



Adithya Balachandran '25 works on a problem at the 2024 Integration Bee, Wednesday, January 24. Brian Liu '24 was the overall champion.

COURTESY OF JADE CHONGSATHAPORNPOONG

2023 YEAR IN REVIEW

see insert, page R1 (OPPOSITE PAGE 8)

MIT community assesses strategies for reducing campus carbon footprint

Page 2

MITHenge happens from Jan. 28 to Jan. 31

MITHenge occurred from Jan. 28 to Jan. 31 at 4:48:50 p.m.. During MITHenge, the setting sun aligns with the Infinite Corridor's entire length, a hallway approximately 823 feet long. This phenomenon occurs at two different times each year — around November 11 and January 31.

MITHenge etiquette includes arriving early and not obstructing the corridor, using the third floor, or standing in the stairwell for a better view to ensure space for all to clearly view the phenomenon.

— Tina Zhang

WELCOME BACK TO CAMPUS!

Moderna co-founder Noubar Afeyan PhD '87 to deliver Commencement address

Afeyan, a member of the MIT Corporation, will speak at the OneMIT Ceremony on the second of three days of Commencement proceedings

By Alex Tang, Tina Zhang, Shabari Shankar, Jessica He, & Russel Ismael

NEWS STAFF

Noubar Afeyan PhD '87, an American-Canadian entrepreneur and philanthropist best known for co-founding the biotechnology company Moderna, will speak at the 2024 OneMIT Commencement Ceremony May 30.

Dr. Afeyan is the Chief Executive Officer of Flagship Pioneering, a biotechnology venture capital company that has founded over 100 new biotechnology companies, including Moderna and Editas Medicine. He is currently a member of the MIT Corporation.

Afeyan was born in Lebanon to Armenian parents and immigrated to Montreal following the Lebanese Civil War. Afeyan studied Chemical Engineering at McGill University (BS) and biochemical engineering at MIT (Ph.D.).

Among his numerous accolades, Afeyan has built over 70 life science and technology startups, received the National Order of Merit from Lebanon, and was elected to the National Academy of Engineering.

The Tech sat down with Afeyan to discuss his background, philanthropic work, and journey to his current position at the intersection of basic research and venture capital.

On the Institute's special qualities

Afeyan involvement with the MIT community traces back decades to when he was a graduate student. From 2000 to 2016, Afeyan was a Senior Lecturer at the MIT Sloan School of Management, teaching classes in innovation, entrepreneurship, and leadership.

Afeyan believes that MIT is unique in the way that it positions itself as an institution geared toward shaping the future. He stated that MIT teaches its students how to "prosecute the future," which stems from recognizing that "no problems can't be solved." Afeyan said that anybody who comes to the Institute departs with both the "burden and opportunity" to tackle challenging problems.

Afeyan's journey in the biotechnology sector

In his words, Afeyan went down an "unusual path" when the biotechnology industry was in its nascent stages.

Afeyan started his first company in 1987, the year during which he completed his Ph.D. One of Afeyan's early companies, PerSeptive Biosystems, which was founded in 1989, was acquired in 1998 by Perki-

nElmer for 360 million dollars.

During the 1990s, Afeyan's work in the realm of startups led him to consider the formation of a centralized institution to catalyze the formation of multiple new companies at once, a concept that he termed "parallel entrepreneurship." In 1999, Afeyan founded Flagship Pioneering, previously known as Flagship Ventures, with this vision.

When asked about any particular individuals at MIT who strongly influenced his career trajectory, Afeyan highlighted his thesis advisor, the late Institute Professor Daniel Wang SB '59 SM '61. Wang was regarded as one of the "founding fathers" in the field of biochemical engineering. Afeyan stated that Wang's academic family tree of students was "quite remarkable."

With regards to the individuals that he works with today, Afeyan stated that Professors Andrew Lo and Daron Acemoglu have "pioneered new thoughts"—Lo in finance and Acemoglu in economics.

Humanitarian efforts

Afeyan has also led various philanthropic initiatives, which include the construction of the United World College Dilijan School in Armenia and the Aurora

Commencement, Page 2

IN SHORT

The spring registration deadline is Friday, February 9.

Q3 Physical Education & Wellness classes begin on Monday, February 12.

The last day to add half-term subjects offered in the first half of term is Friday, February 16.

There are no classes in observance of Presidents' Day on Monday, February 19.

The Tech's has new mailing lists. Review our website for the updated lists to contact our staff.

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

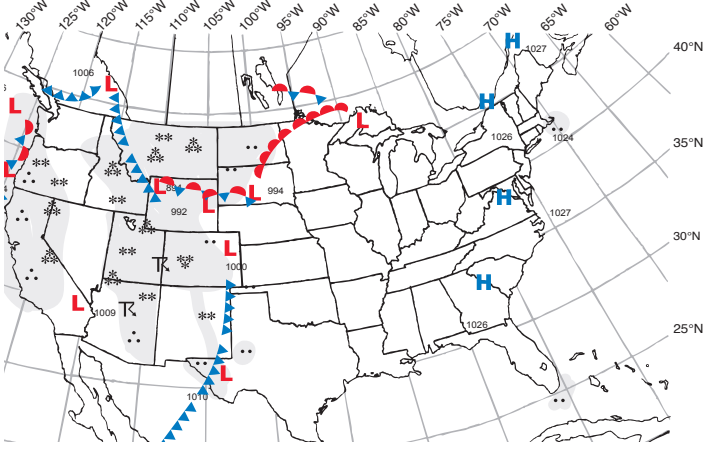
Send news and tips to tt-news-editors@mit.edu



ROBERT KRAWITZ - THE TECH

Landon Dolvin laying it all on the court on Saturday's game against Coast Guard.

WEATHER FORECAST



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

Sunny Skies to Start the Year of the Dragon

By Adrienne Lai
CHIEF METEOROLOGIST

With celebrations for the Lunar New Year upcoming, the clouds are parting giving way to a weekend full of sunny skies and warmer weather. Let the good luck breeze through with wind speeds approximately 10 mph for the festivities!

The Year of the Dragon is known to bring good fortune, which might explain this nice weather after a dreary January! 2024 corresponds with the Wood Dragon element, which is known for new beginnings, so use the warm days and sunlight to set yourself up for success this semester!

| THU (DAY) | THU (NIGHT) | FRI | SAT | SUN |
|---------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| 39°F (04°C) | 30°F (-01°C) | 41°F (05°C) | 57°F (14°C) | 50°F (10°C) |
| Partly sunny. | Mostly cloudy. | Mostly sunny. | Partly sunny. | Mostly sunny. |

FEBRUARY 8

SITUATION FOR NOON (ET)

Extended Forecast

Today: Mostly sunny with a high of 39°F (3.89°C) and ~10 mph winds Northeast.

Tonight: There will be a low of 30°F (-1.11 °C) with mostly cloudy skies. Northeast winds around 5-8 mph.

Friday: Mostly sunny with a high of 41°F (5 °C) and a low of 31°F (-0.56 °C). 5-7 mph North winds.

Saturday: Partly sunny with Southwest winds around 10-14 mph. The high is 57°F (13.89°C) with a low of 41°F (5°C).

Sunday: Mostly sunny with a high of 50°F (10°C).

Noubar Afeyan talks upcoming role as Commencement speaker

Commencement, from Page 1

Prize for Awakening Humanity, an award recognizing individuals involved in humanitarian work across the globe.

With the success from his entrepreneurial endeavors, Afeyan saw an obligation to become involved in philanthropy. Afeyan cited his background as an impetus for such work, alluding to his familial ties to the Armenian Genocide during World War I. He stated that he feels a responsibility to help people “cope with the aftermath” of such events and avert such situations in the first place.

Attitudes for success

With decades of experience, Afeyan described innovation and entrepreneurship as a “Darwinian” evolutionary process that involves “variation, selection, and iteration.” Afeyan stated that evolution could not take place without failure, and akin to the industry that he works in, “failure is a necessity for success.”

Afeyan noted, however, that a pitfall that comes with learning from failures is that people try to take “too much from” a singular event of failure. He believes that the best learning comes from simultaneously advancing multiple different approaches and letting the circumstances “inform at the ensemble level.”

He said, “You have to recognize that if you’re not achieving failure, you’re prob-

ably not going to be successful.”

As an immigrant himself, Afeyan emphasized an “immigrant” mindset that he took when he was exploring new fields. “I immigrated to new technologies, new fields, new science, new activities,” he said.

Additionally, Afeyan believes that one should strive towards change and improvement in new realms rather than be an expert in a singular discipline. He highlighted the importance of leaving one’s comfort zone: Afeyan stated that being relatively new to an area enabled him to work “much better.”

Commencement Exercises

Recent Commencement speakers include popular Youtuber Mark Rober (2023), director-general of the World Trade Organization Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala MCP ’78 PhD ’81 (2022), and civil rights lawyer and activist Bryan Stevenson (2021).

MIT’s Commencement celebrations will take place over three days from May 29 to May 31. The undergraduate Class of 2024 will receive diplomas on Killian Court May 31. Recognition ceremonies for advanced degree recipients will be held on all three days of Commencement exercises.


All Degree candidates are invited to attend the OneMIT Commencement Ceremony on May 30. Events will include speeches, the turning of the Brass Rat, and a rendition of the School Song.

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MIT community assesses strategies for reducing campus carbon footprint

Newman: “Our findings have implications far beyond our campus boundaries.”

By Tina Zhang & Russel Ismael
NEWS EDITORS

In MIT’s climate action plan “Fast Forward: MIT’s Climate Action Plan for the Decade,” the Institute demonstrated its aim to decarbonize the campus by 2050. To achieve this aim, MIT launched a new Decarbonization Working Group — a new subset of the Climate Nucleus, a faculty committee responsible for directing and implementing the current climate action plan.

The Decarbonization Working Group is composed of MIT faculty, staff, and students whose roles are to inform MIT’s efforts on decarbonization of the campus’s centralized energy system.

The group is led by co-chairs Julie Newman, the Institute’s Director of Sustainability and Christoph Reinhart, Professor in the Architecture Department. The rest of the group includes members who have extensive knowledge of sustainability technologies, grid-level strategies, and their uses.

The Decarbonization Working Group aims to utilize the MIT campus as a testing ground to develop energy solutions before implementing them on a global scale. Ipolyti Dellatolas, PhD student in Mechanical Engineering and group member, said, “It’s clear how new energy-efficiency strategies and technologies could use campus as a living lab and then broadly deploy these solutions across campus for scalable emissions reductions.” Newman added, “We seek to study and analyze solutions

for our campus, with the understanding that our findings have implications far beyond our campus boundaries.”

Starting Feb. 2024, members of the working group will use their expertise to assess current technologies for reducing carbon emissions. Newman said, “We are fortunate that there are constantly new ideas and technologies being tested in this space and that we have a committed group of faculty working together to evaluate them.”

The working group will also visit sites where decarbonization technologies are currently used or tested in order to evaluate their efficacy. It will explore university campuses that implement district geothermal and heat pumps as well as test sites of deep geothermal or microgrid infrastructure manufacturers.

Reinhart said, “This is a unique moment for MIT to demonstrate leadership by combining best decarbonization practices,” which include “nearly there” technologies such as deep geothermal, micro-nuclear, energy storage, and ubiquitous occupancy driven temperature control. He added that “as first adopters, we can find out what works, allowing other campuses to follow us at reduced risks.”

The working group’s findings and suggestions will be presented in a report to the MIT community by the end of this year. Opportunities to learn more about the Institute’s efforts to decarbonize will be available during community events on Mar. 14 and MIT’s Sustainability Connect forum on Feb. 8.



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SPORTS BLITZ

Friday, January 26th:

Women’s Swimming and Diving

defeated NYU 166-134

Women’s Swimming and Diving

lost to Williams College 127.5-172.5

Men’s Swimming and Diving

lost to NYU 118-180

Men’s Swimming and Diving

lost to Williams College 138.5-155.5

Men’s Volleyball

lost to Marymount University 0-3

Saturday, January 27th:

Men’s Fencing

defeated Hunter College 27-0

Women’s Fencing

defeated Hunter College 25-2

Men’s Fencing

lost to NYU 13-14

Women’s Fencing

defeated NYU 14-13

Men’s Volleyball

defeated Stevenson University 3-0

Women’s Fencing

defeated Haverford College 22-5

Men’s Fencing

defeated Haverford College 19-8

Men’s Fencing

lost to New Jersey Institute of Technology 12-15

Women’s Fencing

defeated New Jersey Institute of Technology 21-6

Men’s Swimming and Diving

lost to Williams College 136-157

Women’s Swimming and Diving

defeated Tufts University 208-92

Men’s Squash

defeated Middlebury College 5-4

Women’s Basketball

defeated Mount Holyoke College 94-23

Women’s Fencing

defeated Stevens Institute of Technology 20-7

Men’s Fencing

defeated Stevens Institute of Technology 14-13

Men’s Basketball

defeated Salve Regina 86-81

Sunday, January 28th:

Men’s Squash

lost to Williams College 1-8

Tuesday, January 30th:

Women’s Basketball

lost to Middlebury College 51-65

Wednesday, January 31st:

Women’s Basketball

defeated Emerson College 70-62

Men’s Basketball

lost to Babson College 68-84

Men’s Volleyball

lost to Lasell University 0-3

Thursday, February 1st:

Men’s Volleyball

defeated Rivier University 3-1

Friday, February 2nd:

Women’s Track and Field

participated in Crimson Elite (No Team Score)

Men’s Track and Field

participated in Crimson Elite (No Team Score)

Men’s Squash

defeated Bates College 8-1

Saturday, February 3rd:

Women’s Track and Field

participated in Tufts Cupid Challenge (No Team Score)

Men’s Track and Field

participated in Tufts Cupid Challenge (No Team Score)

Women’s Basketball

defeated United States Coast Guard Academy 72-59

Men’s Swimming and Diving

defeated Amherst College 202.5-74.5

Women’s Swimming and Diving

defeated Amherst College 213-77

Men’s Basketball

defeated United States Coast Guard Academy 97-81

Sunday, February 4th:

Rifle

lost to the University of Akron 4322-4700

Rife

defeated Norwich University 4322-4304

Wednesday, February 7th:

Women’s Basketball

defeated Babson College 69-63

Men’s Basketball

defeated Emerson College 94-93

Upcoming Sports Events

FRIDAY 9

Women’s Track and Field

at David Hemery Valentine Invitational

Women’s Swimming and Diving

at BU Winter Open

Men’s Swimming and Diving

at BU Winter Open

Men’s Squash

at MASC Championships

SATURDAY 10

Men’s Track and Field

at David Hemery Valentine Invitational

Men’s Track and Field

Gordon Kelley Invitational at MIT 10 a.m.

Women’s Track and Field

Gordon Kelley Invitational at MIT 10 a.m.

Rifle

at Norwich University 12 p.m.

Men’s Tennis

at Boston University 1 p.m.

Women’s Basketball

vs Smith College 1 p.m.

Men’s Basketball

vs WPI 3 p.m.

Women’s Tennis

at Brandeis University 3 p.m.

SUNDAY 11

Rifle

vs Ohio State University 10 a.m.

WEDNESDAY 14

Men’s Tennis

vs Merrimack College 3 p.m.

Women’s Basketball

at Wheaton College 6 p.m.

Men’s Volleyball

vs Elms College 7 p.m.

Men’s Basketball

at Clark University 7 p.m.

SATURDAY 17

Women’s Track and Field

at Springfield College Tri-angle Classic

Men’s Track and Field

at Springfield College Tri-angle Classic

Rifle

at Army 8 a.m.

Women’s Tennis

at Southern New Hampshire University 10 a.m.

Women’s Basketball

at Salve Regina University 1 p.m.

at Salve Regina University 1 p.m.

vs Vassar College 1 p.m.

Men’s Basketball

vs Vassar College 3 p.m.

Men’s Volleyball

vs Endicott College 5 p.m.

SUNDAY 18

Men’s Tennis

at RPI 2 p.m.

MONDAY 19

Softball

at Brown University 10 a.m.

WEDNESDAY 21

Women’s Basketball

NEWMAC Quarterfinal



ROBERT KRAWITZ - THE TECH

Head Coach Larry Anderson discussing game plans with the MIT Men's Basketball team.

U.S. kills senior leader of Iran-backed Kataib Hezbollah in strike in Iraq, says senior U.S. official

The U.S. killed a senior leader of the Iran-backed group Kataib Hezbollah in a strike in Iraq Wednesday, a senior official confirmed to CBS News. The individual targeted was a commander who was in charge of operations in Syria.

Kataib Hezbollah is one of the Iran-backed groups the U.S. holds responsible for a series of attacks on U.S. forces in Iraq and Syria, as well as for the deadly drone strike in Jordan that killed three U.S. soldiers and wounded dozens more.

Officials told CBS News the strike in Iraq was part of the response President Biden had promised in the aftermath of the drone strike in Jordan.

The retaliation for that attack began last Friday when the U.S. hit more than 85 targets in Iraq and Syria that included command and control operation centers, missiles, and rockets used by the militia groups and their Iran Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps sponsors, U.S. Central Command said in a statement.

Iranian-backed militia groups have launched at least 168 attacks on U.S. forces in Iraq, Syria, and Jordan since Oct. 17. Those attacks, according to data provided by the Pentagon, have killed 3 U.S. service members, very seriously injured two, seriously injured nine, and 132 others have suffered non-serious injuries.

—Eleanor Watson, CBS News

Appeals court rejects Trump's immunity claim in federal election interference case

A three-judge panel in the U.S. Court of Appeals has rejected former President Donald Trump's claim of presidential immunity as it pertains to his federal election interference case.

"For the purpose of this criminal case, former President Trump has become citizen Trump, with all of the defenses of any other criminal defendant," the judges wrote in their 57-page decision, saying that "Former President Trump lacked any lawful discretionary authority to defy federal criminal law and he is answerable in court for his conduct."

"We reject all three potential bases for immunity both as a categorical defense to federal criminal prosecutions of former Presidents and as applied to this case in particular," the decision said.

