. "We all know MIT has plenty of money," she said. "What MIT does to you directly affects you and directly affects us."

"MIT wouldn't run without [the dining workers]" and that "[MIT students] would be very hungry without [the workers] at all," Margolis said.

CLASS OF 2027 ORIENTATION

see page 2



EUNICE ZHANG—THE TECH

MIT Black Students' Union and Party for Socialism and Liberation host a joint rally and teach-in discussing white supremacist underpinnings of the American educational system, Friday, September 8.

Stud reopens after renovations

On Sept. 12, the Stratton Student Center reopened after its complete closure in April 2023. First opened in 1968, the Student Center, known as the "Stud," experienced catastrophic water pipe damage in February.

The first and second floor, which were newly renovated, contain extracurricular spaces,

studying areas, varied dining options, and the "Wellbeing Lab." Popular restaurants including Bibim Box and Tea-Do returned. A larger market in place of the shuttered LaVerde's market has yet to be named.

The fifth floor lounges and study spaces have reopened as well. However, the third and fourth floors have yet to be re-

opened, but Student Organizations Leadership and Engagement (SOLE) projects that the fourth floor will reopen in mid-October. The third floor, according to the statement from SOLE, still has "unanticipated mechanical systems work."

— Russel Ismael, Tina Zhang, and Jayashabari Shankar

Tentative agreement reached with the MIT Graduate Student Union

In a brief statement to the MIT community on Sept. 13, the MIT Bargaining Team announced a tentative agreement with the MIT Graduate Student Union (MIT GSU). The GSU will now have to vote on ratifying the agreement. The Bargaining Team wrote

that the tentative agreement "strikes a balance between the important principles that have guided our approach from the start and the issues the graduate students raised in the negotiations." On the other hand, The Graduate Student Union de-

clared victory, saying that their Sept. 13 meeting would be "a celebration highlighting what we collectively won," according to an X account with the handle @MITGradUnion.

— Alex Tang

Maria Zuber becomes Pres. Advisor; Search for Vice Provost begins

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IN SHORT

Sept. 22 is a Student Holiday!
No classes!

Oct. 6 is the Add Date.

The Tech's mailing lists have been shut down; use tt-join@mit.edu, the following mailing lists: tt-news-editors@mit.edu; tt-photographyeditors@mit.edu; tt-arts-editors@mit.edu; tt-campus-life-editors@mit.edu.

Interested in joining The Tech? Email ttjoin@mit.edu

Send news and tips to tt-news-editors@mit.edu



KATE LU—THE TECH

Students present their projects to judges at HackMIT 2023, Sunday, September 17.



KATE LU—THE TECH

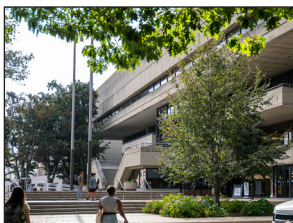
MIT Dining Workers rally against MIT's decision to permanently close STEAM cafe and Koch cafe, Thursday, September 7.

MARIA ZUBER

Read about the Vice Provost of Research's appointment as the new Presidential Advisor. **NEWS, p. 2**

ORIENTATION 2027

The new student group was welcomed into the college by President Kornbluth. **NEWS, p. 2**



STUDENT CENTER REOPENING

See pictures of the new Stratton Student Center. **PHOTO GALLERY, p. 4**

DEAR HOUSEMATE, RE- WRITTEN

Read Campus Life editor Vivian Hir's reflections of her time in Taiwan.

CAMPUS LIFE, p. 6

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WEATHER

Mostly clear skies ahead

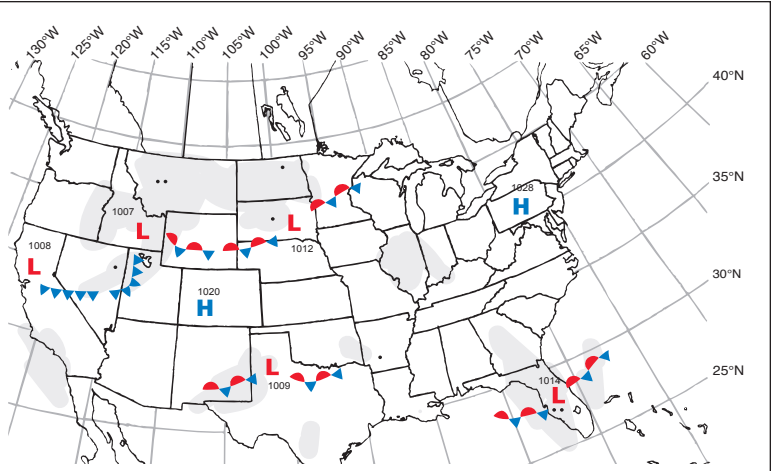
By Phoebe Lin
CHIEF METEOROLOGIST

A lovely sunny weekend is arriving as a higher pressure system moves towards the eastern US this week. Showers may interrupt the clear skies when the outskirts of Hurricane Nigel pass by on Saturday.

