

MIT rejects the Trump administration's compact

Move comes amidst campus petitions in opposition to the government's demands

By Jada Ogueh, Alex Tang,
and Sabine Chu
NEWS STAFF WRITERS

On Friday Oct. 10, MIT President Sally Kornbluth formally rejected the Trump administration's proposed compact in an email to the U.S. Education Secretary Linda McMahon. This decision came after mounting pressure from many MIT organizations, students and faculty alike, that called on the Institute to formally reject the compact. MIT is the first university to openly decline the compact.

The Institute's Response

In her response to Secretary McMahon, President Kornbluth emphasized MIT's "freely" chosen priorities of academic excellence, merit-based admissions, need-blind financial support, and free expression. She stated while such principles aligned with aspects of

the compact, compliance with the totality of the document would compromise other core Institute values.

In particular, Kornbluth wrote the compact "restricts freedom of expression and [the Institute's] independence as an institution. She wrote that the compact contradicts MIT's core belief that "scientific funding should be based on scientific merit alone." These sentiments echo previous Institute messaging, including a website reiterating the university's focus on "merit-based and affordable" education with a "mission of national service."

Kornbluth added that America's leadership in science and innovation depends on the open competition for excellence in the "free marketplace of ideas," which she states the compact could obstruct. Kornbluth emphasizes the

alleged benefits of the scientific partnership between America's research universities and the U.S. government nurtured by MIT leaders, ending her response by stating that she hopes MIT can continue to work with the administration.

Mounting pressure from students and faculty

On Oct. 9, the MIT Undergraduate Association stated their opposition to the contract in a joint statement with the representatives of student governments from the University of Pennsylvania, Dartmouth, Brown, Vanderbilt, the University of Virginia, and the University of Arizona.

An open letter published by the MIT Graduate Student Union (GSU) has been signed by 30 campus organizations and over 900 individuals at the time of publi-



LEE CHEN—THE TECH

MIT Graduate Student Union holds a press conference on Friday, Oct. 10, 2025, following President Kornbluth's rejection of the Trump administration's Compact for Academic Excellence in Higher Education.

Compact, Page 5

MIT GSU holds press conference on college compact

Attendees commended President Kornbluth's decision to formally reject the compact on Oct. 10



LEE CHEN—THE TECH

MIT formally rejected the Trump administration's college compact on Friday, Oct. 10, 2025. MIT GSU, BSU, BGSA, and LGSA were among the groups commending MIT's decision and denounced the compact's potential divisive effects on their respective communities.

By Vivian Hir
NEWS EDITOR

On Friday, Oct. 10 at 1 p.m., the MIT Graduate Student Union (GSU) held a press conference outside Building 7 commending MIT's decision to formally reject the federal government's proposed college compact. Besides the GSU, representatives of four organizations who signed the Union's open letter attended the event. They delivered remarks on how the Trump administration's policies would impact MIT and the universities that sign the compact. Over 50 people showed up to the press conference. Several carried picket signs reading, "1 public rejection down, 8 to go!"

MIT is the first university out of the nine targeted institutions of higher education to formally reject the compact. In President Korn-

bluth's email sent to U.S. Secretary of Education Linda McMahon on Oct. 10, she stated that the compact undermined some of the Institute's values, including scientific funding based on "scientific merit alone" and freedom of expression. As of this article's publication, Brown University has formally rejected the compact, and the remaining seven universities who received the offer have not made an official decision.

The press conference began with a speech from GSU President Lauren Chua G, who said that the compact is not about students nor freedom, but rather control and division. "It's a thinly veiled attempt to divide us, to make us turn against each other and weaken the very communities that make our university thrive," Chua said.

Between Oct. 1 and 10, 15 MIT organizations worked together to demand a rejection from the MIT

administration. As of Oct. 10, over 30 MIT-affiliated organizations and 900 individuals signed the open letter. Chua applauded MIT for rejecting the compact, calling it a "victory for every single one of us," and reaffirmed that the GSU will not yield to the Trump administration's policies that are "racist, xenophobic, or anti-worker." She encouraged attendees to continue to stand up for their rights and called for the other universities to reject the compact. Students chanted, "Who's got the power? We got the power!" eliciting cheers from the crowd.

After Chua spoke, Black Student Union (BSU) representative Jade Personna '26 delivered a speech about the impact of the Trump administration's attacks on DEI initiatives on MIT. Personna cited the closure of the Institute Community and Equity Office (ICEO) in May

Conference, Page 3

IN SHORT

The last day of classes for half-term subjects is Friday, Oct. 17.

FallFest is on Friday, Oct. 17 from 4 to 7 p.m. on Kresge Oval.

Second quarter PE&Wellness classes begin on Wednesday, Oct. 22.

Family Weekend is from Thursday, Oct. 24, to Friday, Oct. 25.

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

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

MIT files motion about antisemitism complaint

Institute defends itself from claims of direct discrimination or deliberate indifference

By Sabine Chu
ASSOCIATE NEWS EDITOR

On Oct. 8, MIT filed a motion to dismiss a complaint from Lior Alon, an instructor and former postdoctoral fellow in the mathematics department, and Will Sussman, a former graduate student in EECS, who accused the Institute and Professor of Linguistics Michel DeGraff of antisemitism. The Louis D. Brandeis Center Coalition to Combat Anti-Semitism and an anonymous MIT affiliate joined as plaintiffs.

The original complaint from Jun. 25 alleged that MIT failed to quell certain pro-Palestinian rhetoric that the plaintiffs found antisemitic or anti-Israeli, including state-

ments by DeGraff, thereby creating what they deemed a hostile climate. In particular, the complaint alleges that MIT violated Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, which forbids discrimination based on race in programs receiving federal funding, and Title VII, which forbids employment discrimination.

Alon and Sussman mention interactions with DeGraff on social media, including a disagreement on X after Sussman criticized DeGraff's characterization of Zionism as a "mind infection." The exchange prompted Sussman to pursue a harassment complaint against DeGraff through MIT's Institute Dis-



VIVIAN HIR—THE TECH

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The Boston skyline seen from Killian Court on Monday, Oct. 6, 2025.

IS TEQUILA GOOD FOR YOU?

No, it isn't. But... **SCIENCE**, p. 15

THE LIFE OF A SHOWGIRL

reviewed by a self-proclaimed lifelong Swiftie. **ARTS**, p. 10

UNTITLED

the first MINCE event of the year. **ARTS**, p. 12



NEW AND FRESH, LITERALLY

The MIT Farm initiative launched this fall. **NEWS**, p. 5

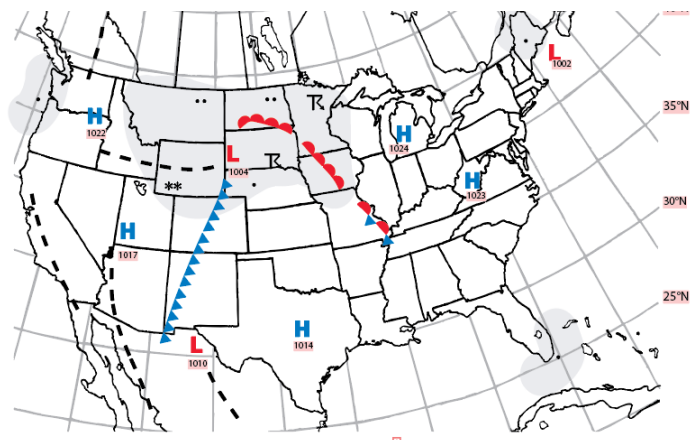
CRASH. OUT.

but hopefully not over these puzzles. **ENTERTAINMENT**, p. 17

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WEATHER FORECAST



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

Relief from the recent rain ahead

By Lou Lahn

CHIEF METEOROLOGIST

After the wet and rainy days of the past week, we have a mostly dry weekend ahead. Temperatures will remain moderately cool in the mid to high 50s, though Sunday will see temperatures in the mid 60s and possibly up to 60. Today looks to be windy, with gusts as high as 30 mph, but the winds will mellow out for a lightly breezy weekend. .