"We cannot accept former President Trump's claim that a President has unbounded authority to commit crimes that would neutralize the most fundamental check on executive power -- the recognition and implementation of election results," wrote the judges. "Nor can we sanction his apparent contention that the Executive has carte blanche to violate the rights of individual citizens to vote and to have their votes count."

"At bottom, former President Trump's stance would collapse our system of separated powers by placing the President beyond the reach of all three Branches," they wrote.

Trump, responding on his social media platform, wrote, "A President of the United States must have Full Immunity in order to properly function and do what has to be done for the good of our Country. ... If not overturned, as it should be, this decision would terribly injure not only the Presidency, but the Life, Breath, and Success of our Country."

Trump spokesperson Steven Cheung said in a statement that "President Trump respectfully disagrees with the DC Circuit's decision and will appeal it in order to safeguard the Presidency and the Constitution."

—Katherine Faulders, Alexander Mallin, & Peter Charalambous, ABC News

Engineer accused of stealing secret U.S. government tech used to detect nuclear missile launches

A former engineer was arrested on federal charges alleging he stole trade secret technology that was developed by the U.S. government to detect nuclear missile launches and to track ballistic and hypersonic missiles, the Department of Justice announced Wednesday.

Chenguang Gong, 57, of San Jose, California, was arrested Tuesday morning and charged with theft of trade secrets, the DOJ said in a press release. Gong is a native of China and became a U.S. citizen in 2011, the DOJ said.

Gong appeared in court Wednesday and was released on \$2.5 million bond with location monitoring and curfew, a spokesperson for the U.S. Attorney's Office in Los Angeles said.

During that hearing, which took place in San Jose, he was represented by a deputy federal public defender. He was ordered to make a court appearance in Los Angeles by Feb. 20 and it remains unclear who will represent him in that hearing, the spokesperson said.

While briefly working at a Los Angeles-area research and development company — from March 30, 2023 to April 26, 2023— Gong allegedly transferred 3,600 files from his work laptop to personal storage devices, according to court documents. Some of these files were later discovered on devices taken from Gong's temporary residence in Thousand Oaks, California, the DOJ said, citing an affidavit filed in support of the criminal complaint against Gong.

Gong transferred more than 1,800 files after he had already accepted a new job at a main competitor of the company on April 5, 2023, the DOJ said.

—Rebecca Cohen & Andrew Blankstein, NBC News

House gives Harvard one-week deadline to turn over antisemitism documents

Matt Egan

CNN

Turn over a trove of documents about antisemitism on campus or face a subpoena. That's the final warning Rep. Virginia Foxx, the Republican chairwoman of the House Education and Workforce Committee, delivered to Harvard University on Wednesday as the panel seeks to advance its investigation into antisemitism on college campuses.

In a letter sent to Harvard leaders, Foxx accused the Ivy League school of "obstructing" the committee's investigation by withholding many of the documents lawmakers are seeking and submitting others that were publicly available and yet contained "bewildering redactions."

"Harvard's failure to produce documents requested by the Committee in a timely manner is unacceptable and will not be tolerated," Foxx wrote in the letter to Harvard interim presi-

dent Alan Garber and Penny Pritzker, who leads the Harvard Corporation, the school's top governing board.

Foxx detailed a series of high-priority documents that she wants Harvard to turn over by 5 pm ET on February 14, including meeting minutes since Hamas' October 7 terror attacks on Israel and communications by university officials related to antisemitism. This narrower list excludes some of the committee's prior requests for information on Harvard's diversity office as well as on foreign donations. "If the above priority requests are unfulfilled by the deadline set above, the Committee is prepared to issue a subpoena," Foxx wrote.

In a statement, Harvard spokesperson Jason Newton said the school was cooperating with the committee and "has provided extensive information with initial submissions made last month and several further responses. We have made eight submissions, including one on Monday, in connection with their inquiries, and plan

another submission for Friday."

"The safety and well-being of our students remains our top priority," he said.

Garber, who replaced Claudine Gay after she stepped down last month, has signaled Harvard will cooperate with the House investigation.

In an interview with The Crimson last week, Garber said Harvard would "comply fully with the process" of the investigation.

Yet Foxx has repeatedly criticized Harvard for its response, previously describing it as "woefully inadequate" and telling CNN that lawmakers "thought Harvard would take this more seriously."

In the new letter sent on Wednesday, Foxx said that so far Harvard has produced just one "document of significance" since the request for documents was made on January 9. That document is a set of recommended goals and steps to address antisemitism by Harvard's antisemitism advisory group. It was provided last week.

Nevada's struggling economy could hold a key to 2024

Kellen Browning

THE NEW YORK TIMES

Nevada has the worst unemployment rate in the country, gas and grocery prices are still among the nation's highest, and the cost of housing here has soared. President Biden's policies are squarely to blame, Republicans argue, and former President Donald J. Trump will fix it if voters return him to the White House.

Nevada's unemployment rate has been cut in half since Mr. Biden took office, gas prices have dropped by nearly \$2 a gallon since mid-2022, and more than 200,000 jobs have already been created as the state is receiving \$3.3 billion in infrastructure investments. Democrats here say that the economy is finally on the upswing after Mr. Trump and the coronavirus pandemic drove it into the ground, and that re-electing Mr. Biden is critical to keeping it that way.

Even though Nevada's presidential nominating contests this week are largely anti-climactic — in part

because Mr. Trump and his remaining Republican primary rival, Nikki Haley, are on separate ballots — Mr. Biden, Vice President Kamala Harris and Mr. Trump all recently made stops in Las Vegas, setting the stakes for the likely general election matchup.

The messaging war heating up mirrors a larger political fight playing out nationwide over which perception of the economy hits home for voters. Traditional metrics indicate that the economy is, indeed, strong, and Americans are spending like it is, according to a New York Times analysis, but consumer confidence remains low.

Republicans believe they have a particularly potent economic argument to make in Nevada, which relies heavily on tourism and hospitality, and was hit harder during the pandemic than most of the country and recovered more sluggishly.

"Certainly, Republicans will make hay about that: the cost of living, groceries, some of those issues," said Da-

vid Damore, a professor of political science at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

Democrats, he said, could make the case that they were improving the local economy through job growth and climate investments. But that argument is "a little more abstract than going to the grocery store and seeing your prices," he added.

Republicans have not won Nevada in a presidential election since 2004. The state's Democrats are famously well prepared, with the political operation of former Senator Harry Reid combining with the organizational heft of the Culinary Workers Union, in particular, to turn out Democratic voters and independents reliably. Still, recent statewide elections have been won by razor-thin margins, and Republicans flipped the governor's mansion in 2022. Last fall, a poll conducted by The New York Times and Siena College found Mr. Biden trailing Mr. Trump by 10 percentage points in Nevada.

House Reps fail to impeach DHS Secretary Mayorkas over border

Alexandra Hutzler, Lauren Peller, & John Parkinson

ABC NEWS

In a stunning defeat, a Republican-led push to impeach Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas failed on Tuesday.

The final vote was 214-216. Three Republicans joined all Democrats present in opposing the measure. A fourth Republican voted against for procedural reasons.

For a moment, the vote was tied at 215-215 before another Republican switched to vote against.

Speaker Mike Johnson announced the resolution had failed, to cheers from Democrats in the chamber.

Moments before, when House Republicans thought they had eked out the impeachment vote -- despite the defiance of three of their members -- Democratic Rep. Al Green, of Texas rolled in to the chamber in a wheelchair in hospital scrubs.

Democratic leaders had brought Green back to the Capitol from the hospital where he was recovering from surgery. Green voted no, deadlocking the chamber and preventing Republicans from impeaching Mayorkas.

A Democratic leadership source said Green was feeling well enough to travel back to Capitol Hill, and that he was expected to return before the vote.

Minutes after the Mayorkas vote failed, Johnson suffered another stinging defeat when the House fell short of the votes needed to pass a stand-alone bill he had backed to provide aid to Israel.

During the Mayorkas drama, Rep. Blake Moore, R-Utah, filed a motion to reconsider immediately after the vote failed, allowing it to be taken up again. It is likely to be scheduled when Majority Leader Steve Scalise, who is receiving cancer treatment, is able to attend.

The articles of impeachment ac-

cuse Mayorkas, long the target of GOP attacks when it comes to immigration policy, of "willful and systemic refusal to comply with the law" and "breach of public trust" amid a surge in unauthorized migrant crossings.

A spokesperson for the DHS called the impeachment baseless and said that it should not have moved forward.

The White House also spoke out against the efforts to impeach Mayorkas.

"Clearly there is bipartisan agreement that this baseless, unconstitutional impeachment stunt should fail. House Republicans ought to realize that extreme political stunts like this are a waste of time, and instead join the President, Secretary Mayorkas, and Republicans and Democrats who want to work together to deliver real solutions that actually strengthen border security," Ian Sams, White House spokesperson for oversight and investigations,

Netanyahu rejects Hamas cease-fire proposal; Blinken visits Israel

John Hudson, Claire Parker, Susannah George, & Lior Soroka

THE WASHINGTON POST

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Wednesday forcefully rejected a cease-fire proposal by Hamas, vowing to fight until a “complete victory” had been achieved over the militant group in Gaza — a setback for Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who was in Israel hoping to build support for a humanitarian pause.

Hamas had called for a three-stage cease-fire deal that would release Israeli hostages, alive and dead, over a more than four-month period in exchange for the complete withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Gaza Strip, according to the leaked text of its response to a truce proposal verified by The Washington Post.

Netanyahu called Hamas’s terms “delusional” in a news conference Wednesday evening: “By giving in to Hamas demands, we will only invite another massacre,” he said, adding that Israel would

continue its military campaign in southern Gaza.

“Continued military pressure is essential for the hostages’ release,” he said.

U.S. officials expected both Hamas and Israel to continue to posture publicly against the truce as a negotiating tactic, but an Israeli initiative to continue military operations for months on end would directly contradict Blinken’s goals of reducing hostilities and allowing humanitarian aid into the strip.

Under the broad framework for a deal, hashed out by negotiators from the United States, Qatar, Israel and Egypt in Paris last month, an initial pause in fighting would last for six weeks and bring about the release of all civilian hostages held by the militant group in Gaza. Israel would release three Palestinian prisoners for every hostage Hamas frees.

Qatari Prime Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani said Tuesday evening that Hamas had delivered a “positive” reply after a week of deliberation, and Qatar had passed it along to Israel.

President Biden characterized it on Tuesday as “a little bit over the top.”

Between his meetings Wednesday with top Israeli officials, including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Blinken said U.S. officials were “intensely” looking at Hamas’s counterproposal.

“There’s a lot of work to be done but we are very much focused on doing that work, and hopefully being able to resume the release of hostages that was interrupted,” he said.

It was unclear Wednesday evening what Netanyahu’s pledge to move forward with Israel’s military campaign – including in Rafah, the last sliver of land its troops have not yet invaded – would mean for international diplomatic efforts to secure a cease-fire.

Osama Hamdan, a senior Hamas official, said in a news conference in Beirut Wednesday that a Hamas delegation would head to Cairo Thursday for fresh talks convened by Egypt and Qatar. He accused Netanyahu of misleading the Israeli public and seeking to prolong the war.

Japan court approves a trans man’s request for legal recognition without surgery

ASSOCIATED PRESS

A court in western Japan on Wednesday approved a transgender man’s request to have his gender changed in official records without undergoing sterilization surgery, the first known ruling of its kind since the top court struck down a surgery requirement for such record changes.

The Okayama Family Court’s Tsuyama Branch said Tacaquito Usui, 50, could get the gender listed for him in his family registry updated to male. Usui original application for the revision was rejected five years ago.

“It’s like I’m standing at the start line of my new life,” he said during a televised news conference after Wednesday’s ruling came out. “I’m so excited.”

Japan’s Supreme Court ruled in October that a provision of a 20-year-old law that made the removal of

reproductive organs a precondition for the legal recognition of gender changes was unconstitutional. The ruling, however, only applied to the sterilization provision and did not address the constitutionality of requiring other procedures.

The Okayama court found that the hormone therapy Usui received made him eligible for gender affirmation. Usui welcomed the recognition, saying he thinks the law in Japan might be evolving faster than the public awareness. Many LGBTQ people in Japan still hide their sexual orientations and gender identities due to fear of discrimination at work and schools. The country remains the only Group of Seven member that does not allow same-sex marriages.

Activists have pressed for greater rights and protections. But change has come slowly in a country of conformity with a conservative government

that sticks to traditional paternalistic values and is reluctant to accept gender, sexual and family diversity.

The law that the Supreme Court addressed in its ruling took effect in 2004. It stated that individuals who wanted to register a gender change needed to have reproductive organs, including testes or ovaries, removed. They also were required to have a body that “appears to have parts that resemble the genital organs” of their expressed gender.

More than 10,000 Japanese have since had their genders officially changed, according to court documents from another court case. A court in central Japan noted in last year’s case that sterilization surgery was not required in most of the approximately 50 European and central Asian countries that have laws that allow gender changes on official documents.

112 dead as authorities struggle to contain forest fires in Chile

Betsy Reed

THE GUARDIAN

Firefighters are wrestling with huge forest fires that broke out in central Chile on Friday. Officials have extended curfews in cities most heavily affected by the blazes and said the death toll has increased to 112 killed.

The fires have been burning with the highest intensity around the city of Viña del Mar, where a botanical garden founded in 1931 was destroyed by the flames. At least 1,600 people have been left without homes.

A person holds a flag that reads ‘against’ as voters take part in a referendum on a new Chilean constitution, in Santiago, Chile

Flames and smoke on the eastern edge of the city have trapped some people in their homes. Officials said 200 people have been reported missing in Viña del Mar and the surrounding area. The city of 300,000 people is a popular beach resort.

Late on Sunday, Chile’s forensic medicine service updated the confirmed death toll to 112 people.

Drone footage filmed by Reuters in Vina del Mar area showed entire neighbourhoods scorched, with residents rummaging through husks of burnt-out houses where corrugated iron roofs have collapsed. On the streets, singed cars littered the roads.

Rodrigo Mundaca, the governor of the Valparaíso region, said on Sunday he believed that some of the fires could have been intentionally caused, replicating a theory that had also been mentioned on Saturday by the president, Gabriel Boric.

“These fires began in four points that lit up simultaneously,” Mundaca said. “As authorities, we will have to work rigorously to find who is responsible.”

The fires around Viña del Mar began in mountainous forested areas that are hard to reach. But they have moved into densely populated neighbourhoods on the city’s periphery de-

spite efforts by Chilean authorities to slow down the flames.

On Saturday, Boric said unusually high temperatures, low humidity and high wind speeds were making it difficult to control the wildfires in central Chile, which have already burned through 8,000 hectares of forest and urban areas.

Officials are asking people in affected areas to evacuate their homes as quickly as possible, while those further from the fires are being told to stay indoors in order to facilitate the transit of fire engines and ambulances.

Curfews have been declared in Viña del Mar and the neighbouring cities of Quilpué and Villa Alemana, as part of efforts to prevent looting.

The fires broke out during a week of record high temperatures in central Chile. Over the past two months, the El Niño weather pattern has caused droughts and high temperatures in western South America that have also increased the risk of forest fires.

World Food Program ramping up aid to reach 3M Ethiopians. Millions more in need

The U.N.’s World Food Program says it aims to reach up to 3 million Ethiopians affected by climate change and conflict in the coming weeks, half the number it supported in the East African country before the agency introduced a lengthy aid suspension last year.

WFP said it “is now working at pace to deliver food assistance to up to 3 million” in Ethiopia’s Tigray, Afar, Amhara and Somali regions. The agency “is extremely concerned about the deteriorating food security in Northern Ethiopia – where many are already facing severe hunger,” Chris Nikoi, its Ethiopia head, said in a statement issued Tuesday.

The United Nations and the United States halted food aid for the Tigray region in March 2023 because of a massive scheme by Ethiopian officials to steal humanitarian grain. The pause was extended to the rest of the country in June after the diversions were found to have occurred nationwide.

The U.S. and the U.N. later resumed food deliveries but on a small scale.

Before the suspension, the WFP helped feed 6 million Ethiopians. It now plans to reach 40% of the 7.2 million people who face acute food insecurity and only “if resources are available.” The rest will be reached by the government and other aid agencies, the agency said.

The WFP is grappling with a worldwide funding shortage at a time when needs are soaring. The agency said it has “limited food stocks” in Ethiopia and urgently needs \$142 million for its operations. Without those funds the agency will be forced to stop food distributions for nearly 1 million foreign refugees in April, it said.

Ethiopia is gripped by drought and multiple internal conflicts that have resulted in millions going hungry.

—Associated Press

Australians vote No in referendum that promised change for First Nations people but couldn’t deliver

With a two-letter word, Australians struck down the first attempt at constitutional change in 24 years, a move experts say will inflict lasting damage on First Nations people and suspend any hopes of modernizing the nation’s founding document.

Preliminary results from the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) suggested that most of the country’s 17.6 million registered voters wrote No on their ballots, and CNN affiliates 9 News, Sky News and SBS all projected no path forward for the Yes campaign.

The proposal, to recognize Indigenous people in the constitution and create an Indigenous body to advise government on policies that affect them, needed a majority nationally and in four of six states to pass.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese had championed the referendum and in a national address on Saturday night said his government remained committed to improving the lives of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders.

“This moment of disagreement does not define us. And it will not divide us. We are not yes voters or no voters. We are all Australians,” he said.

“It is as Australians together that we must take our country beyond this debate without forgetting why we had it in the first place. Because too often in the life of our nation, and in the political conversation, the disadvantage confronting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people has been relegated to the margins.”

“This referendum and my government has put it right at the center.”

—Hilary Whiteman, CNN

King Charles breaks with tradition to open up about cancer

Buckingham Palace’s decision to announce King Charles’s cancer diagnosis breaks with a longstanding tradition of near total discretion about the British monarch’s health, as the relatively new king looks to present the 1,000-year-old regal franchise as more human and relatable.