According to our

friends at the Northeast River Forecast Center, some flooding is possible through the weekend.

Afterwards, dewpoints are finally trending drier as a possible early autumn makes its entrance. The sky has been perfect for cloudgazing lately—there are several fluffy ones passing by my window as I write this!



Situation for Noon Eastern Time, Thursday, September 21, 2023

Weather Systems	Weather Fronts		Precipitation Symbols		Other Symbols
	High Pressure	Trough	Snow	Rain	
L Low Pressure	Warm Front	Cold Front	Shows		Fog
§ Hurricane	Stationary Front		Light		Thunderstorm
			Moderate		Haze
			Heavy		

Extended Forecast

Today: High around 73°F (23°C). Northwest winds around 8-10 mph.
Tonight: Low around 58°F (14°C). Southeast winds around 5-7 mph.
Friday: High around 69°F (21°C) and low around 56°F (13°C). East winds around 4-6 mph.
Saturday: High of 84°F (29°C) and a low of 71°F (22°C). Mostly cloudy with 8-11 mph South winds.
Sunday: High around 67°F (19°C) and low around 55°F (13°C). Northeast winds around 7-10 mph.

Maria Zuber becomes Presidential Advisor; Search for Vice Provost of Research begins
Kornbluth: Zuber is “a perfect match for the challenge.”

By Alex Tang
NEWS EDITOR

In an email to the MIT Community, President Kornbluth announced that Maria Zuber, Professor of Geophysics, will become MIT's Presidential Advisor for Science and Technology Policy. Zuber is currently Vice President for research at MIT, with previous roles as the department Head for Earth, Atmospheric and Planetary Sciences as well as a stint at NASA. Kornbluth wrote that Zuber was “a perfect match for the challenge.” Zuber has led MIT's climate change strategy, which includes MIT's Climate Action Plan published in 2021. Amongst her other services to MIT, Zuber has also served as a founding member of the Se-

nior Risk Group (SRG) and helped “institute a systematic, MIT-wide approach to international engagements that present elevated risk.” Outside of MIT, Zuber has served four US presidents, and according to Kornbluth, has played “an increasingly influential role in shaping national science policy” as a past member of the National Science Board and current co-chair of the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology. Kornbluth stated that Zuber will be focused on “tracking trends and seizing opportunities to inform and advance enlightened state and federal policy.” Zuber will remain on the Academic Council and the SRG, and will continue to advise affiliated centers connected to national security or defense. Furthermore, Zuber

will continue “developing and strengthening federal, state and NGO research partnerships” in conjunction with the MIT Washington Office. In her statement, Kornbluth added that a search for the Senior Vice Provost for Research would begin, reporting to the Provost. Kornbluth intends to tap a “senior faculty member” for this position. Provost Cynthia Barnhart PhD '88 will conduct the official search process. Kornbluth wrote that the change in administration reporting structure was in response to concerns heard during the listening tour, principally that of the need to “move decisively to reduce the burden and strain of research administration.” Kornbluth believes that the Vice Provost role is “purpose-built for this assignment.”

Orientation held for Class of 2027
Kornbluth: “You belong here.”

By Jayashabari Shankar and Tina Zhang
STAFF WRITERS

Orientation for the Class of 2027 began on Aug. 27 and ended Sept. 1. Many events were packed into the week, including residential exploration (REX) and a Convocation address from President Sally Kornbluth. During REX, the Class of 2027 immersed themselves in dorm tours and various activities. Vicki Carrica '27 said “[REX] was a fun way to meet all of the first years while getting free food and exploring campus.” Former residents of East Campus organized REX events. EC, which is known for its culture and community, will be shuttered for renovations until the fall of 2025. Maria Santos '27 said, “The EC Party was really fun and the structure was impressive.” During Orientation Week, the Class of 2027 was divided into color-based orientation teams and had friendly competitions intended to form a cohesive community. Each team was broken up into smaller groups led by an orientation leader (OL). The orientation group activities, however, elicited a mixed response among the freshmen. Some enjoyed the orientation group activities. Adowyn Bryn '27 said, “I liked having some