OCTOBER 16

SITUATION FOR NOON (ET)

Extended Forecast

Today: Cloudy. High around 54°F (12°C). Northwest wind 15-20 mph, with gusts as high as 30 mph.

Tonight: Chance of showers. Low around 45°F (7°C). North wind 15-17 mph.

Friday: Sunny. High around 60°F (15°C) and low around 45°F (7°C). North wind 14-16 mph.

Saturday: Sunny. High around 60°F (15°C) and low around 49°F (9°C). Northwest wind around 9 mph.

Sunday: Sunny, chance of evening showers. High around 66°F (19°C) and low around 53°F (12°C). South wind around 11 mph.

Institute expands “The World at MIT” video series

20 faculty members born outside the U.S. share their upbringing and experiences

By Vivian Hir
NEWS EDITOR

In late September, the Office of the Vice Provost for International Activities expanded its video series called “The World at MIT,” which features 20 faculty members born outside the U.S. who shared experiences of making MIT their “professional home.” The series first released 10 videos in 2024, adding 10 more this year.

Faculty members in the video series include Dean of Science Nergis Mavalvala PhD ’97 and Chancellor for Academic Advancement Eric Grimson PhD ’80. According to Global MIT, nearly half of the Institute’s faculty are born outside of the U.S. Furthermore, a third of MIT’s 104 Nobel Laureates were born abroad, including 2024 Nobel Prize in Economics recipient Daron Acemoglu and 2023 Nobel Prize in Chemistry awardee Moungi Bawendi.

For the 2025-2026 academic year, MIT has 3,432 international students, 529 of whom are undergrads and 2,903 of whom are graduate students. 11.6% of the undergrad population is international, while 40.7% of the graduate population is international. In 2024, 43% of graduating seniors reported participating in an international experience at MIT. Although the recent college compact requests universities to restrict international enrollment for undergraduates to 15%, MIT caps enrollment at around 10%, according to President Kornbluth’s letter on Oct. 10. In 2024-2025, international students made up approximately 12% of the undergraduate population.

The newly expanded “World at MIT” video series comes at a time of uncertainty for many international students and professionals. On Aug. 28, the Department of Homeland Security announced new restrictions that impose a four-year period limit on the F and J student visas. In late May, the State Department paused the scheduling of visa interviews for foreign students, which resumed three weeks later in mid June with heightened measures for social media screening. More recently in mid-September, President Trump signed a proclamation stating that new H-1B visa petitions submitted on or after Sept. 21 would require a \$100,000 payment.

These tightened restrictions and new rules have lowered international student enrollment in universities across the country. According to data from the National Travel and Tourism Office, the number of international student arrivals to the U.S. decreased by 19% from August 2024 to August 2025 — a drop of 73,802 students.

In an interview with *The Tech*, Vice Provost for International Activities Duane Boning ’84, SM ’86, PhD ’91 stated that the purpose of the video series is to “highlight and celebrate the importance” of the international community at MIT and the Institute’s international engagements. Although “The World at MIT” started before the 2024 election, Boning noted that the timing of the video series’ recent expansion is pertinent, given that new federal policies have targeted international students and professionals.

In regard to choosing features for the second round released in 2025, Boning wanted to feature



PHOTO COURTESY OF GLADYS AINOO/BEARWALK CINEMA

A collage of MIT faculty featured in “The World at MIT” video series.

faculty members from different disciplines, schools, and regions of the world that would “mesh with and complement with the first set of ten.” Those featured in the newly expanded series include Professor of Physics Pablo Jarillo-Herrero from Spain and Professor of Biology Yukiko Yamashita from Japan.

Despite changes in the federal landscape that have affected the United States’ global image and

international student enrollment, Boning shared that global partners, from foreign universities to international philanthropists, continue their interest in working with MIT. Furthermore, Boning expects that the number of delegation visits this academic year will be similar to the previous year, which hosted 50 high-level delegations from 28 different countries.

“MIT is a national treasure, but it’s an international [one] as well,”

Boning said. “Many of the problems that we face are bigger than [what] MIT even alone can do.”

The professors in the video series also echo Boning’s sentiment, sharing that they value MIT’s diverse and global community. “MIT is a very special place,” Professor of Computer Science Regina Barzilay from Israel and Moldova said. “The more time is spent here, the more you see it, because there are so many brilliant people around you.”

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Student leaders criticize the compact’s terms

Conference, from Page 1

and the replacement of the Office of Minority Education (OME) with the new Office of Academic Community, Empowerment, and Success (OACES) as recent removals of race-based programs.

“We are nervous that the spaces and organizations we fought so hard for are in danger of extinction in the current political climate,” Personna said. She argued that the Trump administration’s new policies are “political stunts” to pressure universities to decrease support for organizations like the BSU. Despite these challenges, Personna reaffirmed that Black students

“belong in higher education” and promised to continue fighting for their community.

Graduate student Malik George ’22 G, Vice President of the MIT Black Graduate Student Association (BGSA), spoke after Personna. George criticized the compact for being an “attack” on “DEI, affirmative action, gender, and immigration.” He argued that the compact doesn’t demand complete admissions data for the purposes of transparency, but rather to control universities. “We cannot swear loyalty to a government that consistently undervalues and attacks any form of science, any form of speech, and most importantly, any person who

disagrees with their beliefs,” George said.

Latinx Graduate Student Association (LGSA) President Carla Garcia G thanked the MIT administration for rejecting the compact and called for MIT to continue defending its core values. Like Personna, Garcia highlighted the importance of resources for underrepresented students at MIT, which have been dismantled in the past year. Garcia stated that MIT’s new policies regarding DEI have adversely affected the Latinx community by impacting their ability to “celebrate [their] identities” and “coordinating advocacy efforts to defend [their] collective interests.”

Garcia then stressed that international students are crucial for MIT’s reputation as a prestigious research institution and maintained that MIT should continue to protect them.

Vice President of the MIT AAUP chapter and Professor of Political Science Ariel White then shared her thoughts about why other universities should also reject the compact. From White’s perspective, the compact was not about specific policies such as tuition or international student enrollment, but rather intended to “leave universities powerless.” White stated that if universities sign the compact, the federal government’s demands would continue,

citing Columbia University’s decision to comply with the Trump administration in March 2025 as an example.

The rally concluded with brief remarks from GSU Vice President Nadia Zaragoza G. Zaragoza acknowledged the diverse student populations that contribute to the MIT community, from Black to queer to international students. “I’m feeling really energized and inspired by our ability to unify and take control of our campus and demand that MIT stand up for us and our rights,” Zaragoza said. “Our mobilizations show that when we come together, when we fight, we win.”

MIT forms Financial Scenarios Working Group

Recent federal policy could dramatically increase financial pressures on MIT

By Samuel Yuan
NEWS STAFF WRITER

At the Sept. 17 faculty meeting, MIT Provost Anantha P. Chandrakasan and Executive Vice President and Treasurer (EVPT) Glen Shor shared insights into the Institute’s strategy as it navigates a perilous financial landscape ahead.

Recently, federal policy has created a challenging financial climate for higher education, particularly for wealthy institutions like MIT. The “One Big Beautiful Act,” signed into law on July 4, 2025, is projected to raise MIT’s endowment tax rate from 1.4% to 8%, effective fiscal year 2027. A new White House order on H1-B visas could compel MIT to spend over \$10 million per year on visa sponsorships. And federal agency efforts to limit reimbursement for indirect research costs would hamper MIT’s ability to maintain its academic infrastructure.