King Charles is Britain’s largely ceremonial head of state and has the power to sign off on laws and appoint prime ministers. But unlike U.S. presidents who are expected to give granular breakdowns of the physical ailments, the unelected British monarchs face no such requirement and have for years been vague about their health.

On Monday, the palace said that during a recent hospital procedure for benign prostate enlargement “a separate issue of concern was noted” and that subsequent tests revealed this was cancer. Palace officials won’t comment on what cancer or what stage it is at, except to say it isn’t prostate cancer. It is unclear how long the king, 75, will take off from public appearances, but palace officials say he is able to undertake constitutional duties, including his weekly discussion with the British prime minister.

The statement triggered a British national parlor game, with royal watchers spending days carefully dissecting the statement for clues about the king’s actual condition. Meanwhile medical experts are being rolled out in the media to opine about how serious his prognosis might be.

When Queen Elizabeth II had to cancel a visit to Northern Ireland three years ago after she was suddenly hospitalized, palace officials initially claimed that she was simply resting at Buckingham Palace. Days before her husband Prince Philip died in 2021, the press was told he was “in good spirits.” King Charles’ grandfather George VI had a lung removed due to cancer, a diagnosis which was hidden from the public and the monarch himself.

Charles was under no constitutional obligation to disclose his cancer. British law only states that he can be replaced with a regent if doctors conclude he suffers infirmity of mind or body and can’t undertake his royal functions.

—Max Colchester, The Wall Street Journal

WEATHER WORLD & NATION OPINION NEWS CAMPUS LIFE FUN ARTS SPORTS SCIENCE

GUEST COLUMN

A re-re-reflection on HackMIT

A reply from a writer of the past to an unexpected letter

By Vivian Zhong

Dear Susan,

I scarcely know how to write this...re-re-reflection, as it were. Thank you, for starters, for coming up with this inspired idea of writing a letter to an unknown alum from the annals of Campus Life.

There is a lot I want to reflect back to you, so your editor is going to have to forgive me for a long-winded piece. I myself did my fair share of ruthless word-cutting during my tenures as news editor and editor-in-chief; at least this is Campus Life and AP Styleguide need not apply as strictly!) But I think age allows me some leeway for rambling — and I am veritably ancient, for I wrote that HackMIT piece when I was not yet 18; I am now 26. Ancient!

You wrote, “i know you can’t give me answers” — but, as chance would have it, a friend and fellow alum from French House conveyed news of your piece to me via the French House Slack, where your Executive Editor, a fellow Vivian, tried to @ me about it. Welcome to “what a small world,” which you will say and hear ad nauseam for years to come!

You probably didn’t really want, and certainly don’t need, any of the answers and unsolicited advice I’m about to spew forth. But since the powers of randomness have brought us together, I will offer my thoughts nonetheless, in the hopes that you will find at least a morsel of use — and, admittedly, for my own catharsis.

“did you end up majoring in computer science? did it fit seamlessly into your career? did you ever think back to your initial doubt, and if you did, did you confirm it? or did you laugh and shake your head a little at your silly past self?”

I did not, in fact, become a course 6! I went into MIT contemplating 3, 6-7, 5-7, 7, and/or 20, and eventually committed to course 20 (with some “do it with me!” urging from a friend). I am now a Ph.D. student in Bioengineering at Stanford doing research in plant synthetic biology. But it has indeed fit into my research career, as it does in most research nowadays. My sophomore year UROP mentor in a bioengineering lab was adamant that I learn Python for data analysis, for which I am forever grateful to him. I don’t know that CS majors would consider it as true CS, but I can code enough to run an ODE model, process big omics data, and sundry other tasks that come up in biology. CS takes on many forms — stress-coding an app in Johnson is far from the be-all and end-all!

(And bold of you to assume that it’s my silly *past* self — I daresay I’ll go on being silly in some way or the other till the day I die)

“after hackMIT, did you still cringe whenever you heard someone discussing all the complicated edges and facets of computer science?”

I did take a few CS classes that I thought would be useful, as part of my major’s technical electives requirement. I

can certainly imagine my past self cringing at such conversations if I was stressed about an upcoming machine learning midterm! Other than that, I think I generally took it as an opportunity to pick up a few interesting factoids or terms — or maybe I just tuned it out as background noise.

“were you still reminded of how little you knew every time you heard a classmate talk about the new app they were developing or their latest solved leetcode problem?”

One of the exhausting but splendid things about being in an environment like MIT is constantly being reminded how little I know of just about everything. I think my mind would wither if I couldn’t feed it new and interesting information! I long ago accepted that I’ll never know everything I want to know, but I’m still learning how to prioritize what to learn with the limited time, energy, and concentration I have at my disposal.

“this “euphoria” that you describe — how can you tell if it stems from a love of problem-solving and logic, or if it’s the product of a passion for computer science? do you think you even needed to answer this question?”

Definitely the former— I don’t think I ever had a passion for computer science in itself, only as a means to an end, be it bioinformatics or writing a script to scrape social media data about a Chinese actor (one has to keep one’s coding skills honed somehow). I did HackMIT out of curiosity and the desire to know how to do everything at least a little — and probably a hefty dose of FOMO.

“do i simply not have the work ethic? is my brain not wired for computational logic? does it just work too slowly to keep up with the two-week bootcamp?”

Susan, did you take and drop the same class I did?! I took a web app development class during IAP of (I think) my freshman year. I could not make heads nor tails out of it, and wondered exactly as you did — does my brain simply not compute? (Which was also me throughout all of 8.02, as my brilliant friend cracked the code on empty charged shell after solid charged shell and I sat there questioning my understanding of calculus.)

And I too doubted my own work ethic — was I just being lazy? I still wonder this now, when I feel particularly tired and unwilling to start an experiment in lab. I don’t think I’ll ever find a satisfactory answer to this, so I try to focus on the solution: work on problems that interest me enough to push through mental or physical barriers, and work together with others, to provide a bouncing board for ideas and a relief from tedium.

I encourage you to try the class again next year, if you still have the interest; sometimes it just takes a few tries to get it! I understand a lot of things easily now that once brought the gears in my brain to a grinding halt. (Electromagnetism is not one of these things. On that front, I have

simply come to accept that some combination of genetics and not listening to my parents when they told me to study more math in high school has resulted in me being terrible at physics.)

At the same time, the world does not require everyone to know how to build a website from scratch! (I still haven’t!) There are a million other rewarding and impactful things you can do.

“you say hackMIT is analogous to MIT as a whole: “It’s intimidating, it’s sometimes hard to get through, but you’ll come through having met the greatest people and passing the most amazing time.” i also see that you wrote this article a month into your freshman year, according to your graduation date. how did you know this was true so quickly? did it continue to hold for the next four years?”

I really don’t know how I knew that was true! Optimism and faith in the fundamental goodness of people, maybe? That’s gotten me through life so far. But I think MIT is just so chock full of wonderful people that even in one short month, you’ve met enough to know that it’s representative of the whole. And yes, it absolutely held true! As for meeting the greatest people, that continues to hold true even now: you will continue to meet and be inspired by new MIT people after you graduate. The beacon of MIT shines far!

“the truth is, there is still some part of me who feels like i’m just running away from anything that i find difficult. if that’s the case, then why am i here? i couldn’t tell you. have you ever felt like that? like computer science, technology — this institute of technology — might be too much for you to hold?”

Oh, I (and probably 99% of MIT students) am all too familiar with the “why am I here” feeling, the feeling that I could never make the most of what MIT offered. I just said that MIT is a beacon of light; it also casts a long shadow. Even the other day, as I was innocuously biking home, my thoughts drifted to how I was feeling overwhelmed with doing several different projects at the same time, and yet even so it would never feel like enough— not because anyone is pressuring me with their expectations, but because I expect it of myself: to be good enough, successful enough, useful enough to the world (whatever any of that means) to live up to my MIT education. It’s not the externally perceived prestige, necessarily, but rather that I know how much MIT offered — how many resources someone else could have received if I had not been admitted instead of them.

The only solution, for me, is to try and keep my imposter syndrome to a useful level: I’ll never convince myself that I deserved to get into MIT for undergrad or Stanford for grad school, but since I was lucky enough to do so, I’ll try to make the most of it.

I think that’s all the questions! As you noted, HackMIT can leave you with a lot more than a non-to-partially-functioning

app, and I have reactions to offer on that front as well.

“one of the many platonic loves of my life — a friend of a friend. i can’t believe this is your first time meeting her, my other friend had insisted.”

I’m thrilled that you discovered a platonic love through HackMIT, and hope you can nurture that friendship for years to come. I have had many friendships that fell by the wayside because the context for that friendship faded: we no longer took the same classes, participated in the same club, lived on the same floor, and so on. It is a bittersweet lesson that I learned after freshman year, and still continue to learn: friendships take active care to maintain, and yet, often all it takes is for one person to say Hello in the hallway or to suggest getting lunch together. I think we are all afraid of being the first to reach out, for fear of rejection, for finding that we are more invested than the other.

“a new hoodie, dark green and adorned with the hackMIT logo. i still wear it at least once a week.”

I have several shirts from my first (and only) HackMIT that I wear to this day — they’re incredibly light, comfortable, and breathable!

“a vague sense of regret. maybe, i’d chosen the wrong place to spend my time. a vague sense of regret, because what if, hackMIT could’ve been the thing to show me that computer science was possible? that i wasn’t too far behind everyone else to learn?”

Regardless of whether or not a degree in computer science is in your future, rest assured that HackMIT will not be the last opportunity to figure it out. As I said before, computer science comes in many shapes and forms, and it’s truly never too late to learn. A former roommate switched from course 20 to course 6 late in junior year, and in my first-year Ph.D. classes, there were students learning to code for the first time.

I’ll end where you ended: “this is getting too long, and i have a feeling that i know what your answer to all my questions would be: i’m going to have to figure it out myself. so, i guess, here goes!”

I think that, with such an attitude, you are fully equipped to take on the world! Just remember, and I think you already know: though we each have to walk our own path and find our own answers, we don’t need to do it alone. And as the aforementioned Chinese actor who provided me an excuse to stretch my coding muscles once said, when asked about difficult times in his life: “Every step is a part of your wealth; no one can replicate it or take it away.”

Reflection can at times be a scouringly painful thing, but I’m very grateful to you for giving me the impetus to do so.

All the best,
Vivian



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THE TECH
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The Weather
Today: Partly sunny, windy, 39°F (4°C)
Tonight: Cloudy, Buries, 30°F (-1°C)
Tomorrow: Partly cloudy, 45°F (7°C)
Details, Page 2
Volume 121, Number 1 Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139 Tuesday, February 6, 2001

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The Tech
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WEATHER, p. 2
TUE 29° | 24°
Snow.
WED 32° | 18°
Snow/sleet.
THU 29° | 11°
Partly cloudy.
Volume 131, Number 1 tech.mit.edu Tuesday, February 1, 2011

MIT's Oldest and Largest Newspaper
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Established 1881
WEATHER, p. 2
THU 31° | 27°
Cloudy, then Snow.
FRI 33° | 22°
Snow.
SAT 33° | 16°
Mostly Cloudy.
Volume 141, Number 1 Thursday, February 18, 2021



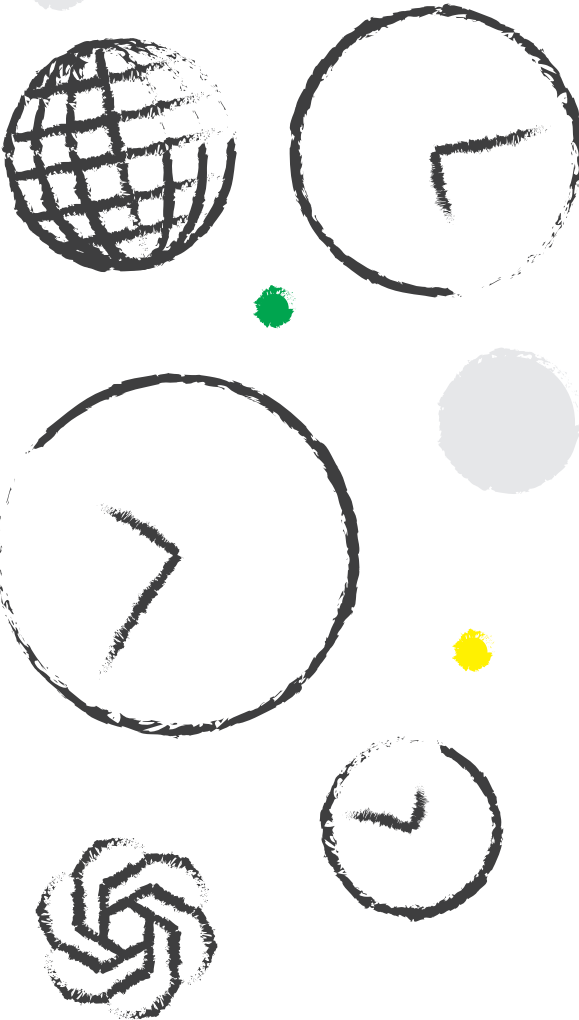
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Ode to Pod Semester

The abnormal in between the normal and the new normal

By Arun Wongprommoon
SENIOR EDITOR

Increasingly often, I've caught myself referencing the pod semester to the younger classes and then meeting blank stares. Only half the seniors today have first-hand experience, and I realize that the pod semester is no longer a thing that people have collectively internalized. As time passes, I am nervous that I, too, will slowly erase the pod semester from my own brain as well. The lives of those during the pod semester were never described in detail in The Tech, as we were busy living it, so I'd like to take this time to throw myself down memory lane and recollect bits and pieces of my experience with the pod semester just around three years ago today.

I. THE PURGE

It was March of my frosh year at MIT. My parents had been talking about this new coronavirus since IAP, which was spreading mostly in China with some 70,000 cases, but had some 7,000 cases each in South Korea, Italy and Iran. People weren't even calling it COVID-19 yet—that term came about in February. I remembered checking the case tracking dashboard on a JHU website. Yes, all the case graphs were, to date, exponential, which was alarming; however, it still felt so far away from me or my family. It's probably yet another one of those fear-mongering news articles my parents shared with me. As with most others, I shrugged it off and lived life as usual.

Nobody around me was talking about this at all. Even in my home country, Thailand, close to China, there were a very countable forty-two cases, most of which were people who came directly from Wuhan or had contact with people in the first group through hospitals, planes, or cars. There were two cases of coronavirus in Massachusetts so far, one of which returned from Wuhan, and the other returned from Italy. My parents and I agreed that Thailand seemed to be closer to the epicenter of this new virus than the United States.

This photo was taken on March 9, 2020, which looks very ominous in hindsight. It was just a regular day of people coming and going to class, and as it was the first warm day in a while, campus sprung back to life, completely unaware of what was to come. I had just finished my dynaMIT interview and was walking back from Building 14, so I just snapped a quick pic of people enjoying the weather.

Over the next few days, we started hearing about the Biogen conference a few blocks down from where we were. Soon, the total number of cases steadily climbed up to a few dozen, and corona made its way into conversations at MIT. Professors, with magical foresight, started unofficially canceling lectures and recitations, using recordings, or moving things online. Zoom was not a commonly known solution yet—that came about in late March. Purell stands started popping up on campus.

Throughout the evening of Monday, March 9, 2020, rumors circulated that campus would be shut down and we would all have to leave, though it was supported only by a screenshot of a Slack message from an attendee of a meeting with MIT administration. The one screenshot spread like wildfire, and we all held our breath from that evening all throughout the



ARUN WONGPROMMOON - THE TECH

[March 9, 2020] It was just a regular day of people coming and going to class...

next day, Tuesday, March 10, 2020, for any official email to come out. It was going to come out at 1 p.m., my morning 21M.606 class said. We didn't have the mental capacity to do anything that morning, and 21M.606 turned into an open-hearted conversation session as the professor sat us around in the stage area of W97.

And so we waited. And then we waited. Everyone seemed to be on autopilot that day, and even if people went to classes and recitations and labs, all that was going on in their minds was "What will the email say?" 1 p.m. came and went. 2 p.m.? 3 p.m. 4 p.m.? 5 p.m.

And then it dropped.

"A significant new step in response to COVID-19," sent from L. Rafael Reif. Tuesday, March 10, 2020, 5:36 p.m.

"All classes are cancelled for the week of Monday, March 16 through Friday, March 20."

"Online instruction [...] will begin for all classes on Monday, March 30, and continue for the remainder of the semester."

"Undergraduates should not return to campus after spring break. Undergraduates who live in an MIT residence or fraternity, sorority or independent living group (FSILG) must begin packing and departing this Saturday, March 14. We are requiring undergraduates to depart from campus residences no later than noon on Tuesday, March 17."

"Classes will continue this week."

Even though everyone had been bracing for this email, once the email hit we were all at a loss. Does that mean I'm going home? Thailand? Must be? Because I don't have a place to stay here? MIT is not providing any exceptions? Are they? To ensure "campus safety," must I travel through crowded areas, such as airports and airplanes, only to arrive in a country with even more cases? Do I need to book flights now? Do I need to pack up? Details were slowly unraveling, and a lot of questions remained unanswered. We international students were told to wait because more details were coming? What rumors and hearsay are real right now?

Some activities continued or heightened, such as The Tech and the Holy Purell event. Killian now looked different—at some point, someone took a Purell stand and sparked a

rally. Was it a celebration? Paying tribute? Manifestation of nervousness and discomfort? 6 p.m. came, so I went to The Tech office, where we were working overtime to keep up with the bombardment of news. We were our own support group, hearing each other out as we tried to make sense of the situation and work out an escape route.

I heard that someone heard that someone in a nearby college caught it, and someone went to that nearby college and then came back to some dorm at MIT. Suddenly, it felt like COVID-19 was a stone's throw away from me.



ARUN WONGPROMMOON - THE TECH

[February 17, 2021] In general, tap access also wasn't as universal as it is now.

Have we caught it? Unfamiliar with COVID-19, I became quite paranoid those few days, fearing it had already infected me unnoticed. Even though I didn't feel anything, every instance of clearing my throat or a runny nose caused me to freak out over a possible infection.