built in interaction with my orientation group, but I'm the sort of person who likes icebreakers.” Shagun Bothra '27 added, “I liked the orientation groups a lot especially since the icebreakers and group activities made it easier to get to know the other people in my group.” Nevertheless, others believed that the orientation events took time away from the more enjoyable REX events. Carrica said that “the OLs were great but forcing people into groups & forcing conversation did make it awkward.” She added that “it was evident a lot of people didn't want to be there as the participation declined steadily as the week went on.” On the second day of Orientation, the Class of 2027 gathered on the Kresge lawn in front of the Stratton Student Center to attend President Sally Kornbluth's first Convocation, having assumed the presidency earlier this year. Kornbluth highlighted the collaborative nature of the MIT community, saying, “You're surrounded by a community of caring people. So, at any time, if you feel like you could use some support — academic, professional, personal — don't hesitate to ask.” She also highlighted the importance of trying new things, saying, “Even if it feels a bit risky, you can join a group that sounds interesting, practice a new skill, or volunteer to serve others in the communities beyond campus.” The Con-

vocation ceremony concluded with the school song “In Praise of MIT” performed by the Chorallaries of MIT. Freshmen also participated in the annual Activities Midway and Academic Expo events, where they saw exhibits about various clubs and academic departments and talked to upperclassmen and faculty present regarding their interests. Mia Lu '27 found “the stalls quite informative but overcrowded, making it hard to talk and obtain information from all the departments and activities I was interested in.” On the last day of orientation week, the incoming freshman class, around 1092 students hailing from 59 different countries, also posed for a class of 2027 photo in front of Kilian Court. The photo shoot was in stark contrast to the letter-writing event that the freshmen attended hours later in the Kresge Auditorium: they wrote a letter to their future selves, which will be delivered at the conclusion of freshman year. Anna Yang '27 said, “it was helpful especially because I had not really thought of my future goals except academics until that point. The event really encouraged me to think of my deeper goals.” MIT did reserve the Boston aquarium for one final event on Sept. 1. Shravika Pendyala '27 said, “it was a great opportunity to explore nighttime Boston, and also to go out with other freshmen and get to know them better.”

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Siebel Scholars Class of 2024

The Siebel Scholars program was founded in 2000 to recognize the most talented graduate students in business, computer science, and bioengineering. Each year, over 80 outstanding graduate students are selected as Siebel Scholars based on academic excellence and leadership and join an active, lifelong community among an ever-growing group of leaders. We are pleased to recognize this year’s Siebel Scholars.

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Stratton Student Center reopens after a summer of renovations, Tuesday, September 12.