Combined, these factors pose serious risks to the overall health of the Institute and amount to hundreds of millions in additional costs — more than a tenth of MIT’s annual central budget. In turn, Provost Chandrakasan and EVPT Shor have formed a “Financial Scenarios Working Group” composed of faculty and staff experts to map out a response.

Two new pages on the Provost’s website relating to the Institute’s response have recently been made accessible to the MIT community.

One details the working group’s priorities, which include protecting financial aid and student support, “remaining a magnet for top student, faculty, and staff talent,” and “raising more budget-relieving gifts.”

The other page, titled “Exploring New Academic and Institutional Models for MIT,” addresses concerns regarding MIT’s response to a changing higher education landscape. It also summarizes faculty suggestions for changes in education and research.

“Several participants raised the idea of reducing the ‘sticker price’ of an MIT education, or even of going tuition-free altogether for undergraduate and PhD students,” the page states. “MIT should consider ways to reimagine graduate education — shorten PhD timelines, introduce more hybrid formats, and introduce focused, stage-based approaches.”

These are the latest updates from the MIT administration in regards to their strategy as the Institute adapts to the developing financial situation. The revisions came just before the Trump administration asked MIT to sign a compact in return for funding preferences. MIT formally rejected the compact on Friday, Oct. 10, 2025.

Under the endowment tax provisions outlined in the “One Big Beautiful Bill Act,” universities with at least 3,000 tuition-paying students would be forced to pay

either 1.4%, 4%, or 8% excise taxes on investment returns depending on their endowment sizes per student. MIT is among just five schools estimated to fall into the 8% tax bracket.

During the faculty meeting, questions about whether MIT could reduce its tax burden by increasing enrollment arose, according to a written statement to *The Tech* from MIT spokesperson Kimberly Allen. Allen wrote that while the MIT administration is “looking at all dimensions of how the tax applies” in terms of class size, it would take “approximately an additional 6,000 students to move from the 8% tax bracket to the 4% bracket.” She stated, “It is appropriate for MIT to plan for an 8% tax liability and to make budget changes to afford it.”

Some have speculated that Princeton may try to sidestep the endowment tax by increasing financial aid, thereby reducing its number of tuition-paying students to under 3,000.

The White House’s compact demands that the Institute waive tuition for undergraduate students in the “hard sciences,” with “exceptions” for “families of substantial means.” Under MIT’s undergraduate financial aid program — in which around 40% of students paid no tuition in the 2023-2024 academic year — there are an estimated 2,700 tuition-paying undergraduate students.



SAMUEL YUAN—THE TECH

Killian Court in the afternoon Sunday, Oct. 5, 2025.

The Provost’s website recognizes how, in a country where only around 40% of adults hold a Bachelor’s degree or higher, it can be difficult for research universities — especially those with large endowments — to convey their value and argue why they should receive public funding from American taxpayers over other pressing issues.

“Multiple faculty participants saw a need for MIT — and universities more broadly — to do more to communicate the value they provide to society,” the page states. “Communications should correct misinformation but should be con-

ducted with humility. They should aim to explain how universities work, why people should care about what universities do, and the return on investment that universities provide for Americans.”

Institute staff were invited to a webcast forum on Monday, Sept. 29 to ask questions about MIT’s response to these new financial pressures; however, a recording of the staff webcast is unavailable. Allen also encouraged all community members to share their thoughts about the Institute’s response to the financial landscape by emailing budgetsolutions@mit.edu.

Profs. Banerjee and Duflo will move to Switzerland

The couple will join the University of Zurich

By Vivian Hir
NEWS EDITOR

MIT Professors of Economics Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo PhD ’99 will join the Faculty of Business, Economics, and Informatics at the University of Zurich (UZH) in July 2026, according to a UZH press release on Oct. 10, 2025. At UZH, the couple will assume an endowed professorship funded by the Lemann Foundation, which will allow them to continue their research on development economics and policy research.

Banerjee and Duflo were awarded the 2019 Nobel Prize in Economics for their contributions to development economics and anti-poverty research. Their research has covered a wide range of topics across the world, from HIV prevention in Africa to microlending programs in India. They were co-founders of the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL), a global research network established in

2003 in which researchers conduct field experiments related to poverty alleviation.

The two have been at MIT for around 30 years. Banerjee joined the MIT faculty in 1993, after teaching at Princeton from 1988 to 1992, and then at Harvard for a year. Duflo entered MIT in 1995 as a graduate student, earned her PhD in 1999, and then joined the MIT faculty the same year.

According to MIT spokesperson Kimberly Allen, Banerjee and Duflo will continue to be involved in the MIT economics department and co-lead J-PAL despite their move to UZH. Banerjee will spend part of the academic year at MIT and continue to teach and advise graduate students. Duflo will transition to a Professor of the Practice and help administer the MIT’s Department of Economics program in Data, Economics, and Design of Policy (DEDP).

Their decision to leave MIT and the U.S. for UZH comes dur-

ing a perilous time for both higher education in the United States and global anti-poverty work. This year, the federal government officially shut down the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), which provides humanitarian and medical aid in developing countries. In March 2025, Duflo co-signed an op-ed in the French newspaper *Le Monde* criticizing the Trump administration for their attacks on scientific research and academic freedom.

Other prominent professors in the U.S. have left the country to take on faculty positions elsewhere. This year, three professors left Yale University to go to the University of Toronto because of their shared concerns regarding the Trump administration’s attack on universities. For similar reasons, economics professor Matthias Doepke left Northwestern University this year and is now a faculty member at the London School of Economics.

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Interphase community worries about DEI at MIT

Students and alumni share concerns about the replacement of OME by OACES

By Jada Ogueh
NEWS STAFF WRITER

On Sept. 12, the MIT Faculty Newsletter published an issue introducing the Office of Academic Community, Empowerment, and Success (OACES), which replaced the former Office of Minority Education (OME). The choice to remove “minority” from both the office’s title and the OACES website contrasts with the Institute’s past approach to diversity, equity, and inclusion. In the aftermath of this change to the OME, *The Tech* reached out to Interphase alumni and 2025 scholars to discuss the impacts of these changes on the OME’s longest standing program.

The development of OME and Interphase EDGE/x

On April 4, 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated. In response, Dr. Shirley Ann Jackson ’68, PhD ’73, member of the Black Student Union, and former MIT President Dr. Paul Gray ’54, ScD ’60 formed Project Interphase in 1969. Over the years, Project Interphase has been staffed by many Black graduate students, some of whom were Interphase alumni themselves.

Gerald Baron ’84, current Chair of Outreach & Engagement Committee of Black Alumni(ae) of MIT, described his experiences with Project Interphase to *The Tech*. Baron understood that the mission of Project Interphase was to expose intellectually capable students to foundational coursework before they entered MIT. In the two years he was involved with Project Interphase, Baron described the cohort as culturally diverse, including “Black, Latinx, Asian and First American (Native American)” students.

Baron served as a tutor for Project Interphase in 1984 and as the Program Director in 1985. As his first job after graduation, Baron found it rewarding to immediately give back by assisting students with their transition to MIT. In a statement to *The Tech*, Baron felt that Project Interphase acknowledged the diversity of students’ backgrounds by fostering an environment in which students could learn from others different from them and gain access to professors and experiences that would help them become successful at MIT.

Baron noted that the transition to MIT is more challenging for African-American students dealing with imposter syndrome and the effects of others making them feel that they do not belong. He wrote that many African-American students also deal with the weight of family “vicariously living through” their academic success.