We were all at different stages of grief those days. It was going to be an extended spring break, some thought optimistically, and then we'd come back. Until it was announced that we'd have an online spring semester. The next day saw eerily empty recitations, protest statements in Lobby 10, and purge cookouts and parties. Seniors, class of 2020, were suddenly hit with the realization that this was the end of their undergraduate experience, that their "June" came early for them. For me, I had just gone to Costco to buy groceries for an ambi-

tious meal prepping with friends, which... well... unfortunate timing.

"Undergraduate students who are unable to return to their home country, or to an off-campus location, may request permission to remain in MIT residences under limited circumstances."

I petitioned to stay but I wasn't really sure if my circumstances were actually limited. I was rejected. Until I wasn't—I was granted an exception a day later. But I already booked my flight home. My flight back was carefully calculated to have a layover in a country, Turkey, that only had 5 reported cases then. The 24 hours of flight were surreal, and I held my breath all the way from Boston through Istanbul to Bangkok and into my parents' arms.

II. THE DOLDRUMS

I arrived back home before the Thai government started quarantining people who returned from abroad, but my parents quarantined me for 14 days anyway. My area was limited to my bedroom and the bathroom immediately next to it, and my mom would bring in food for every meal. For 2 weeks, I never even touched grass. There were no tests then, so symptoms—or lack thereof—were the only signs of infection.

These first couple weeks of experimental life were honestly quite entertaining because it was wildly different and hence not mundane (yet). There was a brief period of time when social life worked weirdly. Everyone was longing for connection, and we were having calls with people left and right, including groups that

I later had no idea of how they came about. Classes were getting creative and finding replacements both in terms of interactivity and time zones. My 11 a.m. morning classes were now right before sleep at 10 p.m. Discord servers popped up, Minecraft servers alike. I helped build a virtual MacGregor along with some buildings on campus like 34, 36, 38, and 54.

Two months had gone by and I still hadn't touched grass, and the fun wore out. My journaling stopped—there was no reason to journal because every day was the same: stuck in my room. Extremely occasionally I was able to go into Bangkok, the first time on May 30, especially once my parents were convinced that cases in Thailand leveled off. This was

Pod, Page 9

Does your
name start
with Jo?

Join the Jo's at The Tech!

join@tech.mit.edu

Josephine Yu, '20
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Jordan Harrod, G
Science Editor

Joanna Lin, '22
Production Editor

Johnson Huynh, '21
Associate Arts Editor

Jocelyn Shen, '22
Science Writer

Joanne Yuan, '22
Science Writer

Jocasta Manasseh-Lewis, '21
News Writer

— Vivian Hir '25
Volume 143 Campus Life Editor

Thanksgiving

The Growth Mindset

Half full or half empty

*Originally published in Vol. 143,
Issue 4 on Mar. 9, 2023.*

EXTRA ORDINARY
dear stranger,

i've been watching (in the least creepy way possible)

By Susan Hong

dear stranger who was sitting in mas-
eeh hall on call with a friend,
thank you for making me laugh. "stop
insulting vegetables by comparing yourself
to them." what a line, and so perfectly de-
livered too.

dear stranger playing piano on stud 4
just a few days after it opened,
you're amazing. i almost knocked on
the door to tell you that, but i didn't want to
startle you. in a way, there's a sort of beauti-
ful peace that comes from sitting alone in
a practice room, with nothing but the in-
strument in front of you and the ghost of
hundred-year-old composers around you,
and who was i to disturb that? but yes, i did
hear your ondine, and yes, it was kind of
magical.

dear stranger who barrelled down the
hall in your mint green hoodie,
your backpack was unzipped. sorry for
not telling you. i only realized after you'd
walked away. i hope you didn't lose any-
thing, and if you did, i hope it wasn't too
important.

dear stranger across from my friend
and me as our conversation settled into
insanity,
i hope we didn't scare you too much.
you see, there's something fun about lean-
ing too much into the craziest aspects
of ourselves sometimes. it's a little break
from reality. it's nice to pretend we care
too much about something that doesn't
matter, because for a moment, the things
that do matter become just a little lighter.
we were definitely a little too loud, though.
also, i hope you figured out the mystery of
how to unwrap an onigiri.

dear stranger who rollerbladed through
the infinite,
i only caught a glimpse of you before
you glided past us humble walkers, turn-
ing and twisting and dodging. i stopped
breathing — just for a moment — before
i realized that you didn't need it. that you
didn't need me to hold my breath for you.
that, in a way, breathing came more easily
to you than it did to the rest of us.

dear stranger who sat at our table on
stud 5 before we came,
why would you order a plain green
tea without sugar at tea-do? respectfully,
what's the point? just kidding. i admire
your ability to distance yourself from sugar.
an ability that i have yet to figure out.

dear strangers who hugged in front of
stata that one cold morning,
i saw you from afar and above, insulat-
ed by thick glass and the height of the sec-
ond floor. i was in lab, waiting for my cell
media to thaw, and i had time, so i made
up stories for you. was it a confession, per-
haps? you, with your hands in your pocket,
eyes on the ground as you spoke. you, look-
ing at the other, smiling because you've
dreamed of this moment for so long, or was
it a reminder of your friendship? a see-you-
later, let's-grab-lunch-sometime. a quiet
i've-missed-you.

dear stranger who said crazy ex-girl-
friend was your favorite show when you saw
us watching it in the new house arcade,
you have fantastic taste. how did you
start watching it, i wonder? were you bored
one day, scrolling through netflix, and it
unexpectedly caught your eye? or were you
hounded by a super-fan friend for months,
begged again and again to give the show a
chance? you'll love it. i promise.

dear stranger who dropped your chap-
stick that rainy night as we weaved through
the puddles lining dorm row,
sorry for scaring you when i handed it
back. it was dark, and i kind of just appeared
out of nowhere. i hope you weren't too star-
tled. and i hope you didn't have that much
longer to walk, because it was a cold, soggy
night. the kind of cold that clings onto your
skin and squishes beneath your toes.
dear strangers waltzing through an emp-
ty lobby 13,
i wish i could've stood there and
watched you dance forever. you made the
space seem so small; it was like you were ev-
erywhere at once, swishing and twirling and
tapping and gliding and — almost flying.
love,
susan

Originally published in Vol. 143,
Issue 20 on Dec. 14, 2023.

ALOR'S LORE

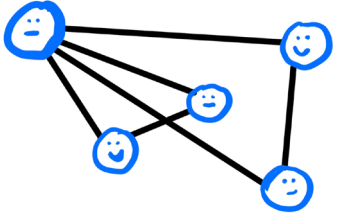
Clique Counting

Cliques in computer science... and socially

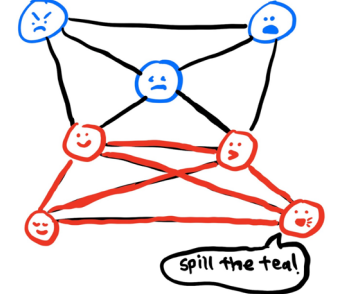
By Alor Sahoo
STAFF WRITER

I've been frustrated by the idea of cliques,
both in computer science and socially. Let me
explain. The computer science "clique maxi-
mization" problem kinda goes like this: Within a
graph, find and list all the biggest cliques, where
a clique is a group of vertices where everyone is
connected to everyone else.

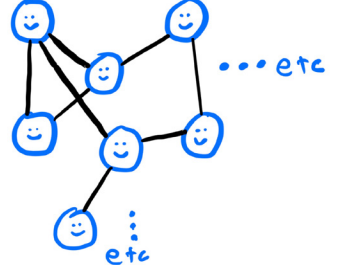
This is a graph, with smiley-face nodes and
edges between them:



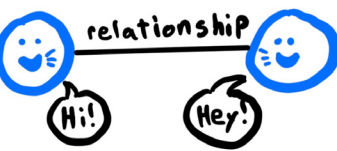
Here's an example of a graph, with the big-
gest clique colored in red:



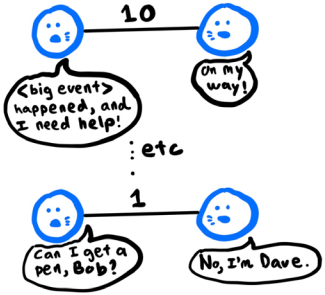
How easy of a problem is it to solve? Very
roughly, it's considered a "hard" problem to
solve computationally. That's kind of funny to
me, given how "cliques" also used to describe
exclusive social groups.



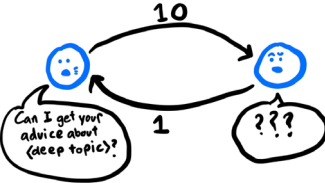
To integrate these two different views on
cliques, here's a little walkthrough. Imagine that
everyone in the MIT community is represented
by a node:



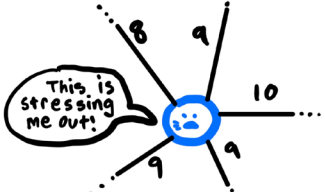
There's an edge between two nodes if and
only if they are acquainted with each other.
Clearly, not every relationship is equally
strong. So let's assign some arbitrary weights
to represent the "value" of a relationship. Yes, this
is very reductive:
Hold on again, though. In some relation-



ships, there's some unevenness, with one per-
son putting in more energy than the other. For
another oversimplification, let's direct our edg-
es, so that we can now have up to 2 weighted
edges between any 2 nodes. Here's an example
where the left person feels they have a stronger
relationship with the right than the other way
around:



Of course, there are even more complica-
tions. For example, each person/node can only
expand certain amounts of energy socially.
Graphically, this limits the number of weights
"exiting" a specific node, unless it stresses itself
out:



My eventual conclusion is the following:
people can't be friends with everyone they
might possibly want to be friends with.
When I first spawned onto the MIT social
graph during CPW, I looked for people nearby
— people with similar experiences, interests,
vibes, etc. At first, I was confused: the connec-
tions I'd formed seemed both sparse and weak.
At CPW, there were obviously some people
that I knew, and that knew of me, through In-
stagram or Messenger — but that was mostly it.
As I walked through and across and over all the
subgraphs of MIT, I felt disconnected:



This disconnect was surprisingly OK for me,
as long as it was temporary. Surely, I just need-
ed to wander through some more vertices, cross
some edges, and then I'd stumble into the right
group of people.
In other words, I wanted to solve my per-
sonal MIT clique maximization problem — and
fast.

EUNICE EXISTS!!

the gis of 'eunice exists!!'

i genuinely feel pretty happy about this first articlussy [(-~)~]

By Eunice Zhang
EXECUTIVE EDITOR

the trailer ><

- "i feel like im reading a tumblr post not a newspaper article"
- "overall very nice, and i think it gives a realistic perspective into a small quok-
kie's life in college!"
- "i'm not gonna lie I understood 10% of
it"

introduction >:

i had to do an elevator pitch recently as
part of a workshop thingy — and it made
me realize, talking about yourself is ex-
tremely hard. like, what if "i'm MALIGN-
ING you by not being my full, genuine,
authentic self? then i'm lying and that's
HORRIBLE — it's time to burn at the stake
in hell, even god can't save me now" vibes.
you know, it's actually really funny
because i've spent a LOT of time worry-

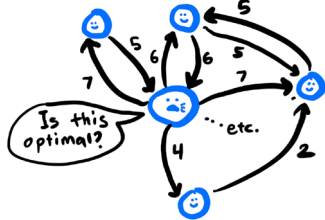
ing about this article, but the trailer + first
paragraph basically tells you everything
you need to know about what to expect
from 'eunice exists!!'
tl;dr: i am unhinged, i am constant-
ly hrrgy, and i see the world as a series
of long, winded, run-on sentences that
somehow go everywhere and nowhere at
all.
my sister emeri says that there are
only two constants in life — change and
yourself, and she's right (older sisters are
always right!!) i experience constant emo-
tional turmoil (change) & i am inded eun-
ice (myself).
welcome to 'eunice exists!!' it's me!! i'm
eunice!!! i exist!!!! onwards, babygirls, as
we venture into the great, beautiful, un-
known cosmos that is life.
side note: what's a hrrg? >C
well, i'm so glad you asked! also, it's
probably good for me to explain this given

This epiphany hit me in the middle of CPW.
Boba started taking its toll on my tastebuds, so I
went to grab a real lunch at a dining hall. Nearby
some dozen or so prefrosh were hanging out. I
grabbed my food, sat at a nearby table, and while
wolfing down rice pilaf, I caught casual bits of
conversation — a "Mrs. So-and-So" and a "re-
member when XYZ did ABC?" and so on. Then it
hit me: *Duh, they all went to the same high school.*
It stung knowing that I'd never get that big,
nostalgic high school-MIT crossover. Even when
I met people I'd already known, I felt like I was
missing out. Someone else always seemed to
either be a part of cooler graphs or more graphs.
By Fall 2022, I started to realize that optimiz-
ing my number of connections wasn't a healthy
goal. The primary driving force was exhaustion: I
was too tired to "keep up." It worked out.

Later on, I started thinking about a new
aspect of the "clique maximization" problem:
what even defines one? When do group events
go from special and inclusive to irritating and
exclusive? Can a club that hangs out outside
meetings become a clique? Was I part of one?
For sure, some of these groups are bound to
be tight-knit: living groups, certain clubs, pset
groups for grueling classes, and so on. But a
lot of them are much bigger, once you include
MEng students, alumni, friends of friends, etc.
But what was the biggest one? Hard to define,
but an obvious guess is each graduating class, if
that counts. Between sophomore ring delivery
to annual formals to fancy senior spring events,
they're pretty cohesive, as much as a group of
more than a thousand students can be.

So, as a quick exercise, I decided to calcu-
late my "MIT friend age" average. Here's how
it works: define 0 to be a brand-new frosh, 4 to
be a graduated senior. My average? 2.3. Was that
a bad thing? I didn't know. Was I just not "fro-
shy" enough? I was pretty worried, and for a few
weeks, I repeatedly asked myself:
Now, a semester later, I don't have the
answers.

But I also don't care. Because all approach-




es quantifying any aspect of this problem boil
down to the same ideas: First of all, that being
closer with some people means being more dis-
tant with others. Second of all, there is no per-
fect way of reconciling this difference whenever
two corners of the MIT social graph intersect.
As a result, I'm giving up on the MIT clique
maximization problem. I've spent way too long
adding edges to my node, adjusting the weights,
and removing edges, and so on. I'm going to just
let my edges naturally form, break, weaken, and
strengthen as the years go by. Most importantly,
I learned that tinkering with my graph and try-
ing to "solve" this unproblematic problem is
futile: even the computer scientists admit that.

Originally published in Vol. 143,
Issue 11 on Aug. 3, 2023.

that i'll be saying this A LOT in my articles
(this one alone has 33 counts of the word
hrrg) — plus, it always comforts me to re-
alize that i'm not the only once experienc-
ing these feelings, so i hope it can do the
same for you.
hrrg is more of a vibe than anything
else, but if i had to define it: a feeling of
stress/shame that may not be rational, yet
you can't help but feel it anyways. hrrg can
be used as a adjective, noun, verb, any-
thing you want, really! ex: "i'm feeling so
hrrgy today :)" "oh my god i hrrged all over
the place" "do you want to talk about your
hrrgs uwu?"
side side note — ultimately, the most
important thing to remember is that you
never hrrg alone ♡ it may sound cheesy,
but i'm being so for real.
especially at a place like mit, where ex-
treme hosage and hrrg can often feel like



A compilation of The Tech's favorite foods from last year



MENU

tech's picks

APPETIZERS

Blueberry Pancakes (STATE STREET PROVISIONS)

\$15

WHIPPED HONEY BUTTER, MAPLE SYRUP

Baklava Pancakes (BROOKLINE LUNCH)

\$16

BAKLAVA & PISTACHIOS, HOMEMADE ROSEWATER SYRUP

Breakfast Sandwich (STATE STREET PROVISIONS)

\$16

FRIED EGG w/ AIOLI, APPLEWOOD BACON, & CRISPY POTATOES

ENTRÉES

Margherita Pie (VIALÉ)

\$15

TOMATO, MOZZARELLA, BASIL

Spicy Sausage Shakshuka (BROOKLINE LUNCH)

\$16

POACHED EGGS, HOMEMADE FRIES, & NAAN

Golden Original Chicken (BB.Q CHICKEN)

\$18/HALF

CHOICE OF ORIGINAL OR SECRET SAUCE

\$36/FULL

BOWLS

Za'atar Egg Bowl (BROOKLINE LUNCH)

\$16

SERVED w/ HOMEMADE FRIES & NAAN

Signature Rice Bowl (BB.Q CHICKEN)

\$17

w/ EGGS, JAMAICAN JERK SAUCE, MAYO

SEAFOOD

Shrimp 'n' Grits (VIALÉ)

\$18

SPANISH CHORIZO, SUNNY EGG

Lobster Tacos (PESCADOR COASTAL GRILL)

\$26/2 PCS

w/ GRILLED CORN, RED CABBAGE, TOMATILLO SALSA

\$36/3 PCS

DRINKS

Agave & Oil (PESCADOR COASTAL GRILL)

\$17

OLIVE OIL INFUSED TEQUILA REPOSADO

Rey Campero Jabalí (PESCADOR COASTAL GRILL)

\$24

MEZCAL

BAKERY

Sticky Buns (STATE STREET PROVISIONS)

\$6

PECAN, TOFFEE, BRIOCHE

Tres Leches Roulade (PESCADOR COASTAL GRILL)

\$15

TOASTED COCONUT

Beatty's Chocolate Cake (GOLDBELLY)

\$100

SERVES 6-8 PEOPLE

PieCaken (GOLDBELLY)

\$100

SEASONAL VARIANTS, SERVES 10-12 PEOPLE

THE BOY AND THE HERON

A romantic close-up of a man and a woman in a field, likely from the movie 'The Notebook'. The man is on the left, wearing a dark jacket, and the woman is on the right, wearing a light-colored dress. They are facing each other, almost touching, in a field of tall grass under a soft, hazy sky.