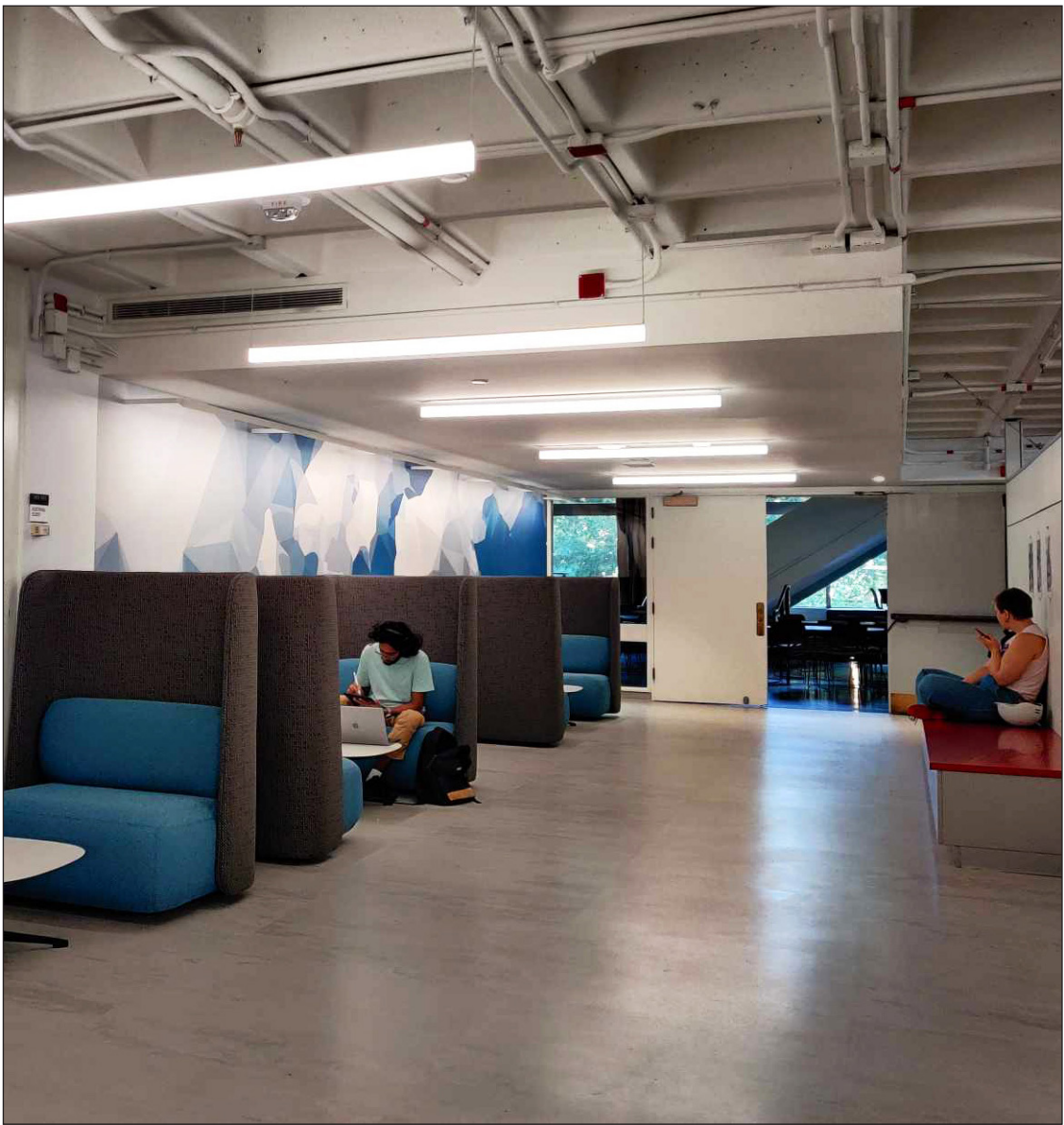
OMAR OROZCO—THE TECH



Students work and relax in the newly-reopened first floor of the Student Center in front of the renovated staircase.

ALEXA SIMAO—THE TECH

STUD Reopening



Stratton Student Center reopens after a summer of renovations, Tuesday, September 12.

ARUN WONGPROMMOON—THE TECH



OMAR OROZCO—THE TECH

Stratton Student Center reopens after a summer of renovations, Tuesday, September 12.



ALEXA SIMAO—THE TECH

Tawakal, the new Somalian food vendor in the Launchpad, opens for business.



ARUN WONGPROMMOON—THE TECH

Stratton Student Center reopens after a summer of renovations.



ARUN WONGPROMMOON—THE TECH

Stratton Student Center reopens after a summer of renovations.



ALEXA SIMAO—THE TECH

Hundreds of first-year students explore clubs and activities at Student Activities Midway during Orientation, September 1.



ALEXA SIMAO—THE TECH

Stratton Student Center reopens after a summer of renovations, Tuesday, September 12.

it's over

CAMPUS LIFE EDITOR

The tears started on the flight from Taipei to San Francisco. Unlike previous flights, I didn't feel like watching a movie. I tried watching a fashion documentary, but I lost interest after watching 15 minutes of it. I didn't want to numb my pensive thoughts by watching hours of inflight entertainment. Doing nothing but thinking on the plane sounded like a boring idea, but the timing felt appropriate. I simply wanted my mind to reflect upon the 80 days I spent in Taiwan, trying to process all the things that happened there, from the places I visited to the conversations with my housemate.

Feeling sentimental, I decided to play Stefanie Sun's A Half Goodbye (半句再见), a song from my Spotify playlist of Mandopop songs. I heard the song many times before, but this was the first time I felt that the song's lyrics and emotions described what I was thinking about at the exact moment - faces I wouldn't forget, lost sleep, many memories, etc. Tears started to well up in my eyes when the chorus began. I couldn't continue listening to the rest of the song. Tears streamed down my face.