In 1973, a report published by the Office of the President outlined issues facing MIT’s racial climate. The report reiterated MIT’s policy on diversity, which called for access to education, employment, achievement, and personal fulfillment to be based solely on “individual ability, interest, and merit.” In 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson issued Executive Order 11246, requiring that “federal contractors not discriminate in employment and take affirmative action to ensure equal opportunity.” In the late 1960s, about 11% of Americans were Black, but each 1,000-member class at MIT had perhaps half a dozen Black students.

The report responded to these conditions by acknowledging that “informal traditions and shared priorities” at MIT were created by a “society dominated by white men,” contributing to “ingrown institutional challenges.” In the spring of 1973, the Commission on Minority Education reported on the unique problems facing minority students, including isolation, insecurity, and “perceived contempt from non-



PHOTO PROVIDED BY MEAGAN MCFADDEN

Students from the 2025 Interphase EDGE cohort at a theme park on Aug. 6, 2025.

minority members of MIT.” The Commission recommended efforts be made to strengthen the sense of community among minority students and facilitate access to the full range of educational and counseling resources that exist at the Institute.

Through the work of the proposed Office of Minority Education in 1973, the MIT administration hoped to create a “truly human environment” where all students could thrive as individuals, not solely as “representatives of ‘the women’s issue’ or ‘the Black issue.’” Thus, in 1975, MIT formally founded the Office of Minority Education (OME).

The OME adopted Project Interphase, which gradually evolved into Interphase EDGE. In 2018, even before the COVID-19 pandemic, former Associate Dean and OME Director DiOnetta Jones Crayton’s team worked with MITx to accommodate a new remote cohort called IPx, culminating in the Interphase EDGE/x program that continues today.

Michaela Purvis ’24 has been involved in Interphase since their admission to MIT in 2020. They participated in IPx 2020, an online program during the pandemic, which they estimated had around 88 students. For Purvis, the biggest reason for participating in Interphase was to receive financial aid. Purvis also attended a predominantly white high school and hoped that Interphase would connect them to students of color, especially since the U.S. was under lockdown. Since the pandemic interrupted their senior year, Purvis found a summer of academic adjustment extremely helpful.

Purvis also praised the second part of Interphase EDGE/x, a two-year engagement with the program revolving around academic success, community building, and professional development. They still keep in contact with their Interphase advisor.

The beginning of the OME’s dissolution

OACES combines the OME and the UAC’s Advising and Student Belonging pillar. In January 2023, Associate Dean and Director Dr. Diep “Yip” Luu joined the Undergraduate Advising Center (UAC). Three new subunits were created:

Advising & Academic Achievement, Advising & Strategic Initiatives, and Advising & Student Belonging (ASB). Similar to the OME, the ASB pillar was committed to “academic success, mentorship, and belonging for students from historically marginalized backgrounds and/or those who have navigated unique paths to MIT.”

On June 29, 2023, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled race-based affirmative action programs unconstitutional. In a 2023 MIT Faculty Newsletter, the Faculty Advisory Committee (FAC) and the OME discussed the court case’s ramifications on MIT. In particular, MIT admission readers would no longer receive mandatory racial information about applications. The FAC argued the affirmative action ruling would cause underrepresented racial and ethnic group members to become “even less represented in [MIT’s] classrooms from 2024 on.” The FAC also claimed the SCOTUS decision would “affect current students who have been told by peers that they were admitted because of their race.” The FAC also believed currently enrolled students may be treated differently from incoming classes starting in 2024.

Days before the ruling, Dean of Admissions and Student Financial Services Stu Schmill ’86 reaffirmed MIT’s commitment to diversity, stating that no matter the ruling, “our commitment to a vibrantly diverse and academically excellent MIT” would remain “undimmed.” The newsletter mentioned Interphase EDGE would continue to play an important role in supporting underrepresented minority students.

However, 2024 saw a stark decline in minority student enrollment numbers, from 25% to 16% in an aggregated profile for the previous four classes, which has now been removed from the MIT Admissions website. The percentage of Black first-year enrolled students dropped three-fold from 15% to 5%, and from 16% to 11% for Hispanic and Latino students.

This drop was reflected in Interphase: according to the OME website, Interphase EDGE usually consists of “70 scholars”; however, student sources attested to an approximate enrollment of 30 for the 2024 Interphase cohort. The year before, the 2023 cohort for Inter-

phase EDGE also fell below expectations, with an estimated 50 scholars participating. Purvis, who worked as an Interphase EDGE residential peer mentor and teaching assistant, suspected it was also because of the “consistent turnover in [OME] admin.” and former Interphase Program Director Somiya Kalloo’s departure. Kalloo did not respond to *The Tech*’s request for comment by the time of publication.

On Feb. 2, 2024, former OME Director Crayton stepped down from her role for unspecified reasons. In an MIT News article, Elizabeth Durant, Communications Officer for the Office of the Vice Chancellor, wrote how Crayton led the OME for 14 years, “advancing OME’s efforts to provide a robust portfolio of programs, services, and resources for undergraduate students of color.” Durant hailed Crayton as a change-maker since her arrival at MIT in August 2009. Among other notable accomplishments, Crayton co-chaired a major MIT 2010 conference on underrepresented minority student success in higher education; she also developed The Standard and the Creative Regal Women of Knowledge (CRWN), programs historically intended to support men and women of color, respectively.

On May 9, 2024, a meeting between the OME and OME-affiliated students took place. Diep Luu, former Interim Director of the OME, outlined future plans for collaboration between the OME and UAC, as well as a potential renaming of the OME entirely. Luu cited “potential organizational changes to the OME, cultural norms, and external scrutiny” as reasons for the move. According to MIT administration, renaming would “create a more inclusive and supportive environment.” The MIT administration stated that they would preserve the ten current OME staff, “ensur[ing] continuity in its specialized programming while avoiding any reallocation of resources to support the UAC’s expansion.”

Baron disapproved of the “possible dissolution” of the OME. “Any attempt to dilute the resources made available to African-American and Latinx students would be a horrendous mistake,” Baron stated.

On Sept. 23, 2024, a public meeting was held between members

of the MIT community and representatives from MIT Admissions and Administration, including Stu Schmill, Melissa Nobles, Karl Reid, and Chris Peterson, to discuss the effects of affirmative action on MIT. A Q&A slideshow revealed many of the attendees’ concerns. Some attendees asked what steps were being taken to keep programming directed towards underrepresented minorities (e.g. OME, WISE, Ebony Affair, Sin LIMITE) sustainable and thriving, pointing to the unexplained drop in minority student percentages, MIT Admissions’s “failure to consult with peer institutions prepared for race-blind admissions,” and planned changes to the minority demographics.

Purvis was in attendance, and stated that the administrators “pretty much said that African-American students are less likely to be prepared” to enter MIT and were “looking for students who have basically already done the GIRs.” Purvis recalled that many were upset due to this “monolithic thinking” and the financial barrier present for students from Title I schools, who would have to pursue these higher courses in community colleges or equivalent courses if their school doesn’t offer them. According to Purvis, administrators stated that Interphase would supplement this knowledge gap for no cost, prompting discourse over the declining Interphase enrollment numbers. “The flaws in their thinking are that they’re already filtering out students that would benefit from Interphase,” Purvis wrote.

On March 17, 2025, Vice Chancellor Darmofal hosted a virtual meeting for current OME program users. Slides from the meeting reveal that from as early as February to April 2024, MIT began “consultation with OME stakeholders to explore options for enhancing collaboration and coordination between the OME and UAC.” Notably, this consultation occurred immediately after Crayton’s departure.

The proposal outlined in the slides would turn the OME into a UAC office to “distinguish” or “elevate” it. Furthermore, the mission and name for the OME would be developed with stakeholders; the former would include “cultivat-

High turnover causes Interphase admin to resign

Interphase, from Page 4

ing a sense of belonging.” All of the proposed names replaced the word “minority” with terms such as mentorship, equity, engagement, educational excellence, community, or belonging.