SCARS ABOVE OFFERS AN INTENSE SCI-FI
SOULSLIKE EXPERIENCE WITH MORE FIELDWORK
THAN FIGHTING
(REVIEWED ON APRIL 9, 2023)

MIT Shakespeare Ensemble performs modern adaptation of Much Ado About Nothing

Much Ado About Nothing, originally written by William Shakespeare in 1598 and 1599, is a witty, banter-filled comedy following the love lives of two couples: Beatrice and Benedick and Claudio and

Family Weekend concert keeps audience riveted

Ultimately, the concert was a smashing success. The piece selection balanced lighter moods with more hard-hitting ones, and the audience was riveted throughout. It was a wonderful concert to kick off the season.

INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLER

*Accomplishing More by
Managing Your Time,
Attention, and
Energy*

THE
PRODUCTIVITY
PROJECT

CHRIS BAILEY

"A book that will help you understand and control the way you work and
live. It's the most important book on time, energy, and attention."

DAVID ALLEN, AUTHOR OF *GETTING THINGS DONE*

CARRIE SOTO is BACK
★★★★☆



Everything you need to know about Superbowl 58

In order to reach this monumental game, each team had to win their conference championship titles. The Chiefs dethroned the number 1 seed Baltimore Ravens 17-10 with a fantastic Defensive performance that shutdown the MVP favorite Lamar Jackson and included vari-

The 58th Superbowl will kickoff at 6:30 pm EST with Usher will be performing the halftime show. After defeating the Philadelphia Eagles last year, the Chiefs will be defending their title and the 49ers fandom is eager to hoist the Vince Lombardi Trophy which they have not touched since 1995. According to some betting sites, Kansas City is considered to be the underdogs in this match, but the Chiefs have been known to put up a fight so only time will tell.

SPORTS Timeline

Women's Basketball:
Christina Antonakakis
broke the points record
now 1,426 points)



SPORTS in 2023



We want to learn about
your team! Email us!

sports@tech.mit.edu

University of Michigan Football finished off their perfect 15-0 season with programs first national championship title in 26 years. Led by Head Coach Jim Harbaugh and Quarterback J.J. McCarthy, the Wolverines defeated the University of Washington 34-13. Both J.J. McCarthy and Jim Harbaugh have their eyes on the NFL with McCarthy declaring for 2024 NFL Draft and Harbaugh signing to coach the LA Chargers.

The Texas Rangers won the 2023 World Series—for the first time in franchise history (52 years in the making)- in game 5 over the Arizona Diamondbacks. Before grabbing this title, the Rangers were the oldest team in the MLB without winning the national championship. Impressively, the Rangers entered the post-season as the 5th of 6 seeds in the American League, yet managed to pull off this historic victory.

January 1st, 2024 didn't just reign in the new year, but debuted the Professional Women's Hockey League (PWHL)- which consists of 6 teams- launched with a puck drop in Toronto. This is the 3rd time since 2007 that North America has attempted to launch a women's league, but this one looks more optimistic than the past failures since this is backed by billionaire funder Mark Walter. The opening game had 8,000 fans in comparison to the NHL's opener with a mere 700 (and the NHL tickets were handed out for free). There have been 2 major rules changes with the premier of the PWHL that differs from the NHL: a distinct game point system and a new way to end power plays.

Iowa Women's basketball is one of the hottest teams in college sports at the moment, grabbing national attention and filling an arena at every game. The Iowa Hawkeyes have been led by their star Senior Guard Caitlin Clark who has been averaging a stunning 32 points per game so far this season. Now, Clark is only 5 points away from taking 3rd place on the women's all-time scoring list (she currently has 3,389 points).



SPORTS SPORTS SPORTS SPORTS SPORTS SPORTS SPORTS SPORTS SPORTS SPORTS

times was that I was a witness to the successes of this Institute. Professor Mounji Bawendi won the Nobel Prize in Chemistry for his research on quantum dots. Ayomikun Ayodeji '22 was selected as a Rhodes Scholar. Findings by Professor Mriganka Sur and his group at the Brain and Cognitive Sciences made fourteen years prior culminated in the first FDA approved drug for Rett's Syndrome.

What was heartening for me during these

— Alex Tang '26
Volume 143 News Editor

In its 143rd volume, *The Tech* was not immune to hardship. There were many issues where I was the sole person working in the News Department. But as we worked to rebuild our staff, we knew that our work is special because it transcends us. In the future, the pieces we write will be portals to the perspectives of the present MIT. The stories we write will become the story of this Institute. I'm deeply grateful to have shared them with you.

21 **BC residents fined for “vandalism” by HRS**

BC President Cameron Kleiman '24 noted that “stenciled bird murals” had appeared in common areas, and estimated that the fees for repainting would be around \$10 per resident.


18 The Tech interviews math professor, former NFL player **John Urschel**


Professor John Urschel was appointed assistant professor in fall of 2023.

**FEBRUARY 2022 -
FEBRUARY 2023**

NEWS in 2023

MIT's Oldest and Largest Information Transit Authority
thetech.com

 **INSTAGRAM**
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/themittech

 **TWITTER**
@thetech



— Karie Shen '27
Volume 143 Photo Editor

Can scientists mimic the benefits of CBD without using cannabis?

Originally published in Vol. 143,
Issue 22 on Jan. 25, 2024.



Are you a tetris ninja?

Use your
powers
for good!

...by joining
the production
department at
The Tech!

arts arts arts
arts arts arts
arts arts arts
arts
arts
arts

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Silicon Souls: Priming beliefs about AI in chatbot conversations

"We have this fun name for it called 'Ghost in the Shell' from a sci-fi," Pataranutaporn said. "The robotic shell or the human soul: Which one actually makes the AI? Is it the observable behavior that we see when we think of AI, or what we imagine the AI is on the inside that made it affect you?"

Originally published in Vol. 143,
Issue 19 on Nov. 30, 2023
Read the full article online.

Between a right to free expression and a right to be free of discrimination, what value prevails? At MIT, the answer seems to be free expression.

As I wrote in an op-ed in *The Tech* on November 9, 2022, free expression does not come freely. Someone has to pay a price. The campaign team of which I was a member was composed of marginalized students heated and passionate about the pattern at MIT, and in the broader society, of our communities paying the highest price for others' free expression. When there is a conflict — and there will be one eventually — between a right to free expression and a right to be free of discrimination, what value prevails? At MIT, the answer seems to be free expression.

President Kornbluth can preach all day about the “distinction between what we can say to each other — in other words, what we have a right to say — and what we should say to each other,” but her opinion has no bearing on the question of: can, not should, I poster harmful speech? President Kornbluth’s answer? Yes. You have a legal right to poster harmful speech — go wild. Why? MIT’s policies protect such speech. In fact, when an MIT administrator violated Institute policy by taking down a poster in February, they were warned that “per MIT’s Office of the General Council, it is recommended that community members refrain from taking down the posters in question as to do so may be in violation of MIT postering guidelines.”

I want to emphasize that Institute policies hold an incredible amount of power. The Mind & Hand book, which has a free expression policy protecting the poster campaign, prevents me from facing disciplinary charges no matter how offensive my actions by posting were. This should be upsetting. I was told by a member of MIT's Bias Response Team that the poster campaign solicited the largest number of Institute Discrimination and Harassment Response (IDHR) reports, yet I was not summoned once by IDHR yet alone disciplined for my actions. Why? Because the poster campaign broke no policies.

I want to be clear that the MIT administration knew about my involvement in the poster campaign since February 2023 but could do little, nay nothing, to discipline me because they are the ones to allow the poster campaign in the first place. If you are interested in learning more about how the poster campaign advocated to senior leadership I encourage to explore these slides and one-pager of recommendations that were presented to Chancellor Melissa Nobles, Provost Cynthia Barnhart, Chair

Third, why use harmful speech if that is the very thing you are protesting? The poster-ing campaign is exposing a flaw with the way this campus deals with this free expression by creating a simulated experience. We personally do not agree with the content on the posters, but with the rise of radicalization of certain groups, it is a real possibility that there will come a time when people post such content sincerely (I have certainly seen such statements growing up in the Deep South). We hope the MIT administration will recognize the impact of this policy as this campaign serves as a case study.

As a personal reflection, in participating in this poster campaign, I realized there is an issue beyond that of free expression: MIT's honoring of its own policies. Time and time again, I reported instances of MIT violating its own policies, violating students' rights. For example, despite the Mind & Hand Book explicitly saying that "It is not appropriate to remove or deface the poster," community members, including MIT administrators, violated this principle. While I can agree with the intention behind why someone might want to remove the poster, I do not believe the solution is to break a policy — an offense that the poster campaign has not committed. If MIT doesn't honor its free expression obligations, how can I be sure MIT will fulfill its anti-discrimination or anti-sexual assault obligations?

Put simply, MIT needs to rework its policies. My aim now is to provide my story, which before this moment, has not been made public. I urge you to evaluate my arguments, agree or disagree, and let this movement contribute to our collective understanding of why policies, practices, and people are critical in shaping the MIT you want to see. I hope this moment of care towards free expression does not escape us.

David Spicer is a fourth-year undergraduate majoring in political science, and is a member of the MIT Pre-Law Society.

OPINION IN REVIEW

Our commitment to preserving the authenticity of these perspectives ensures that, as readers of *The Tech*, you can be confident that you are engaging with the genuine voices of our student body. The *Tech* acts as a filter — we attempt to enhance the strength and credibility of arguments while ensuring that the opinions presented remain true to the author's intent. In today's climate, where accurate information can be elusive, the importance of turning to vetted sources cannot be overstated.

At the same time, it's important to acknowledge that opinion writing inherently carries an agenda. The anecdotes chosen, the comparisons drawn, and the narratives framed, even when factually correct, form an argumentative strategy deliberately selected to support the author's perspective —

This year, two of our campus' most contentious debates concerned former UA President David Spicer's chosen form of protest against campus free expression policies; and issues related to administrative repression of, and the downstream anti-Semitism and Islamophobia stemming from free speech. Both prompted editorials with opposing viewpoints, three of which — one on the postering issue and two on anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and free speech — are featured in our year-in-review here. I am particularly proud of our work in editing these pieces. I sincerely believe that we have done our very best to preserve the authors' purposes while bolstering their arguments, even when we did not subscribe to the stances taken in the pieces.

I hope that we have affirmed the value of your opinions and treated them with the respect and rigor they deserve, and that in this environment of mutual trust, you will continue to share your opinions with us, 2024 and beyond.

— Srinidhi Narayanan '24
Volume 143 Opinion Editor

GUEST COLUMN

Vote 'yes' on recall, and other thoughts about student advocacy

On David Spicer, shared governance, and the freedom of expression

In November 2022, The Tech published an opinion column by Spicer criticizing the freedom of expression report, a report compiled by the Ad Hoc Working Group on Free Expression in June. The problem with this column is not solely that David's argumentation is flimsy, taking some solid ideas and diluting them with poor writing and uncontextualized anecdotes, but that by tossing out such a document with seemingly minimal forethought, he diminishes the credibility of student governance as a whole. Instead of presenting a seasoned response to a report with genuine flaws, he presents half-baked arguments—such as complaints about the report's length—allowing faculty members to assume that this is the best students can come up with in response. If this was the quality of Spicer's contribution to the Ad Hoc Working Group, it is no wonder it was unpersuasive.

Indeed, there are problems with the Freedom of Expression report, such as the failure to acknowledge the extent to which “time, place, and manner” restrictions may place different burdens on faculty, staff, and students; or the continued inconsistencies between its theoretical grounding in the First Amendment, which also protects anonymous speech, and current policy. These are problems that the report fails to grapple with deeply, responding to a difficult scenario involving “conflict over student speech” by merely offering the option of more “viewpoint-neutral” restrictions, which seems to contradict the desire for additional free speech (p. 25).

The UA will continue to fail as a student advocacy organization so long as it is stuck in a mindset of “politics as point-scoring” where the correct way to accomplish things is to make a lot of noise about issues which sound like issues we ought to be working on. I get it—saying that you worked on the “freedom of expression” policy at MIT sounds great. But by engaging in vigilantism, rather than putting in the actual legwork of building consensus on the subject with his constituents and the administration, he doomed his mission before it ever took off. In fact, the amount of active

harm Spicer has done in the process of trying to accomplish his goal massively outweighs any benefit which could have been gained by students. This was already true before the posters—he has wasted hours “working” on the subject with senior administrators and the UA Council to no avail, time which could’ve been better spent addressing student-centered issues, such as food security or mental health—but it is undeniably true now.

MIT has a strong history of student governance, and it is a tradition I am proud to be a part of. We know that, by working together, students and administrators can design initiatives and make decisions which can benefit both parties. This is the only reason students continue to have a seat at the table—it is because of the hard work of previous student leaders to maintain good relationships with administrators and win positive, feasible change along the way. It has not always been easy. Changes do not happen overnight. But, by working in good faith as collaborators tackling difficult issues, rather than as adversaries fighting for a particular cause, we can make a difference. When it comes, therefore, to leaders who seem to think that their particular issue is the most important one, and are not willing to engage collaboratively and in good faith with people with actual power—who must, sometimes, move slowly—we ought to reject them.

The UA Council has voted to trigger a recall election for David Spicer, and I thank them for their service. I urge him to step down and apologize to the groups he has hurt, but, barring that, I urge my fellow undergraduates to vote 'yes' on recalling him when the ballot opens. More importantly, however, I urge the incoming UA leadership to consider this tale a cautionary one; that is, not just a dismissable outlier, but rather a painful and important lesson to take your job seriously, to earn respect from administrators and faculty rather than demand it, and to work with the institution in a manner which directly benefits the undergraduates they represent. This kind of myopia has no place at our school, much less our student government.

Alan Zhu is a fourth-year undergraduate studying Creative Writing and Computer Science. They are the current Vice President of the Dormitory Council (DormCon), and served as the Next House President in 2022. This editorial reflects only their opinion and not the opinion of DormCon, nor of any other organizations they belong to.

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Calls for 'Intifada' are traumatizing MIT's Jewish community

To Jews with connections to Israel, the word “intifada” is associated with suicide bombings, terrorism and the wanton loss of innocent life

The MIT Jewish community huddled together in Hillel, supporting one another, as a swelling crowd loudly called for the extermination of our friends and family. Outside, the crowd was chanting “one solution, intifada revolution,” using a term which connotes violent uprising against Jews and thereby implying that the brutal murder of Israeli civilians is anything other than morally abhorrent terror. To say that I felt unsafe would be a gross understatement of the fear and horror I experienced as a group of students from the university which I have chosen to call my home supported violent, indiscriminate attacks against the home of my people.

For those who are not yet aware, a few weeks ago, Hamas, an Iran-backed terrorist group, murdered over 1,400 Israeli civilians and kidnapped 222 hostages in a single day. This terrorist attack, which targeted women, children, and the elderly, constituted the biggest loss of Jewish life in a single day since the Holocaust. Jewish communities all over the globe are still reeling from the unprecedented scale and brutality of the attacks.

Many of us are reminded of the pogroms of Kristallnacht, which were smaller in scale, especially since one of the hostages is an elderly Holocaust survivor. These attacks were not legitimate acts of war, as some on this campus have unfortunately claimed (see dormspam from Oct. 8, subject line: Rally for Palestine TOMORROW: Statement and Call to Action). They were abhorrent acts of “intifada,” a word which signifies the slaughter of innocent Jewish civilians.

This is not the first time Jews have heard the word “intifada”. Most recent in our memory is the Second Intifada, a series of violent attacks against Israel in which 3,000 Palestinians and 1,000 Israelis lost their lives.

Although I was not in Israel during the intifada, many of my friends and family were, and they experienced trauma beyond description. To Jews with connections to Israel, the word “intifada” is associated with suicide bombings, terrorism and the wanton loss of innocent life. As such, when Jewish students at MIT hear calls for “intifada revolution”, we cannot interpret them as anything but an active

call to violence against the Jewish nation. Words gain meaning from the historical context in which they are used. In this case, the historical context is violence and terrorism in the name of resistance. Claims to the contrary are either misinformed or dishonest.

As a Jew, I have experienced hate because of who I am. During my time at MIT so far, I have been inspired by the university's commitment to combating antisemitism and helping me feel secure in my identity. That sense of belonging came crashing down as I observed the Institute's passivity and complacency in the face of violent speech. I firmly support MIT's deep commitment to fostering free speech on campus.

The CAA has the legal and moral right to express their violent opinions, just as neo-Nazis have the right to free assembly. But, in the words of MIT's 18th president, there exists a "clear distinction between what we can say ... and what we should say." When students on campus call for attacks against Jews, MIT's administration has a moral responsibility to state unequivocally that it does not support,

and in fact abhors, such violent ideas.

Sadly, MIT has failed to fulfill this responsibility. In the hours after the infatada rally, President Kornbluth released a lukewarm statement in which she denounced all forms of hate without mentioning the CAA by name or making note of their calls to violence. We call on President Kornbluth to use her presidential voice to directly condemn these calls for violent infatada against Jews.

The sun set, and the voices outside, full of anger and vitriol, continued to chant. Some of my friends took an Uber home, fearful of walking across their own campus. Many more remained, attempting to process the shock, grief, and trauma of the past few weeks. In this dark time, when it felt as if the whole world was turning against us, we somehow found solace in togetherness and community.

Avi Balsam is a sophomore, studying computer science and mathematics. He is a vice president of the MIT Hillel student board.

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Speaking out against genocide in Palestine and repression of free speech on MIT's campus

A statement from a collective of graduate students in HASTS at MIT

We, a collective of graduate students in the MIT Doctoral Program in History, Anthropology, and Science, Technology, and Society (HASTS), forcefully condemn the recent actions of the MIT administration toward members of our campus community speaking out against the violent oppression of Palestinian people and genocide being enacted in Gaza by the Israeli state, which has received military and financial backing from the United States.

We stand in solidarity with student groups across campus—including MIT Jews for Ceasefire, the Arab Student Organization, the Black Graduate Student Association, the Black Students' Union, the Asian American Initiative, and the broader MIT Coalition for Palestine—in calling for the liberation of Palestine and an end to more than 75 years of Israeli settler-occupation, towards a land with freedom and equal rights for all. We grieve all lives lost and fiercely oppose all forms of Islamophobic, anti-Semitic, and racist violence.