I didn't understand why so many of my tears came from thinking about her, considering that we had a heated argument before I went to the airport. I was still hurt and embarrassed when I thought of what she said to me the last two hours we were together. Perhaps my tears came from thinking about how much she cried for me the last few days we were together and how much she would miss me. For context, my summer housemate is a single woman in her late forties. While she has a lot of relatives, they live in Malaysia, so she rarely sees them. In other words, she has lived a solitary life for a long time.

It wasn't until I listened to the song that what she said hit me – we may never see each other again. It was probably the first real farewell I had in my life. While I could always fly back to Taiwan, I didn't have a good answer as to when in the future. Likewise, my house-mate wasn't sure of how long she would stay in Taiwan before moving back to Malaysia. But I still didn't have a concrete answer as to why my feelings for her felt so complicated, like a mess of emotions from all over the spectrum.

As much as I wanted these waves of overwhelming emotions to end, I realized that sadness doesn't automatically come to a halt simply because I want to turn them off. Rather, it is a process consisting of many stages that requires undergoing the lowest lows to ultimately reach an emotional state of equilibrium.

Fortunately, the 22-hour-long journey ended once I arrived in Boston. The drive back home was somber as if I wasn't done grieving for a place. As I stared at the sunrise outside my car window on the highway, I thought about how I was now on the opposite side of the world, thousands of miles away from Taiwan. I was in my home country once again, yet I couldn't stop missing the landscapes of Taiwan, whether it was the Taipei skyline or the green rice fields. It is amazing to consider what eighty days in a foreign place does to you.

I must admit, there were times she annoyed me and made me feel uncomfortable. I still don't agree with some of her views and beliefs. Despite these disagreements and awkward situations, all I could think of when I cried were bittersweet recollections of my housemate: her mischievous smile, the times she made me laugh to the point of tears, eating together in the kitchen, and so much more. After living with her for 80 days, not only did we learn a lot about each other from our families to our upbringing, but also we had all sorts of conversations from Chinese idioms to current events in Taiwan.

I cried because I finally understood how loneliness drove her to become attached to me. For the first time, I learned what it was like to have no family or loved ones nearby. Over time, I noticed that what she wanted was someone to listen, to sympathize, to simply be there for her, really. From my conversations with her, I realized how hard her current life was, as she had to handle so many problems at once while not seeing the light at the end of the tunnel. I now understood why she grew so fond of me: my presence offered the daily companionship that she needed during her lowest lows.

I cried because no matter how much she cared about me, I never fully reciprocated those feelings. Although she was critical of me at times just like how a parent is to their child, she also cared about me deeply, whether it was showing concern for my health when I was feeling unwell or writing me a well-thought-out farewell letter. What I did in return could not compare to the amount of mental and emotional effort she put into me. Despite our relationship's unbalanced nature, she still enjoyed having me as a housemate. I always felt uneasy when she told me that I didn't cherish her enough before I left. I wanted to deny this fact, but the truth was that I wouldn't admit it.

When I lived with her, I was tired of hearing her tell me the same things over and over about how I should love and thank my parents. Looking back, I wish I had a better attitude at that time. She taught me the importance of practicing gratitude, a virtue I barely practiced when I first lived in her apartment. To put it simply, I lacked perspective. While I wished that some aspects of my childhood were better, I wonder what good came out of focusing on the negatives. If there is one thing I won't forget from the Chinese idioms she taught me, it is 生在福中不知福 (to live in plenty without appreciating it).

Although crying at home helped me reach some conclusions as to why thinking about her made me cry, I was still unsatisfied with these reasons. The cognitive dissonance continued for the next month or so, which was mentally draining. Writing journal entries to make sense of this internal conflict made me feel better, but not much. I still had mixed feelings about my relationship with her, as I wondered whether it was unhealthy or even toxic.

Therefore, was the point of forcing myself to feel one way over the other if that meant lying to myself? While the time we spent together was relatively short, it was undeniable that our relationship felt as close as an aunt-niece relationship, something that I never quite experienced before. It isn't the same as a mother-daughter relationship, but it is still special nevertheless. I don't know whether I will see her again in the future, and even if we don't, I won't forget this summer with her.



'I'm sure they're a harmful tool of the cosmetics-industrial complex and all, but my goodness do those strips ever work to pull gunk out of your pores. I was shocked, disgusted, and vaguely fascinated by the result.'

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