The formation of OACES

When questioned again in September 2025 about specific reasons for the changes to the OME, Luu, now Senior Associate Dean of the Division of Graduate and Undergraduate Education, wrote, “OACES aspires to provide a more cohesive and coordinated approach to advising, mentoring, academic enrichment, and community building.” According to Luu, OACES aims to build on the “pioneering legacy of the OME” to champion the success of all MIT students, including minority students.

Given MIT’s former dedication to diversity, erasing the minority aspect of the OME concerned members of the community. Ananth Venkatesh ’28 believes that the restructuring of the OME is a “clear elimination of DEI,” satisfying “ridiculous” demands

from the Trump Administration instead of “tackling discrimination and supporting minorities.” Purvis believes that administrators do not realize how detrimental the uprooting of OME programming such as the Talented Scholars Resource Room (TSR^2) and Interphase is to students with higher academic needs.

According to Interphase EDGE 2025 participant Meagan McFadden ’29, the staff told the cohort that OACES would be the same entity as the OME, just under a different name. “The effect and significance of this different name wasn’t really examined as much as it could have been,” McFadden said. She estimated that there were around 90 students in her cohort, a significant increase from 2023 and 2024, which she felt was racially, geographically, and academically diverse. She guessed that there were around 10 to 15 Black students, and was one of three Black people in her 15 to 20 person class.

It is unclear how Interphase 2025’s demographics relate to the Class of 2029’s demographics. (As of this publication, MIT Admissions

has not released the data for the class as a whole.) The 2025 program ended right before the announcement of the new OACES in September, but changes to the OME have been in the works well before its conclusion.

Former Interphase EDGE/x Program Coordinator Maria Aranibar sent out a resignation letter to the OME and greater MIT community on Aug. 27, 2025, outlining her reasons for resigning on June 25, 2025. While Aranibar’s main reason for leaving was to start her master’s this fall, she said it was “one part of the larger equation.” Aranibar believed her work was not appreciated and expressed that OME employees’ labor as “student-facing programming staff is taxing and not equitably compensated.” She noted that her position may not be filled until Spring 2026. In addition, she communicated that the OME had lost its second Program Coordinator on the Academic Success team as well as announcing the termination of the Interphase Program Assistant position in Summer 2026.

Aranibar deemed it “unacceptable” that a “two person team” was expected to run Interphase, a program with over 130 students, with no additional pay and limited staff. She felt that using promotions without increased compensation as an incentive for productivity created a toxic environment for an “office [that already] historically has a high turnover.” Aranibar also mentioned requests from upper leadership to reduce programming for Interphase, which would “affect [its] integrity,” given that the program had already been scaled back since Spring 2024.

Aranibar also cited the September 2024 Town Hall meeting as one of the “biggest moments in this office that made her take strides to leaving,” stating that “upper leadership chose retaliation” instead of investigating student concerns. In her letter, she claimed that leadership failed to escalate racial slur incidents during Interphase 2024, and disregarded a student-led survey in Spring 2024 that showed an “overwhelming amount of support for OME operation and programming.”

McFadden mentioned that the use of slurs was an issue in her cohort as well, which surprised her given that it occurred during an OME program. According to her, staff made an announcement forbidding the use of slurs and emphasizing a zero-tolerance policy for racism. When McFadden tried to report inappropriate usage of slurs to the administration, she found their response slow and the racism could have been handled “a little bit better.” According to her, nothing ultimately came out of the announcement.

Aranibar expressed fears that “the merging with the UAC is a much larger conversation than just office furniture and cubicle space” during the federal government’s “attack on diversity, equity, and inclusion” at MIT. Furthermore, she shared concerns about how the name change of the OME will play a large role in the “institutional amnesia that comes with office mergers.”

“Soon, the institution will forget why the OME was created in the first place,” Aranibar wrote.

MIT is the first to formally reject the compact

Compact, from Page 1

cation. The authors labelled the compact a “fundamental violation of core principles of higher education and academic freedom,” and argued that signing the compact would enable “unprecedented control” from presidential administrations over MIT’s student body’s academic freedom and civil rights.

In an official statement published on Monday, Oct. 6, the MIT Chapter of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) corroborated the GSU’s open letter, calling for MIT senior leadership and the MIT Corporation to reject the compact “wholesale.”

The remaining eight

Nine institutions, both private and public, were asked to agree to

the compact. MIT is the first to formally reject the measure. The other university leaders who have made public statements thus far have also emphasized the importance of preserving their institution’s values.

On Oct. 3, Dartmouth’s president, Sian Leah Beilock, did not explicitly make a decision on whether or not Dartmouth would sign the compact, but stated she would “never com-

promise our academic freedom and our ability to govern ourselves.” On Oct 5th, J. Larry Jameson, President of Penn, stated he would “continue to seek the input of the Penn community” in responding to the compact. On Oct. 15, Christina Paxson, President of Brown, rejected the compact, making Brown the second university to do so.

The University of Texas at Austin, in contrast, may be more re-

ceptive to the compact’s demands. Kevin Eltife, the chairman of the Board of Regents for the University of Texas, stated that he “enthusiastically” anticipated working with university officials to review the plan. The other two public universities, Arizona and Virginia, are still in the process of review as of time of publication.

The institutions have until Oct. 20 to respond to the compact.

MIT Farm connects community with agriculture

Prof. Miho Mazereereuw: “It’s scrappy and entrepreneurial — distinctly MIT”

By Sabine Chu

ASSOCIATE NEWS EDITOR

The MIT Farm initiative, which launched this fall, aims to bring community members to green spaces and green spaces to community members. Their flagship programs include student volunteering sessions at local farms, a weekly community-supported agriculture (CSA) “Fresh Food Bag” pop-up, and a modular miniature mobile farm prototype.

On Oct. 4, *The Tech* spoke with Aleks Banas G, Zachary Rapaport MArch G, and Kahlen Wheaton ’27, three members of the MIT Farm executive team. Banas and Rapaport stated that they were inspired to bring agriculture to the Institute after participating in the MIT Civilian Climate Corps program, a collaboration between the Department of Urban Studies and Planning (DUSP), the Department of Architecture, and the Urban Risk Lab.

The members of the executive team worked with Professor of Anthropology Heather Paxson, who teaches 21A.155: Food, Culture, and Politics. In July, Susy Jones, a Senior Project Manager at MIT’s Office of Sustainability, sent Paxson an article about federal funding cuts affecting Hannan Healthy Foods Farm in Lincoln. Jones put Paxson, who had brought her class to the farm in an earlier semester, in contact with Rapaport and Banas. They worked together with the Hannan Farm team to organize the farmstand and volunteering initiatives.

Through MIT Farm, the organizers hope to create a vibrant student organization rooted in a passion for fresh food. In addition, they seek to accelerate momentum for the creation of physical growing spaces on campus, buoyed by robust partnerships with MIT units and outside farms. “As we’re building this vision for physical spaces, we’re also building the support network,” Banas said. She described a future on-

campus farm as a “teaching space” where volunteers could teach each other how to grow food and spearhead their own agricultural initiatives.

The organizers also aim to make a broader societal impact through food. Noting the prevalence of food insecurity on campus, they emphasized the importance of providing healthy, local, affordable, and sustainably-grown options. Rapaport added that this model could serve both as an exchange of knowledge and an exchange of land. “There’s so much opportunity to reorient the property that MIT owns toward the community, rather than holding it as an asset for the Institute,” Rapaport said.