We are extremely concerned that the Institute chose to deploy armed campus police to cancel a peaceful teach-in on Friday, November 10, 2023, quashing dissent through fear-based tactics that have infamous historical precedents at MIT and in the US more broadly. We are especially alarmed by the Institute's threat to suspend students—even if only from non-academic activities—who had participated in a sit-in on Thursday, November 9.

While MIT justified this disciplinary action by claiming that demonstrators were acting against Institute guidelines by organizing a demonstration in an unapproved location, the guideline changing Lobby 7 from a preferred location to a by-approval-only one was introduced after the sit-in had already been organized and announced, raising questions about its timing and purpose. We see this as a contradiction to MIT's stated commitment to academic freedom and freedom

of expression.

Our concerns are heightened amidst rising censorship on US university campuses about Palestinian human rights, which scholars have termed the “Palestine exception” to free speech. Actively preventing students and researchers from speaking openly about historical events and their ongoing implications is not only a moral and ethical failure—it also flies in the face of MIT’s commitment to the pursuit of knowledge based on empirical evidence.

It is disturbing that Institute administrators chose to punish students who are standing against a “mass ethnic cleansing,” in the words of the UN Special Rapporteur on the occupied Palestinian territories. We are worried that the Institute’s current approach—including the expansion of police presence on campus—impedes campus safety for all students, especially those from already marginalized groups, and degrades the Institute as a space of learning and empowerment.

We urge MIT to oppose apartheid in Israel and call out the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians by severing its academic, financial, and political partnerships with entities that facilitate this violence, including the Lockheed Martin Seed Fund. We are optimistic that institutional change is possible given the precedents set by such student movements of the past. In 1969, for example, MIT students and faculty held an anti-war research strike, successfully forcing MIT to officially divest from the MIT Instrumentation Laboratory (now Draper Laboratories).

Informed by this history, we believe in MIT's power to create meaningful change, in both the local and international spheres. We ask the MIT administration to support all students whose safety and well-being are adversely impacted by the decades-long violence in Israel and Palestine and who are expressing their views on campus. To ensure this, our requests are as follows:

- We urge that peaceful demonstrations

be allowed on campus, including by groups that were unfairly threatened with suspension from non-academic activities for the non-violent sit-in on November 9. The way we see it, the goal of a demonstration is to disrupt, to acknowledge that business should not go on as usual. Even so, the demonstration for which protestors were punished did not prevent any students from going to class nor cause significant disruption.

- We demand that MIT conduct open and thorough investigations of ongoing harassment, intimidation and doxing faced by students supporting Palestinian human rights, faced by students supporting Palestinian human rights, and to take concrete measures ensuring that all students are protected from such harassment. This includes ensuring that protesters are not filmed against their consent with the goal of intimidation and doxing as occurred at the sit-in on November 9.
- We ask the Institute to be transparent about its Ad Hoc Complaint Response Team, including communicating to the community: what behavior constitutes harassment; where and how it can be reported; how complaints will be reviewed; what the disciplinary consequences are for specific harassing actions; and where further support and resources can be found at MIT.
- We ask that the proposed council Standing Together Against Hate clearly distinguish between anti-Semitism and Islamophobia on the one hand, and the protest of states and state policies on the other, as MIT Jews for Ceasefire has also demanded.
- We ask that the administration and its various offices make clear what students' legal and institutional rights are in demonstrating on and off campus, and how to seek protection if needed. We echo the demands made by faculty for clarity about disciplinary decision-

making processes and students' right to due process.

- We ask that the Institute allocate financial and human resources to existing departments, centers, and programs that are best suited to provide educational programming on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, especially through the School of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences (SHASS). The History department already offers courses that explore MIT's historical and ongoing involvement in systemic inequality and oppression, such as MIT and Slavery and The Indigenous History of MIT. We ask MIT to similarly invest in educational programming about MIT's ties to militarism and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by, for instance, developing a course on MIT and Defense Funding/Research.

Above all, we ask that MIT be an institution true to its values as a place where rights to freedom of expression are upheld, and where commitments toward making a better world are driven by the desire for human flourishing—not the interests of donors, the net gain of financial holdings, or US foreign policy agendas.

Until that time arrives, we join our voices to those of our campus colleagues to demand that MIT stop repressing members of the community who are bravely giving their time and energy to advocate for an end to the violence in occupied Palestine. An institution of MIT's caliber deserves better leadership.

This statement was collectively authored and/or endorsed by a group of 20 doctoral students in History, Anthropology, and Science, Technology, and Society (HASTS) at MIT, a program committed to the interdisciplinary study of the social, cultural, and political life of science and technology. It represents our own views, not those of all individuals in the program nor those of the program itself.