Miho Mazereereuw, a professor in the Architecture department who leads the Urban Risk Lab, said that the MIT Farm initiative is “starting small with a big vision that can scale. It’s scrappy and entrepreneurial — distinctly MIT”

In their first month of operations, MIT Farm has already gained some traction. From Sept. 13 to Oct. 5, the initiative sent 97 volunteers to nine sessions at Hannan Healthy Foods Farm, the Rooftop Farms at Boston Medical Center (BMC), and Eastie Farm in East Boston. Volunteer tasks vary, but common duties include planting, harvesting, mulching, washing, and packing produce.

Sarah Hastings, the manager of BMC Rooftop Farms, expressed excitement about MIT Farm’s involvement in BMC’s efforts, citing the Center’s ambition to “inspire other institutions to integrate physical food production spaces that enhance education and awareness around food systems principles, nutrition, and sustainability.” She hopes that the urban agriculture community in Boston can continue to flourish through future collaborations.

MIT Farm has sold over 150 Fresh Food Bags, mostly within

the first 30 minutes of each two-hour sales period. These packages come from a partnership with Hannan Healthy Farms, one of the volunteer sites, and are sold at the Stata Center through a partnership between MIT Farm and the Office of Sustainability. The group will have two more sales this semester, for a total of six.

Each harvest box is sold for \$10, but the box contains \$20 of fresh, organic produce, including napa cabbages, shallots, tomatoes, and poblano peppers; half of the cost is subsidized by MIT. Leftover food is donated to the Cambridge and Somerville Programs for Addiction Recovery (CASPAR) shelter near Ashdown House.

Standing at the Fresh Food Bag stand on Oct. 6, volunteer Islam Genina G opined, “Healthy food is what makes us feel good in our bodies, and being part of a system that makes that possible would be great.” He praised the “hands-on experience” of volunteering.

Mohammed Hannan, the founder of Hannan Healthy Farms, told *The Tech* that he hopes to replicate the farm stand model throughout communities in Greater Boston. “Together, we’re working to build a more resilient, inclusive, and equitable local food system,” Hannan said.

Paxson echoed this desire, stating, “I would love to see a campus-based model of Community Supported Agriculture develop that would supply organic produce to our FSILGs and dorm kitchens as well as the farmstand.”

In the weeks ahead, Banas, Rapaport, and Wheaton hope to learn more about seasonal farming practices as they gear up for the winter. Banas stated that “continuing the exchange” between MIT and local communities remained their top priority.

Vivian Hir ’25 MEng ’26 contributed to reporting on this article.



PHOTO PROVIDED BY ZACHARY RAPAPORT

MIT Farm volunteers assemble their mobile farming device.



PHOTO PROVIDED BY ZACHARY RAPAPORT

Community members examine MIT Farm’s Fresh Food Bags in the Stata Center on Monday, Sept. 29, 2025.



PHOTO PROVIDED BY ZACHARY RAPAPORT

Community members line up for MIT Farm’s Fresh Food Bags in the Stata Center on Monday, Sept. 29, 2025.

MIT spends billions redeveloping Kendall Square

Eight new glass buildings to be constructed as part of Kendall Common project

By Samuel Yuan
NEWS STAFF WRITER

Rarely do neighborhoods have rags-to-riches stories quite like Kendall Square. Left vacant during a period of deindustrialization, MIT's backyard is today the epicenter of a bustling biotechnology industry. Lately, the Institute has poured billions into acquiring and redeveloping parts of the neighborhood, betting that its good fortunes will continue long-term despite recent slowdowns.

Once a salt marsh, Kendall Square became a center of industry known for biscuit making and piano crafting in the early 1900s. As a result, it was well-positioned to capitalize on the manufacturing booms of World War I and II. But these trends did not continue in the postwar era. Deindustrialization after the Cold War and an abrupt decision by NASA under President Nixon to drastically cut down a planned Electronics Research Center in Kendall — now the Volpe Center — left the region desolate.

Technology, though, soon began to transform the neighborhood's fortunes.

Biotech origins

The 1971 breakthrough invention of recombinant DNA by Stanford School of Medicine Professor Paul Berg allowed scientists to deliberately combine genes from different sources, enabling the mass production of proteins like insulin. In short order, the technology spread to the East Coast. And, in Cambridge, biology labs at MIT and Harvard quickly began research that pushed the frontiers of the field — both scientifically and legally.

While the technology clearly had enormous potential to do good, residents of the City of Cambridge also worried about the risk it posed to their safety. Stoking these fears, Alfred Vellucci, Mayor of Cambridge at the time, highlighted sensationalized news reports of alleged recombinant DNA research failures.

"In Dover, MA, a 'strange, orange-eyed creature' was sighted and in Hollis, New Hampshire, a man and his two sons were confronted by a 'hairy, nine foot creature,'" Vellucci wrote in a letter to the National Academies of Science.

These concerns eventually convinced the city council to impose a moratorium on recombinant DNA

research and to assemble a working group of professors to investigate the research's safety. In city council meetings that attracted nationwide attention, the public was captivated by back-and-forth dialogue between the mayor and the scientists. It was an early test of science's ability to communicate and assuage fears. It became a textbook example for how science could prevent panic-induced regulation.

Ultimately, the Cambridge council unanimously voted not to ban recombinant DNA research, setting a nationwide precedent that would lay the groundwork for a stable biotechnology industry.

The industry reaction was almost immediate. Soon after the council's decision, MIT Professor Phillip Sharp — along with Harvard Professor Walter Gilbert and others — founded Biogen in 1978. Biogen became the first company to obtain a license for recombinant DNA work, and it was the first biotech company out of many to be headquartered in Kendall Square after a move in the early 1980s.

On March 24, 2025, Biogen announced that it would centralize its operations in the first building of Kendall Common in 2028. Months later, on Sept. 16, 2025, a groundbreaking ceremony was held at the 75 Broadway site, with Massachusetts Governor Maura Healey, Biogen CEO Chris Viehbacher, and MIT President Sally Kornbluth in attendance.

MIT's continued investments

Kendall Common is an ongoing eight-building construction project in Kendall Square, located behind the Cambridge Marriott Hotel. In 2017, MIT acquired the land for a sum of \$750 million. The Common represents the biggest development in a long trend of MIT acquiring land for the investment and development of giant, shiny glass boxes in and around Kendall. Emblematic of this pattern are Kendall Square Sites 1, 3, 4, and 5, which were completed in the early 2020s and are all now either office or residential towers; Kendall Square Site 2, located next to Sloan, remains under construction. In the early 2000s, MIT also spent around \$90 million acquiring four buildings in Cambridgeport.

The Kendall Common project's ambitions are grand, from both a civil planning perspective and a financial perspective. In a planning document for the development, images of Rockefeller Cen-



SAMUEL YUAN—THE TECH

Construction in Kendall Square on Saturday, Oct. 12, 2025.

ter in New York City and Harvard Square are outlined as examples to emulate — reflections of city planners' goal to transform the area from an office park to a more lively district. These plans include four office towers, four residential towers, a community center, parks, and retail space. Financially, the project represents a significant investment of over \$1.2 billion by MIT's Investment Management Company.

These days, Kendall Square is not only home to the offices of biotech companies like Moderna, but it has also seen substantial investment from technology and pharmaceutical companies. Businesses like Google and Amgen have expanded to Kendall — driven, in part, by a desire to share close proximity with MIT. This, in turn, has positively contributed to the health of Cambridge, according to an email to *The Tech* from City of Cambridge Director of Media Relations Jeremy Warnick.

"Commercial and Industrial markets significantly help offset the property tax rate for residents," Warnick wrote. "Furthermore, the health and growth of our commercial industry allows greater opportunities for investments in the City from programming, infrastructure, new capital projects, etc. So, the growth of Kendall Square has

played a pivotal role in the health and growth of Cambridge."

But even as MIT continues to double down on neighborhood real estate ventures, it is becoming increasingly apparent that commercial investments are slowing down. On July 2, 2025, the Boston Globe reported that MIT's investments in Kendall have become bigger "gamble" than they used to be due to increased pressure on university endowments and slowdowns across the life sciences sector. On June 10, 2025, the New York Times reported that Yale was shifting away from long-term holdings managed by private equity — part of a larger effort by some universities to move towards more liquid assets due to recent federal pressures. Moreover, according to a Colliers office space report from July 17, 2025, Cambridge had an all-time high office vacancy rate of 26.2% during 2025 Q2, more than double the historical average.

The Colliers report attributed part of this increased vacancy to oversupply. Indeed, in addition to MIT's new investments in Kendall Square, Harvard is attempting to emulate the Kendall model nearby in Allston, adjacent to the Harvard John A. Paulson School of Engineering and Applied Sciences, with the construction of an "Enterprise Research Campus" adding

more than two million square feet of new space.

Still, the cyclical nature of industry investment, the enduring reputation of MIT innovation, and the promise of growth from new technologies offer glimmers of hope into the future. Earlier this year, NVIDIA, the world's most valuable public company, announced that it would begin building an "Accelerated Quantum Computing Research Center" in the Boston area by late 2025. While an exact location has not been publicly announced yet, NVIDIA expressed interest in collaborating with the Engineering Quantum Systems (EQuS) group at MIT. At the 2025 GTC March Conference in San Jose, CA, NVIDIA founder and CEO Jensen Huang conveyed optimism for the center.

"Working with the wider quantum research community, the NVIDIA Accelerated Quantum Research Center is where breakthroughs will be made to create large-scale, useful, accelerated quantum supercomputers," Huang said.

The MIT Investment Management Company did not respond to *The Tech's* request for comment by the time of publication, and an MIT website detailing more about the Kendall Common and Volpe parcel is currently unavailable.

The motion refutes claims against MIT and Prof. DeGraff

Motion, from Page 1

crimination and Harassment Response Office.

John Doe, an anonymous former postdoctoral associate at MIT who now works as an instructor at a different Institute department, joined as a plaintiff on an amended version of the complaint filed Sept. 17. Doe, who is Israeli, accuses his labmates and PI of antisemitic and anti-Israeli hostility. He argues that he was dismissed from his lab because of his identity.

In their motion, MIT argues that the plaintiffs failed to demonstrate any "direct discrimination" by the Institute against Jewish or Israeli community members. Rather, the Institute's motion recounts a concerted effort by university leaders to curb antisemitic activity on campus since Oct. 2023, far from the "deliberate indifference" standard required in Title VI cases for prosecution of indirect discrimination.

MIT also reports that Doe "received MIT's assistance to transition to another (higher paid) position" despite his claims. The motion contends that the Louis D. Brandeis Center lacks standing because the plaintiffs failed to show a unified "theory of discrimination" against Jewish students on campus.

In its argument, MIT underscores Alon and Sussman's deliberate choice to engage publicly in political discourse regarding the conflict in Gaza. It stated that DeGraff's disagreements — also public — were with the plaintiff's political views, not their ethnicity or religion.

Kimberly Allen, an MIT spokesperson, wrote to *The Tech* that "our motion speaks for itself." She stated that MIT does not comment on individual personnel.

At the time of publication, Alon and Sussman did not respond to *The Tech's* request for comment.

Solution to Crash											
from page 17											
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Solution to Out											
from page 18											
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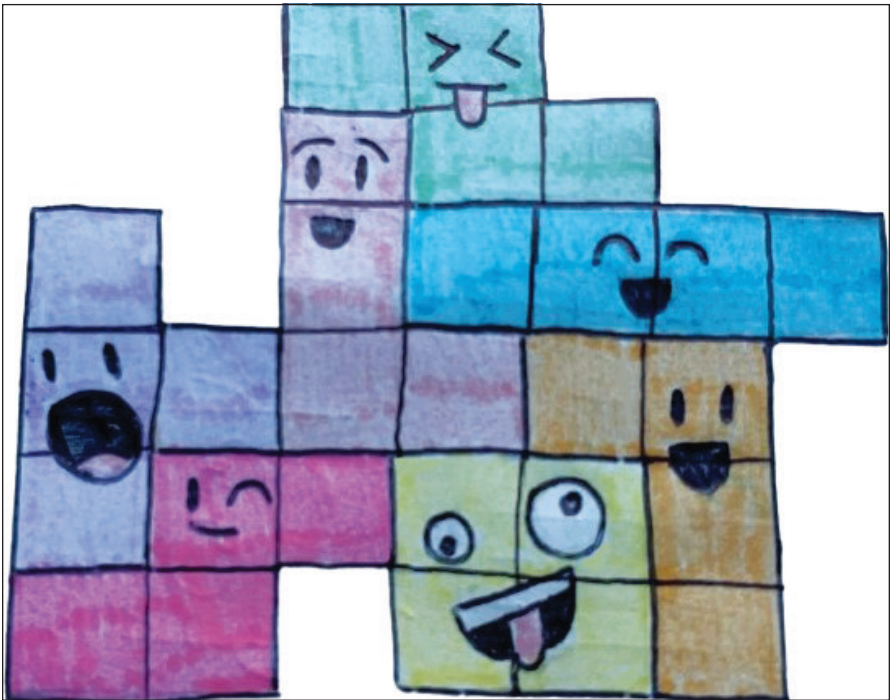


LATYR NIANG—THE TECH

The map shrinks, and peace is declared.

FROSH FILES

Tetris
On fitting in



SHELLY YANG

Everything starts falling into piece.

By Shelly Yang

Community has been the glue that holds my sanity together.

The opposite coast holds what I used to call home, now 3,000 miles away. Throughout my 18 years of revolving around the sun, I established communities wherever I could: home, school, extracurriculars, on-line. As welcoming as the MIT community is, it still feels a little strange to be uprooted. I'm used to being known, not in the sense of being famous, but rather understood.

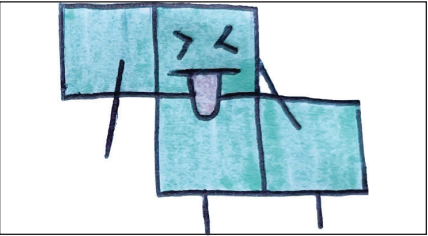
Throughout my classes, clubs, and living groups, I've met a lot of people. I have trouble remembering everyone's names; rather, I'm much better at recognizing someone by face. The trouble with this, though, is I know I'll have seen somewhere before, but I can't recall their name nor where I met them. It's especially awkward when I want to talk to them, but can't initiate a conversation because I don't have their name in my head. It's even worse when they remember my name, and I awkwardly stand there trying to remember where I've seen them before.

Even when I do remember both, I still have trouble taking the first step to hang out with people. I hesitate to text someone directly and ask what they're up to because I worry it might come off as annoying, so I usually don't. Instead, I rely on chance; I show up to random events or my usual study spots and hope to run into someone I know. That actually works more often than I'd expect, but it still makes it hard to stay in touch with the people I really want to see.

What I've come to realize, though, is that people generally aren't annoyed when you reach out. In fact, I really appreciate it when someone texts me first, but for some reason, I don't extend that same logic to others. It takes conscious effort to remind myself that maintaining a connection means reaching out, not just waiting for it to happen. Maybe that's because I'm not just trying to talk to people; rather, I'm trying to really understand them. Everyone here is doing something interesting, and while I do enjoy those conversations, I think part of me is impatient to actually understand someone's values rather than what they do. If someone is completely stripped of their activities, beliefs are what make someone unique. To me, understanding those values feels most fulfilling and intellectually stimulating.