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File Edit Options Buffers Tools Im-Python Python Help
from new_skills import *
def learnMarketableJobSkills():
    return linux, OSX, javascript, applescript, perl, python, PHP
if self.interest == True:
    print "E-mail join@tech.mit.edu"
----:----F1 joinTechno.py (Python)--L1--Top-----
```


— Kate Lu '25
Volume 143 Photo Editor







Dear readers,

Curating a newspaper for a student body as large and diverse as ours is nontrivial. Doing so in a year as turbulent as 2023 has been even more complicated.

The year began with the unexpected closure of the Student Center, the reopening of the Cheney Room, and excitement about President Kornbluth’s upcoming inauguration; in the middle, we confronted questions of free speech, appropriate protest, and the “right” way to effect change with the recall election for former UA President David Spicer; and in recent months, we have felt the pain of the Israel-Hamas-Palestine conflict far too closely as it affects many of our own.

As we contended with these challenges, pervasive in our News and Opinion sections, we took solace in the arts. Productions like MIT Monologues, LOST’s Stupid F*cking Bird, and Shake-

peare Ensemble’s Much Ado About Nothing gave us food for thought and many laughs. Moreover, The Tech was fortunate to interview some of the creators involved in the MITMo and LOST shows, opening our eyes to the passion, dedication, and artistic depth inherent to each endeavor. We also saw a return to the familiar and comforting consistency — the first in-person Mystery Hunt in three years, MLK Day Celebrations, and the third year of the OneMIT graduation plan. For our part, The Tech revived relics of the pre-COVID era in restoring our Science and Sports columns.

This past year calls on us to realize that our community thrives because of the myriad ways in which we engage with the world around us. We have equal need for the activists who feature in our news stories, the thinkers whose opinions help us reframe our own, the artists we look to

in the toughest of times, and the scientists who champion innovation and discovery. The Tech has strived to mirror this richness in our coverage, recognizing that every department contributes uniquely and indispensably to our narrative.

On a personal note, I joined The Tech in my freshman fall. Over the last three and a half years, I’ve had the privilege of serving as News Editor, Opinion Editor, and Editor-in-Chief. In each role, I’ve seen shining examples of the best our student body has to offer. At the same time, I’ve encountered difficult questions and needed to approach situations with nuance: When do authors deserve anonymity? Should every opinion piece be published, irrespective of its position’s extremity? Where does the line between comedy and offense lie? These poles remind me every week

that serving in these positions is indeed a privilege, but it comes with just as much responsibility. This responsibility — to uplift the voices of our community in a conscientious way — is not one I’ve borne on alone. The Tech’s Managing Board, fifteen individuals who understand this commitment intimately, have helped me grapple with these questions, provided input on every decision, and performed beyond the call of duty so that the paper may thrive. I thank each of them for helping me grow as a writer and leader.

I hope you have all enjoyed, learned from, and felt represented by the words of The Tech this year, and I am confident that our incoming Managing Board will continue to do justice to our 143-year-strong tradition.

— Srinidhi Narayanan '24
Volume 143 Editor-in-Chief

Ode to Pod Semester

Pod, from Page 8

during a time where timelines of location and activity were published for every single case in Bangkok and where people would still mask indoors, outdoors, and keep their distance away from the other people and places listed. Soon, Thailand's first wave was over: the total number of cases in the whole country was around 3,000, while the number of cases in the US reached 1,770,000. I thought to myself that coming back was a good decision.

Summer came and went. I was doing a remote UROP in a group of 10 that met every day at 8 p.m. Pacific, 11 p.m. Eastern, and 10 a.m. Bangkok. I have little to no recollection of what happened each day because every day was the same: stuck in my room.

Fall came and went. MIT outlined a plan for the 2020–2021 academic year, which consisted of having seniors back on campus in the fall and the other three classes back in the spring. This meant that my life was going to stay the same for a while, so I better get used to these online classes. I took an egregious number of classes that fall semester, but all of them looked the same. I ate dinner, hopped into one Zoom, then hopped onto another, slept, then woke up to catch up on all the messages everyone sent and all the afternoon classes by watching recordings and spent the rest of the day psetting alone because nobody in the US was awake. Every day was the same: stuck in my room.

That semester was the peak of mundaneness — everything was stripped to its bare minimum. Even The Tech was a Zoom call (later Gather), indistinguishable from everything else. I got hooked into playing Minecraft speedrunning Twitch streams in the background just to hear anyone other than my parents and my inner monologue. There was one silver lining during the semester, and I had to thank Thailand's continually low case numbers for this: we were able to explore real life outside of Minecraft but inside the country during breaks. I spent my Thanksgiving break going on a masked trip to Lampang and Chiang Mai along with other American college students who were sent home to Thailand. We properly freaked out when we heard that one person in the entire province of Chiang Mai caught COVID-19 a few days before we were there. Other than that, every day was the same: stuck in my room.

IAP was no exception. I tried to take a couple classes like Battlecode and Quantum Computing but didn't have the energy to fully commit to either. The Zoom fatigue was real. Need I say it again? Every day was the same: stuck in my room.

III. THE POD

November 2nd, 2020 marked the inception of the concept of the pod semester. MIT experimented with having seniors, class of 2021, partially back on campus for the 2020 fall semester, with moderate success. There was regular testing, and there were cases, but it seemed like things were under control. Of course, I didn't know much about that — I, along with juniors (class of 2022) and frosh (class of 2024), was in the doldrums.

"Current plans for the spring semester," was sent to undergraduates by Cynthia Barnhart. "Specifically, as we hoped for the upcoming term, all current first-years, sophomores, and juniors who would like to live and learn on campus will be able to do so." Hope.

"Because cold weather makes it harder to socialize outdoors and because the to-and-fro of spring break travel presents an obvious risk of viral spread, the spring semester will start two weeks later for all students; instruction will be entirely online for the first two weeks to accommodate a one-week quarantine period for all on-campus students; and we will replace spring break with several long weekends distributed throughout the semester." Okay.

"The undergraduate pod program and the graduate residential visitors policy will be available to students in the spring. Undergraduate students residing on campus will be required to be on a meal plan, which MIT will continue to subsidize." Sure.

Even so, with all the excitement going through me, I was nervous and unsure whether I actually should return to campus in the spring. Actually, I wasn't even sure if I could, in relation to my government and government-sponsored scholarship restrict-

ing / strongly recommending leaving the country, being the helicopter parent more so than my parents. Hm. The logistics also seemed hard. Would I rather live in a dorm with a bunch of rules and restrictions or at home without any? But, friends.



ARUN WONGPROMMOON - THE TECH

[February 15, 2021] Your average Simmons meal, circa Pod Semester.

As the weeks went by, the emails ramped up from all sides, including from HRS, and uncertainty remained. It was going to be a very interesting process because the dorms would be decided first, then the pods would form within each dorm and be cemented into writing. This sounded reasonable until my friends and I realized that our top priority for us was podding together, while the specific dorm was secondary. My friends and I ranked dorms entirely the same with a note to HRS to guarantee placement in the same dorm and allow for us to pod.

Here's a graph theory question: with all the nodes and edges that are MIT undergraduates, how do you divide nodes into groups of at most 6? This is socially impossible; social life isn't quite discrete like that. Cue a mess of trying to pod up — I joined a group of people whose headcount grew to at least 11 — imagine the horror of needing to split that up into two pods. People were also at different confidence levels of returning when this happened, and mine was the lowest, adding to the chaos.

January rolled around, and I did all the paperwork needed to convince my scholarship to let me back to the United States, and all the forms with HRS. I ended up being the only class of 2023 student from Thailand out of three who returned. The opportunity for vaccinations and a normal-ish MIT experience, including in-person social interactions and living in the same time zone, trumped the risk of infection and all the restrictions in place. I was then officially added as the fifth member of a pod of five and did all the pod paperwork. The interleaving deadlines and documents were stressful (something that I'll have to get used to for the rest of my life), but a wave of relief came afterward, leaving behind excitement. I WOULD BE RETURNING TO CAMPUS !!

Our five-person pod was a star-like graph, where everybody knew the "center" person but not all the rest. I personally knew one person and two more by name from a singular chance encounter during the purge. We had one initial relatively awkward bonding call playing an online board game the week before school started.

I took a PCR test in preparation for the flight, and gosh did that hurt my insides. Then, the day of the flight came: February 14, 2021. It was a day of love, and my love was MIT, so much so that I extended that day by 11 hours (time zones). The airport and airplane were eerily empty. It was about a one-to-one ratio of air hostesses to passengers, and economy looked like first class. I deliberately chose a seat in the back section of the plane 20 rows away from anybody else, but with strong persuasion from the crew, I moved up to the front section of the plane, still some 3 rows away from anybody else.

The ride back to MIT was surreal. 11 months away, yet MIT looked the same, save for the beautiful blanket of snow that now lined the entire campus. It felt slightly dangerous, but it felt nostalgic and welcoming. February 14 ended with me be-

ing in Simmons, wildly unprepared for the weather and confused about the elevators and the 9 windows in my room. Two boxes laid in my room that were packed up from a year before—one was missing. Just like entering MacGregor for the first time my frosh year, I didn't have bedsheets. Some podmates already came, and I shuffled across the hallway to ask one of them, a stranger I only knew the name of, if I could borrow her beddings.

Q Week descended, and it was reminiscent of my quarantine period at home. Everyone had to quarantine in their rooms, and physical interactions were limited to a minimum. Since nobody was permitted to cook, every dorm became a dining dorm—even EC, which used Walker as their make-shift dining hall. As such, we could and had to leave our rooms, mask up, go down and get food. Three times a day, my pod altogether went down to the Simmons dining hall. Everything was takeout—we were given a box each, and as we went through the choices, we told the dining staff what items we would like. Afterwards, we had to take our food to eat in our own rooms. We called each other on Zoom, which was ridiculous because we could also hear each other through the walls.

Getting tested was quite a ritual during pod semester. Right when people arrived and at the end of Q Week, we had to test, and for the rest of the semester afterwards, we had to test twice a week. Remember, this was before rapid test take-home COVID test kits were a thing. The ice rink was transformed into a PCR test venue, with a few booths where one can (literally) screw their nose with an extremely stiff and sharp swab in privacy. We would get results the next day or two, and our tests were valid for 4 days, hence the need to test twice a week. Sometimes, the results would be invalid as well (if we didn't swab well enough), and we'd have to get tested again the day after.

Daily attestations, a series of questions surveying symptoms and compliance and such, were also something that we had to do in addition to tests, and this too had impacts. Only when the daily attestations were done, plus some fifteen minutes, would one be able to tap into campus buildings outside of their own dorm. Otherwise, you'd just be stuck outside, like multiple people were. In general, tap access also wasn't as universal as it is now. Each person, depending on their course, would be granted zones of buildings to access. As an undergrad, I got Simmons and the main campus buildings.

Now, podmates lived right next to each other, and each pod had a designated pod lounge, which could either be an actual lounge or a person's room (which, for this reason, would be larger than usual). We were only able to take off our masks when we were

with our podmates in the pod lounge or in one of the members' rooms. Otherwise, if you were to go see someone outside your pod, you have to mask up and/or be distant from them. There were some pod rules and perks as well, such as a budget, but I can't quite recall the rest anymore. This whole pod mechanic obviously created quite the social dynamic.

Even though we were on campus, only half the undergraduate population was, and classes were mostly virtual. My day would mostly start with me crawling out of my bed, joining a Zoom meeting, joining the next Zoom meeting, and another, and then psetting for the rest of the day. Yes, it sounded the same as what I was doing back home, but at the same time it couldn't be more different. Being in a pod meant that I could count on being able to walk over to my neighbors and hang out with them at night every single night as I pleased, especially since I was in the ideal time zone. My podmates became very close friends, and oftentimes it felt like these six were the only people in the world.

Some lab classes were hybrid, including a class I was an LA one year later after being kicked out of campus as a student in 6.08. The contrast between how the class was run then and now was quite impressive, yet chilling. The physical classrooms were only a quarter filled, and the rest of the lab queue was waiting behind online meeting rooms.

Despite all the restrictions, there's a lot that happened during pod semester for me. Pod semester, because of their distribution of holidays throughout the semester, as well as the circumstances of everything being online and people were being grouped up in sixes, allowed for many day trips and weekend trips. We went to Cape Cod, New Hampshire, Maine, Rhode Island, and since one of those weekends coincided with my birthday, I got a good birthday trip and surprise, complete with some soju as a rite of passage as I turned 21. I was also able to get vaccinated in April and May, quite a few months before I would have been able to had I stayed in Thailand.

By the end of May, it was time for us all to pack up. The experimental semester was over, and the fall semester of the next academic year was announced to be a return to somewhat normal, albeit still with masks and testing. It was a wrap, as were our things wrapped in boxes and our experiences wrapped as memories.

IV. THE AFTERMATH

Off everyone went on their summer journeys. A subset of the pod were doing internships, which in 2021 were all virtual. This meant it didn't matter where we were as long as we worked during work hours. We decided to take advantage of this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to band together and go on the world's slowest road trip, or more faithfully a trip where we hopped cities every two weeks to a month. We started in San Francisco, went up to Tahoe, decided to be in Boise for a bit (why not?), and ended in Seattle.

Over the next couple years since the pod semester, my social life still largely consisted of the pod. Sure, we could interact with other people now, and I did interact with people I met before and after the pod semester, but there was something special with the pod. This was the group of people I returned to MIT and quarantined with and spent a full four months seeing almost exclusively 24/7.

Graduation came with the realization that the gang was getting broken up, and people were moving away. This academic year, of the six of us, two are still on campus doing their M.Eng., one is still a senior, one works in Cambridge, and two work in San Francisco. Next year, it is looking like two (one of which is me) will join the Bay Area gang. Even though we are split across the country, we still reunite every so often, once back in October in Boston and once in January in San Jose. I flew and surprised people with my physical presence in the Bay, and we had a good reunification day of Topgolf, boba, udon, and goofing around. I crashed in the apartment of the two now living in San Francisco, and waking up to my former podmates down the hallway threw me into proper nostalgia. The bond is still there, and all the memories and interactions and personalities kept reminding me how crazy of a story this all was, and how grateful I am to have these people alongside me as we go through and figure out our lives, move into adulthood and out of campus.

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Putting the pieces together

Meet Justin Yu '25, Tetris world champion

By Russel Ismael & Josh Nix
NEWS STAFF

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

Name and Class: Justin Yu, Class of 2025

Areas of Study: Major in Course 6-3 (Computer Science), Minor in Music Technology

Living Group: Next Hall

Home State: Dallas, TX

Activities: Video Game Orchestra, Tetris

Justin Yu '25 has recently become just the second person ever to beat Tetris and is the reigning champion of the Tetris World Championship. Justin sat down with The Tech to discuss strategy, math, Tetris variations, and the future of the world's most famous game of colorful blocks.

Justin didn't become the best just by luck; he put in the hours.

How long have you been playing Tetris?

This version of Tetris [Classical Tetris], five years. Random versions of Tetris, I played many for many years before, but never for more than an hour at a time. But that was before I started playing seriously. Now, it's like, three or four hour sessions.

How would you explain your Tetris strategies to the average person?

Contrary to what most would believe, the goal is actually not to make the board look as nice as possible. Essentially, the game of Tetris is just to survive as long as you can while simultaneously looking for tetris'es, which occur when you get a long, straight block that wipes out multiple rows in one single drop.

What's the difference between Classical Tetris and Modern Tetris?

So, Modern Tetris gives a lot of quality-of-life things that can be used to make the game [streamlined to user experience]. The stuff that Modern Tetris gives is like more depth, but it also makes the goal of survival easier. So, NES Tetris is a game all about survival, so you aren't given as many tools.

What tools am I talking about? For example, if you don't like the piece you don't have right now, in Modern, you have the opportunity to hold it. That's not

an option here [in Classical Tetris]. However, in Modern Tetris, you're often given three or four pieces that you can look at in the future. And in Modern, they have this special randomizer that's meant to be really fair, but this concept was not figured out in 1989, so we don't have that. Thus, pieces are a little more chaotic and the challenge of surviving is a lot greater. Every time this comes up, I want to stress that I don't think Modern is easier or worse because it has, like, all these extra mechanics.

How can you explain Classical Tetris strategies? Like the rolling technique, for example?

Rolling is kind of out of necessity for the game because the game doesn't give great movement options out of the box. So, being able to wait for pieces is maybe the most important part of the game. And just basic probability, the longer you're able to wait, the more likely it is that there's a piece that you want.

What this means is that being able to move left and right as fast as possible is extremely important, and the game gives you a really slow auto-repeat mechanism that only goes like 10 frames per second, which is decent, but not great. The way we get around this is this technique that presses the button as many times as possible. We split the load over all five of our fingers, and we use the back of the controller because it's a wider surface area than the actual button itself. So, if we do that, it creates this rolling motion where you're getting all five of your fingers on the controller, that's where it comes from. We can reach up to 30 frames a second.

How do you apply the principles of mathematical solving to a game like Tetris?

I did a lot of math competitions in high school, so I think having that brain has helped me here. The main skill I think I have over my competitors is that I'm constantly analyzing every single placement, just this idea of self-evaluation and always considering the best decisions. On the whole, I think that kind of helps when it comes to problem solving.

For something more technical, I kind of see improving in Tetris as basically performing reinforcement learning on yourself, but that's another rabbit hole.

What advice would you give to someone trying to get into Tetris?

The most important thing is to ensure you actually enjoy the game. I see plenty of people start getting into Tetris and decide

they want to be competitive just for the sake of competitiveness, not out of enjoyment. As for a sort of training regimen, I mainly recommend practicing the slower levels. Just like anything else, getting good at Tetris is just a matter of practice and dedication. Another tip that's gone a long way for myself is watching Tetris streams — being involved in Tetris as much as you can is the key to improving.

How do you balance your Tetris life with other commitments like Video Game Orchestra?

I think it's just a matter of making sure that I get all the essential stuff done first, so then I can play Tetris afterwards if I want. I think this most importantly comes up whenever I have to travel for world championships because this means I'm missing several days of school. I always make sure that I'm completing my homework for that period well in advance, so that I don't have to worry or stress about it.

Does this mean you solved Classical Tetris? Do you think you'll still be able to top your score skillswise?

So, you can crash the game by playing a single at 1489 lines. But as we saw — that's the one I did, at E89 except it's single — it's also possible not to, like any other line clear. It turns out, by making sure that you're clearing a different amount of lines than the ones that have a chance of causing a crash, you can just avoid it. So, you can play forever or you can play on a special mode we made that actually fixes the crash, and this means that we can just worry about scoring.

Would you describe yourself as competitive? Did the recent news of someone beating Tetris inspire you to do the same?

Technically, I inspired [Willis Gibson]! *Editor's note: Gibson was the first person to beat Tetris at the age of 13.*

I think there being competition helps me make less silly decisions just because there's an actual threat of somebody else getting to goal before me, but in general, I like to go for categories that I make up and just play at my own pace. When it comes to chasing the world record, for competitive head-to-head competitions, it's different.

How do you expect the Tetris community to improve skillswise? Do you think we're reaching the skill ceiling?

I think people have been thinking we're gonna die off and have peaked for

the past few years; I don't know, it's kind of difficult.

One thing I would say is that getting to the game crash and getting beyond the game crash, I don't think I've actually tested the skill ceiling that much. What I find more interesting is playing shorter games, but going for more Tetris'es, and taking more risks in the process. That is the kind of format that the head-to-head competitions are going to be using, and that is still extremely far from being optimized.

I think we still have a bit of life in that department.

Do you think you integrate your Tetris skills into your everyday life?

Tetris has had a major impact on how I think about randomness. For example, it's very hard for humans to estimate when things will occur, and a big part of that is recognizing that things are actually independent. Like, if there is an event with two outcomes of equal probability and the event has occurred as just one of the outcomes the past ten times, the probability that the next event will have the opposite outcome is still just 50 percent, not any greater.

You mentioned in previous interviews that your future goal is to help run Tetris websites and tournaments instead of participating in them. What inspired this change of pace?

Nothing really specific. I have just been to a bunch of live events over many years of playing, and I love meeting people there, and I love playing Tetris there. And that's all because of the work of people who are always working in the background, the stuff behind the scenes.

There's this massive control center with all these wires connecting TVs and game cartridges and just keeping all of that running, and making sure people show up on time to big efforts, and this one that I think goes unappreciated.

Actually, a couple of weeks ago, I had my chance to host my own event here.

Was that Tetris event publicized? Would you say there's a lively Tetris scene at MIT?

It wasn't actually publicized. We still ended up having like 50 to 60 people show up by word of mouth and getting friends to attend.

I would not say that [there is a Tetris scene at MIT]. It was mostly people coming in from the outside, but maybe there could be.

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Face behind the cards: Meet Alex Zhang, President of Pokerbots

Meet Alex, this year's president of Pokerbots

By Josh Nix
STAFF WRITER

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

Alex Zhang '26 is the president of the recently finished and wildly popular IAP course 6.9630, Pokerbots. Alex sat down with The Tech to discuss training computers to play poker, exciting poker variations, and the rewarding process of organizing such a large event.

So what exactly is Pokerbots?

Pokerbots is a yearly-offered IAP course in which students form teams and train computers to play poker. The first two weeks consist of lectures teaching basic game theory, poker theory, and counterfactual regret minimization strategies that teams can adapt and implement into Machine Learning (ML) models. During this time, students refine their bots by playing them against other teams' bots on the scrimmage server and even against themselves on local playgrounds. Pokerbots culminates in a final tournament with over \$40,000 in prizes and networking

with sponsors.

What are some common student challenges?

The biggest challenge for students is not a lack of prior poker background — Zhang himself only started playing seriously once he got to MIT. Instead, it turns out that most students struggled with the limitations set by Pokerbots' homemade engine system. That is, Pokerbots utilizes a different poker variation each year, so students can't count on using some bot written in the past; they have to start from scratch. Students have to be able to play 1000 hands in thirty seconds, so it isn't feasible to just copy a bot found online.

What are some innovative or surprising strategies that have emerged in past competitions?

A few years ago, a team developed a bot that went all-in on every single hand. This bot was surprisingly hard to counter in real-time without an accurate history of its playing style, but since then we've mentioned it in lectures and bots with similar strategies don't do as well anymore. The key insight here is

that even given a hand with a high expectation of equity, if it also has high variance because of future cards (the draw and the river), it typically outperforms its equity. Typically, bots that exploit opponent weaknesses, especially those that utilize the most poker theory and heuristics, fare the best.

What's been the most rewarding part about being Pokerbots president?

It takes a long time to put all this together and we spent nearly all of Christmas break working on it. The best part was just seeing it all come together. We also have a very small team compared to other IAP classes with only nine of us, so it was great to see them all succeed. This year, we had the most sponsors we've ever had and also the largest turnout for the final event, so it was very exciting. There were a lot of firsts this year; for example, there was the implementation of a local playground feature and a physical poker tournament without the bots. I think Pokerbots has a very promising future and I'm excited to see where it goes.



Sol. to Free Skate

from page 16

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BOOK REVIEW

Corpses, bad name-based puns, and 100 pages too many: *The Undertaking of Hart and Mercy*

This book is 415 pages long, and for what?

★★★★☆

The Undertaking of Hart and Mercy

by Megan Bannen

Orbit

August 23, 2022

By Alexis Yi

In my opinion, romance is the hardest genre of writing to do successfully. My metric of success is highly scientific: does the storyteller convince me specifically that these two made-up people connect to each other on a level we could call love? A lot of times, the answer is ‘no’: the banter is awkward and annoying, or worse, there’s no banter at all; the characters are as bland as the tofu served in McCormick dining and together they somehow have even less substance, or maybe the trajectory of their romance is so contrived that I check out before we even get to the third act miscommunication. Basically, a lot of things can go wrong in a love story.

Unfortunately, a lot goes wrong in *The Undertaking of Hart and Mercy* by Megan Bannen. The Undertaking is a fantasy romance set in Bushong, a province — a city? It’s unclear to me, and that’s one of the problems with this book. It’s set in the Federated Islands of Cadmus, a world that feels very similar to our own, except with less technology and more paganism. One of the main characters, Hart Ralston, is a demigod patrolman who patrols Tanria, a magical territory within Bushong from which dangerous creatures sometimes escape. These creatures — drudges — are corpses infected by lost souls who attack living people.

The other main character, and Hart’s romantic interest, is Mercy Birdsall, a female undertaker who is very tall (which we’re reminded of a lot). She’s also trying to keep her family business afloat, Birdsall & Son, an undertaking business on the edge of Tanria, which processes dead bodies. The two often see each other due to their lines of work, and they hate each other because Hart was rude the first time they met years ago and Mercy responded in kind.

One day, Hart gets super lonely and sends a desperate unaddressed letter. Mercy receives it, and then they become anonymous penpals. A spicy premise.

My major issues with this book were world-building and the development of atmosphere, or the lack thereof. After 415 pages immersed in this world, I still have barely any idea what anything looks like. Bannen fails to describe most things,

from side characters to creatures to landscapes, adequately or at all. I found myself flipping back and forth often to try to figure out what certain things were. For example, Hart rides this animal called an equimaris, which is supposed to be some kind of watery horse, yet I don’t know whether this is a horse with special nautical hair or an actual seahorse. I have barely any idea how big Tanria is or what Mercy’s place of work looks like or anything about the world outside of Tanria and its bordering towns. The descriptions that Bannen offers, if she does offer any, are given once and only once, because God forbid she come up with another way to describe the same thing.

The way Bannen offers world-building information is also pretty transparent, and while it’s not the most awkward world development I’ve ever seen, it’s also not seamless. Giant chunks of information are presented at once, such as when Hart teaches his new apprentice about Tanria, or sometimes there are just straight paragraphs of mythology, and not a lot of it stuck in my head.

This world also has its own religious system, one that seems to be loosely inspired by Greek mythology: there are Old Gods and New Gods, each with their own domains, and these gods are all related to one another. But the names and figures of this mythological system are not mentioned often enough outside of swearing and brief prayers or differentiated enough from one another to create any kind of meaningful atmosphere. These gods don’t actually seem to have that much of a hold over the people in the story, despite what the author seems to be trying to get across. The characters did not feel like characters living in a world where gods were alive and well — they felt like characters from a small town in America.

And that was one of the weirdest things about this book for me. Despite the fantastical setting, this felt very much like a small-town romance, complete with the whole struggling-family-business trope going on with Mercy’s family (which consists of herself, her ailing father, younger brother, and brother and sister-in-law). This isn’t necessarily an issue per se, but the adherence to the small-town romance tone really slowed down the pace for me in the beginning.

And wow, the plot really dragged for the first 300 pages. In this part, we just get a lot of Mercy and Hart griping about their lives, both internally as they go about their world and through the letters they send to each other. The letters themselves came across as a little pretentious, and I didn’t think they really sounded like either of the characters. It was hard to get invested in the letters, yet those were the only connection between Mercy and Hart until nearly 200 pages in. Given that this is a romance novel, that’s a pretty big problem. When they do get together, it’s after a near-death situation. Near-death situations trigger the most significant developments in their

relationship throughout the book, which makes their whole dynamic feel very inorganic. They also have this weird thing of calling each other puns based on their names — for example, “Merciless” and “Hart-ache” at the beginning when they hate each other — which is maybe supposed to be cute and banter-y but mostly just strikes me as odd.

Structurally, Mercy and Hart’s relationship mostly follows the stereotypical romance plot points: initial meeting, getting together, honeymoon phase, third act miscommunication or conflict, separation, then reunification and happy ending. And I’m not upset by that — those plot points exist for a reason and they can still be executed well. But once again there were pacing issues for me. While the build-up to Mercy and Hart getting together was super slow, the honeymoon phase felt way too fast. I had a hard time believing that these two people who had supposedly been on acrimonious terms for years could suddenly just be all over each other, when (mild spoiler alert) Mercy doesn’t even know that Hart is her pen pal when they get together. The third-act miscommunication was also very predictable and it failed to really trigger the kind of angst in me that this plot point usually should.

The secondary plot about a sudden dangerous increase in drudges (those possessed corpses that attack people) was also unsatisfying. The villain is cartoonish and pretty obvious, and I predicted the outcome at least 100 pages before it was explicitly resolved in the text. This subplot clearly took second stage to the romance, which is fine since this is a romance first and a fantasy second, but there was so little effort to create some kind of meaningful, thought-provoking conflict for the characters. And ultimately, a plot without meaningful struggle for its characters leads to uninteresting characters.

Mercy’s and Hart’s character concepts seemed very promising in the blurb, but the execution of these characters was uninspired, and they were both stereotypical romance leads. Mercy is a tall girl who really wants a man who matches her height. She’s also super quirky because she likes books and pastries (or something like that). She actually doesn’t even think much about undertaking or the process of dealing with dead bodies at all outside of when she’s doing her job, which is such a lost opportunity for a cool interest that is not often found in a romantic lead. She’s voluptuous and Bannen never calls her “plain,” which are refreshing choices in a landscape full of stick-thin female romance leads who are mysteriously unaware of their physical appeal. But beyond that, Bannen doesn’t really take this character into any really interesting territory.

The same can be said for Hart. He’s a demigod who doesn’t know his godly parentage, and somehow this is barely talked about until the last quarter of the book. Being partly god is a really the-

matically rich concept and Bannen barely touches it. I will say that he’s much more emotionally repressed and angsty than Mercy, which is always very fun to see in a character. But once again, Bannen doesn’t go as crazy with the repression as she could. Lastly, Hart works as a marshal, which is basically a cowboy/cop figure in this world. I’m just not going to get too into that.

There were other character development choices that irked me. For one, we don’t see enough of either person’s background or memories. There are very few flashbacks or prolonged scenes of active recall of Mercy’s or Hart’s pasts, and this just means that we don’t see either of them fully as characters. Ultimately, I was primarily irritated that these characters weren’t made more extraordinary, with more problems — we’re literally in a fantasy world! Anything is possible! And somehow, these characters just tread the same emotional and psychological territory that you might find on The Disney Channel. Finally, one minor nitpick was Mercy’s family — there were just too many characters, and I didn’t particularly care for any of them or the conflicts introduced among them. The Birdsalls are very much the Big Happy Family where misunderstandings occur, but ultimately there are no serious relationship problems between any of them, and it’s just such a boring choice.

Despite the issues I had with the book on all these levels, the writing style itself was pretty competent. Sentences did not feel clunky or misplaced. That said, the writing also wasn’t very striking or notable. I only had one moment where I thought, “Wow, this is actually an interesting sentence or concept.” When Mercy and Hart wake up after having sex for the first time and Hart is late for work, Bannen writes that Hart “laughed with a self-deprecation that Mercy could eat with a spoon.” I like that sentence, and that sentence only, in this book. Elsewhere, I often felt that the emotions of each character were overexplained. The narration is quick to identify exactly what each character is feeling explicitly before any attempt to show us. There’s also no creativity in varying the syntax to create different moods.

Ultimately, my verdict is that no romance novel needs to be more than 400 pages and this book is no exception to the rule. The Undertaking’s fantasy aspects aren’t developed enough to justify the page count here. Beyond that, this book just felt really stale. Nothing was very exciting. The author executed what she promised in the safest way possible and brought nothing else to the table. It’s quite a disappointment given the interesting ideas introduced in the blurb and the first few chapters.

I guess if I want to satisfy my romance cravings, I’ll have to rewatch the second season of *Fleabag*, where the protagonist has recently recovered from a period of high libido and falls in love with a Catholic priest...



Leave marks,
not sharks!

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MUSICAL REVIEW

Musical Theatre Guild brings to life *Chicago's* razzle and dazzle

The musical about the Windy City’s celebrity criminals was a whirlwind.

★★★★★

Chicago

Staged by MIT Musical Theatre Guild

By Russel Ismael
NEWS EDITOR

Billy Flynn (Reidyn Wingate ’25) told Roxie Hart (Xochitl Luna ’22) that if she wants to be saved from the hangman’s noose, then it would be crucial to get sympathy from the press. Well, she sure did!

I had the pleasure of attending the Musical Theatre Guild’s (MTG) rendition of *Chicago*, a dazzling musical set in an age of jazz, cabarets, and loose morals. This is the very first musical I have ever watched, and I could not have chosen a better one.

Chicago is unapologetically gleaming and exuberant and as bright as a resplendent star. Of course, *Chicago*’s blinding glare is only appropriate considering how ruthlessly it portrays stardom and fame. After Roxie Hart’s lover, Fred Casely (Ian Rosado ’25), breaks things off with her, an enraged Roxie guns him down, with the drums punctuating each of her shots with a bang.

The murder is juxtaposed by a vibrant

choral group singing about night-life thrills and Roxie’s reaction to the murder — “I gotta pee!”

The opening act set the musical’s tone and principal conflict. Fred Casely’s cold-blooded murder did not evoke any emotion from Roxie aside from contempt, believing that Fred was just receiving his comeuppance.

This moment is later played for laughs when Billy and Roxie are being interviewed by Mary Sunshine (Grace Anderson G). Mary asks if Roxie is sorry for Fred’s murder, prompting Roxie to break off from Billy’s apparent ventriloquism to snark at the question. Luna’s delivery of “Are you kidding?” caused the audience to erupt in chuckles.

Roxie’s lack of remorse regarding the murder is on display when Sergeant Fogarty (Elvin Yang G) is interrogating the meek and often forgotten Amos Hart (Jon Rosario ’24). The more murder-inclined of the Harts sings a humorous song about how despite Amos’ shortcomings, ranging from his lack of great physique to his lack of smarts, at least he would stand up for her. But Roxie’s tune becomes more scathing once Amos pieces together that his wife is having an affair with Fred, leading to him turning against her.

The stage lights were put to great use, accentuating a lot of moments including Amos’ interrogation. This was more impactful in the *Murderess’* Row scene, where the entire stage operated under a scarlet cover as each murderess details

how they killed their lover — except for Hunyak (Julie Steele ’26), the Hungarian who does not speak English, who is, of course, not guilty.

In opposition to Roxie is Velma Kelly (Rachel Waggoner ’27), who is essentially *Chicago*’s premier murderess after Velma kills both her lover and sister after catching them in the act. Velma and Roxie trade many barbs throughout the show, as Velma is initially presented as the quintessential celebrity criminal and Roxie as just a social-climbing clout chaser.

However, Velma starts to slip from the public consciousness when Roxie is catapulted into greater fame for being a “reformed sinner,” causing more friction between the two characters — doubly so when Roxie takes Velma’s rhinestone shoes to wear at the trial. The inversion of their statuses foreshadows what would eventually happen to Roxie.

The musical was also surprisingly meta. There were scenes where characters had the self-awareness that they were in a musical. Characters call for their exit music (except for poor Amos who has none), play poker with the orchestra members, and call the spotlight on them (except for Amos, who is missed). There is even an instance where Velma hands a newspaper (*The Tech*, at that! It appeared twice!) to the conductor, Sydney Nguyen ’24, which made me realize how delightful this musical truly was. Moments like these highlighted the brilliant teamwork the stagecast, crew, and orchestra had

in crafting a meta experience for the audience.

What took the cake for this musical, however, was Billy Flynn’s *All I Care About is Love* performance during which he rips his shirt off completely. The unexpected move electrified the audience, and I laughed when Billy chucked his ripped shirt to an ensemble performer, barely missing her from my perspective.

Chicago’s nature made me want to kick my shins for not catching the point of the show much earlier. The musical is a brilliant satire of the media sensationalizing criminals and making them “celebrities,” albeit for only 15 minutes. It makes fun of public trials where even the worst defendants can garner sympathy from the public despite their crimes.

It only registered to me when, in the midst of Roxie’s trial, a news reporter bursts in shouting about a woman whose murders eclipse even those of Roxie’s, causing the jury to leave the court. And if this still went over your head, Velma and Roxie thank the audience at the end for our belief in their innocence, exclaiming that we are a living example of what America is like.

Overall, I went to this show not knowing what to expect, but I left in a brighter mood. The cast members were terrific, the orchestra was euphonic, and the crew elevated the musical experience. I can confidently say that the lights of MTG’s *Chicago* razzled and dazzled me: *Chicago* was truly an unassailable performance.

RESTAURANT REVIEW

Mu Lan Taiwanese Restaurant: a great Cambridge dining staple

a place that satisfies your cravings for Taiwanese food

★★★★☆

Mu Lan

Taiwanese, \$\$

228 Broadway

Cambridge, MA 02139

Monday to Saturday 11 a.m.–7 p.m.

By Vivian Hir & Alexis Yi

The last time I went to Mu Lan, a Taiwanese restaurant on Broadway 15 minutes away from Lobby 7, I had one of the worst meals of my life. It was 8 p.m. on a Saturday night during Family Weekend. After a cold scary walk alone in the dark, I met my parents and a group of Chinese-American families from Minnesota at Mu Lan. To give a sense of the gathering’s vibe for those who don’t have immigrant parents, some of the adults wore “Harvard parent” pins on their chests like they’d won something. The college students of the group were made to introduce ourselves and say where we went to school before we’d even ordered. For the next ten minutes, every other word out of anyone’s mouth was “MIT” or “Harvard”. It was excruciating, and the rest of the dinner wasn’t much better. I left as soon as I finished eating.

Thankfully, my most recent experience at Mu Lan with Vivian was much better. We’d eaten together at Mu Lan before, and once Vivian and I agreed to start writing restaurant reviews together, this venue — a place with decent Chinese food not too far from campus — seemed like a great place to start.

When you first walk into Mu Lan, you’re greeted by waitstaff at the podium, who then seat you. The main room is very welcoming, with soft yellow lighting, big open windows, spacious seating, and consistent

East Asian decor. About two-thirds of the tables were occupied when we went, so there was a nice buzz of conversation in the background. Despite this, Vivian and I could still hear each other. There were also people speaking Mandarin around us, which is always a good sign. Vivian arrived first and sat down at a small table for two near the front of the room, by the windows. I joined a few minutes later.

Before we ordered, we got complimentary jasmine green tea and a small plate of pickled vegetables. The pickled vegetables were surprisingly flavorful, given that at first glance they seemed to just be unseasoned raw vegetables. They worked well as an appetizer, and best of all, we didn’t have to pay for them.

The waiter came soon after we sat down. It was a bit hard to choose what to order at first, since Mu Lan’s menu boasts a total of 179 dishes. The options included seafood, many vegetable dishes, and a diverse range of meat options. There’s also a lunch special on the weekdays for reduced prices, but with smaller portion sizes. Since we went on Saturday, that unfortunately wasn’t an option for us. We ended up ordering stir-fried string beans (干扁四季豆) and fish fillet in spicy bean sauce (豆瓣魚片). We ate family-style, the only correct way to eat at a Chinese/Taiwanese restaurant.

The stir-fried string beans arrived within ten minutes of ordering, which was a pleasant surprise given how busy the place was. The portion size was good for its price of \$13.95. The beans had a dark, shiny soy sauce glaze and a generous amount of cooking oil. According to the waiter, the beans were first deep-fried, then stir-fried. The beans weren’t overcooked or burnt. They were a bit soft though, and could have been more crispy, especially since they were deep-fried.

The sauce had a nice savory taste but could have used a bit more salt. This dish can sometimes be really oily, but that wasn’t an issue at Mu Lan. The minced garlic bits on the beans were properly burnt, and the green beans were appropriately wrinkly. Overall, it was a solid rendition of a



VIVIAN HIR - THE TECH

Fish fillet in spicy bean sauce (豆瓣魚片).

pretty famous Sichuan dish, even though it wasn’t spicy. (Other restaurants often serve this dish spicy, but Mu Lan had no such option.) The dish had a pleasant umami taste, but there was a hint of melted granulated sugar and ginger in the sauce, which gave the beans a more complex and enriching flavor.

The fish filet in spicy bean sauce was also decently sized, though at \$24, it was on the more expensive end. The first bite was a satisfying experience because of how warm and soft it was. The viscous red sauce was a nice mix of sweet and sour, which complemented the spiciness. While there were a couple of red chili flakes sprinkled on the fish, the piquancy was rather light. The crunchiness and freshness of the scallion garnish on the fish helped balance out the sauce. The fish filet had a pleasant taste, though for some people this dish may not have been spicy enough for their palate.

We also got individual rice bowls, each for \$1.95. That’s a bit pricey for rice, but we really couldn’t have eaten the dishes we ordered without it, given the strengths of the individual sauces.

As a whole, the dining experience at Mu

Lan was delightful because the dishes had contrasting tastes and textures. For those who want Chinese or Taiwanese food but don’t want to make the trip to Chinatown, Mu Lan is a great option for its proximity to campus, the variety of menu options, and its moderate price range. You can bring a large group, or go with a friend. The service is fast and friendly; our waiter was knowledgeable about the dishes and happy to answer our questions. Mu Lan is certainly a place worth going back to.



VIVIAN HIR - THE TECH

Stir-fried string beans (干扁四季豆).

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interview **students,**
administrators, and
faculty...

cover new
campus policy...

and find out how **MIT**
connects to the rest of
the **world.**



TECH's PICKS: ENTERTAINMENT THIS ISSUE

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 8 – WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 21

FILM

LISA FRANKENSTEIN
(FRI, FEB 9)

BOB MARLEY: ONE LOVE
(WED, FEB 14)

FILM

MADAME WEB
(WEB, FEB 14)

BLEEDING LOVE
(FRI, FEB 16)

TV

TRACKER
(SUN, FEB 11)

THE NEW LOOK
(WED, FEB 14)

VIDEO GAMES

HELLDIVERS 2
(THU, FEB 8)

DEEP ROCK GALACTIC: SURVIVOR
(WED, FEB 14)

[1981] Rickrolling Anniversary

THIS MONTH MARKS TEN YEARS SINCE THE PEAK OF THE RICKROLLING PHENOMENON.

SERIOUSLY? WOW. HAPPY ANNIVERSARY, I GUESS.

WE'VE KNOWN EACH OTHER FOR SO LONG. WE REALLY HAVE.

Want to feel old? The "want to feel old?" factoid meme dates back to around 2011, closer to the Bush/Kerry election than to today.



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

[2849] Under the Stars

I LOVE SITTING OUT UNDER THE STARS.

...IT'S DAYTIME.

YEAH, BUT THE STARS ARE ALL STILL UP THERE.

CONSTELLATIONS WHEEL OVERHEAD; THEY'RE JUST PAINTED OVER WITH BLUE.

EVERY SKY IS FULL OF STARS.

THAT'S SOMEHOW TERRIFYING.

IT'S OKAY—JUST LOOK AT THAT SUNNY SKY AND TELL YOURSELF SPACE ISN'T REAL.

"DAYTIME" IS US CLOSING OUR EYES AND PRETENDING IT MAKES INFINITY GO AWAY.

If you live in Los Angeles (around 33°52'N, roughly the latitude of Hermosa Beach) the black hole in V404 Cygni passes over you each day. On Christmas Day it will be directly overhead around 2pm.

Did you see speling or grammar mistake in The Tech?

Join copy!

join@tech.mit.edu

Poems

Submission from Joaquin Dubon '24

Purple and Golden

Cielos de púrpura y oro
— Prayer to the Salvadoran Flag

I fell for you in the middle of the
Orange, golden sky of your dawns

After a sleepless night full of worries
And monsters outside my room's window.

I heard your voice in the matutinal
Song bird of Sunday,

On the howling winds of October, and
On your crashing waves.

No one can understand your pace
Until they had slept on a hammock

By your sea. No one can understand
your peace
Until they have been soothed by your
breeze.

I miss your gifts: a ripe mango
Barely hanging on a branch of

A tall tree. The mango so big
It almost brings the whole branch down,

And a small, smooth stone in my hand.
After tries and tries I get to have

The free delight in my tired hand. How
many
Tries until I get that mango?

How many tries to get out
Of my lonely country?

Now that I am out, now that
I am not with you anymore

I wonder if I'll get a reward
As sweet as one of your fruits,

Or if that is forever gone,
And I have lost your sky

Dear Living Things

I am using this tree as if I were a god.
Using it to give genesis to something
I have named collective sadness,
Named our mourning. This morning

I met a red cardinal.

He told me things — told them like
A eulogy — told them like a sorrowful
Song — sang them like a requiem mass.

He said he saw, weeks ago,
Silhouettes running in the desert
Right before the sky had spread
Its wings.

These creatures standing
High in the moon
-light and then low as snakes in sand.

Fast as river and then still as death.

The blue men caught up to them,
surrounding
Them. The cardinal heard the creatures'
names
"Aliens" the blue men screamed. "Stop"
"Quietos"

The aliens froze and dropped —
To the ground. The cardinal followed the
group,
And saw the aliens caged (like birds).
They were quiet, as if something
Had escaped their dreams.

As if they had drowned in the space
Between earth

And the heavens.
Some of them did drown, didn't they?

Yesterday, in the river down south, the
Rio Bravo.

Condolences,
The woodpecker

ALSO SEE INSIDE

**A re-re-reflection on HackMIT,
Ode to Pod Semester
Books, Restaurants, & Musicals**

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!)

The Tech's MILE

By The Tech Sports staff

main the MLB Postseason. In the Americ
Division Series against Minnesota with e
their opponents, the Texas Rangers, reco

Can you find the typo? (Answer is below)

***The Tech* is looking for copy editors!**

Free Skate by Mehek Gosalia '25

Solution, page 10

Across

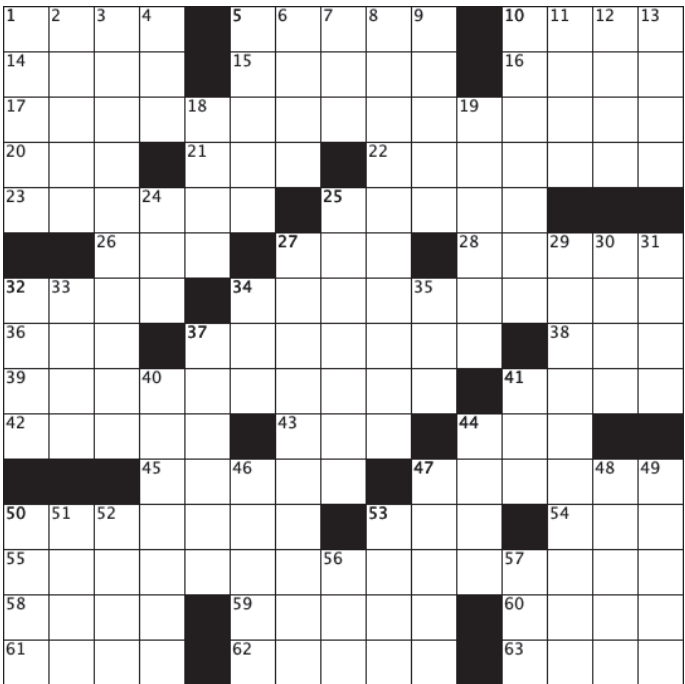
- 01 Lund in Casablanca
- 05 Pastel purple
- 10 Pest controller
- 14 Simba's queen
- 15 Venue for bowls or jams
- 16 Inside, to start
- 17 On thin ice, professionally
- 20 "Golly!"
- 21 Found with Os on a grid
- 22 She always serves, piping hot
- 23 Sea hawk
- 25 Malay footballer
- 26 Atlanta based channel
- 27 Stitch
- 28 Poet Calvino
- 32 Cultured dairy
- 34 What 55A and 17A want
- 36 Doofenschmirtz's tax status
- 37 Second-person plural pronoun
- 38 What blows the roof off stadiums

- 39 Sleeping on this cover story
- 41 Harsher than truths
- 42 In their ____
- 43 Hosp. staffer
- 44 Main character sign
- 45 Mexican coin
- 47 Cultured Dairy
- 50 V = IR
- 53 Home of Green Gables, for short
- 54 Musician Issa
- 55 Bewitching teen, actress
- 58 German no
- 59 Smacks
- 60 Agent of antiquity
- 61 60s "Gotcha"
- 62 Bad dreams address
- 63 Zeus's wife

Down

- 1 You killed his father, prepare to die
- 2 Doilies and Docs have these
- 3 The only two-wheeler missing from college campuses

- 4 Dentist's office conversation starter
- 5 Actress Chabert
- 6 Irritates
- 7 Director Spike
- 8 2005 political documentary
- 9 Edna Mode says no
- 10 Recent MIT Hack
- 11 Actress Taylor Joy
- 12 Getting this is only fun at 21
- 13 Nemo's friend
- 18 They're yoked
- 19 Girlies, classily
- 24 Go to a BNB for this
- 25 Former first family
- 27 Common in New Mexican buildings
- 29 Advice for young and old
- 30 French moon
- 31 Withdraws (out)
- 32 Small drinks
- 33 Using needles for cover
- 34 Plant or pig, depending on the field
- 35 It's more brutal than honesty



- 37 Echoes through the Alps
- 40 Slipping, in judgement
- 41 Payment, with an arm
- 44 Hog in your mouth
- 46 UF President
- 47 In your bread, but hopefully not your muffin
- 48 Said when sending
- back steak
- 49 Tri- plus one
- 50 Tri- plus some
- 51 Listen
- 52 Roman 1052
- 53 Sodas
- 56 You do want this in your muffin
- 57 "As if!"