Obviously, being that vulnerable with someone within a few weeks is very rare, which is why I'm tethered to the communities back in my hometown, where I don't have to explain myself. I've had trouble keeping in touch with people back home because of the time difference, but I'm also having trouble relating to the people here since we've only been together for a short period. It takes time, but I always feel like I could be doing more to find a strong community here, to find my new home.

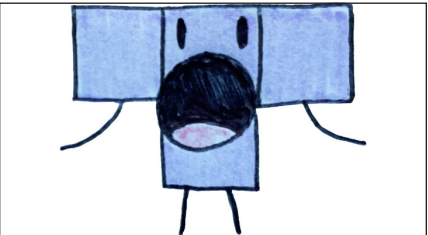
Maybe home is a bunch of communities stitched together into one. I like to think of it as Tetris blocks: each block (Z, T, J, O, L, S, and I) represents a different community. Right now, they're still falling, looking for a place below. I feel like I'm jumping between them, trying to see how they fit together.



SHELLY YANG

And so I introduce the Z Tetris block, which represents my dorm floor, 5W (pronounced "fifth west"). When I was deciding my living community for the next four years, I remember the upperclassmen were remarkably chill when chatting with freshmen. I didn't know if I was going to stay on this floor at the time because my dorm, East Campus, has an event called Hall Rush where we explore all of the floors to glean their culture and rank our top choices. I ended up opting out of the entire process to stay in 5W. One of the major reasons I chose to stay was that I really enjoyed hanging out with the upperclassmen on the floor. They made an effort to get to know us freshmen and included us in their traditions, like kekechez (where the floor enjoys cookies and cheese together) and hallfeed (where we enjoy some freed food as the hall chairs make their announcements). I also loved the mix of chill and chaotic vibes of the floor. It's much more laid-back than the other floors, so it's nice to live on. Also, there are cats, which is enough of a selling point.

In general, I appreciate East Campus as a whole. I think it filters a very specific subset of the MIT community, which ended up being a good fit for me. Even though the culture of each floor is different, you can freely traverse the other floors and hang out — people are pretty inviting. There are lots of mixers between floors, which I don't hear much about in other dorms. The one inconvenience, however, is being separated from all the other dorms, so I do sometimes feel isolated from the general MIT community. Luckily, the other Tetris pieces alleviate this feeling of isolation.



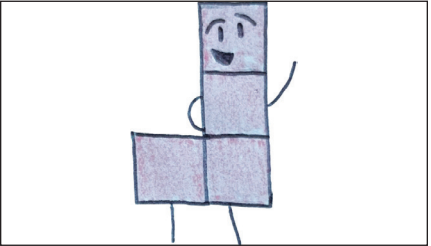
SHELLY YANG

In particular, I'm part of the MIT-Wellesley Toons, represented by the T Tetris block. The Toons are an acapella group and one of the first communities I joined. I knew I wanted to try out acapella in college after being blown away when I watched the Logarithms perform at Campus Preview Weekend. At the time, I didn't realize there were so many more acapella groups, so during the hectic weekend of auditions, I speedran as many of them as I could. I honestly didn't expect to get into any, because the extent of my experience was singing in my elementary school's choir and playing piano. I just did it for the lore.

There is so much to learn from everyone, and I'm excited to be able to sing with such

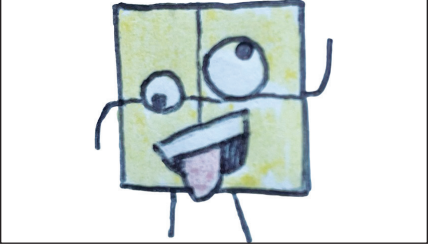
a well-established group. Unlike the other acapella groups, The Toons have members from colleges other than MIT, namely Wellesley College and Olin College of Engineering. Wellesley and Olin are pretty close to each other, so half our rehearsals are at MIT, while the other half are at Wellesley. To get to Wellesley from MIT, it's about a 45 minute bus ride using the Local Motion bus, which we affectionately call the Loco. While we get quite annoyed about how the Loco is always at least 20 minutes late during rush hour, the trip is worth it — we get to eat at the Wellesley dining hall. The food at MIT pales in comparison to Wellesley. To be clear, I do not think MIT dining is bad, but it could be better. Apparently, the students at Wellesley think their dining hall food sucks, but I think most of them haven't eaten at MIT before.

Anyhow, I enjoy the mix of people from different colleges because there is more variability in how people think about college and future careers. Additionally, the last hour of rehearsals is reserved for "check-ins" — we go in a circle and everyone shares what's been going on in their lives since the last rehearsal. At first, I thought this would be one of those quick, pointless icebreaker-esque meetings, but everyone is actually very open about sharing. Because most members have known each other for several years, they set the stage for a close-knit check-in session, which makes everyone else more willing to talk about their recent happenings. Of course, no one is forced to share if they don't want to, but I appreciate having a safe space where I can be more vulnerable.



SHELLY YANG

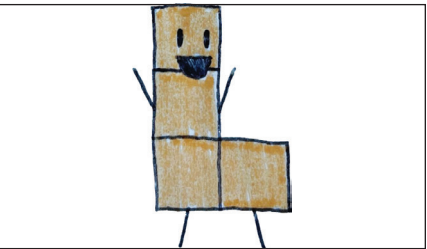
Another space is here, through writing. I represent *The Tech* with the J Tetris block — unfortunately, there is only one T block, but surely, J is close enough. They have a general meeting with everyone, except my acapella rehearsal at Wellesley overlaps with it. However, there's a meeting specifically for people writing for Campus Life; usually, there's a group of 3-5 people. I love how laid-back it is and how we can talk about anything. At the same time, the people are very vibrant, which is very refreshing after a long day.



SHELLY YANG

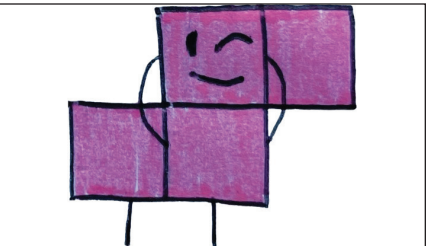
Inevitably, one must pset. That's where the O Tetris block comes in, representing my academic groups. In each of my classes, there is somewhat of a community, and I notice it the most for 6.1210 (Introduction to Algorithms). I have not met a single person who finds it a breeze; it's not shocking that people bond together in times of struggle. Most people seem to work better with others, and it's highly encouraged to form groups with others for the collaborative aspect. However, I have trouble focusing in groups because I end up wanting to talk to people. Often, I wonder if I should keep trying to force myself to work better in a group, or if I should just accept that I work differently. I'm realizing that I compare myself to other people a lot; I'm more productive when I focus on what works for me. I tend to be quite impatient in figuring out my best workflow, but I'm working on being kinder to myself. Even though I'm still figuring things out, I've enjoyed meeting all these people in my classes.

I've also learned that calling is a pretty common mode of communication, which I wasn't used to. I've missed a bunch of calls from people in 6.1210, because I simply wasn't good at picking up. I am more used to scheduled calls, as I'll actually be expecting a call. I'm still terrible at responding to calls, because I usually have Do Not Disturb on, but I am growing to enjoy the spontaneity of these 6.1210 calls.



SHELLY YANG

One group that's been my foundation are the people I met at Campus Preview Weekend. I represent them with the L block since they don't take Ls. I don't always see them because they frequent Simmons, which is quite far from East Campus, but catching up with them is nice. We've had a fair number of movie nights, where I had the opportunity to become slightly more cultured. For reference, I've watched so few movies that I could probably list them with the fingers on my hands. I've watched Avatar and a part of Arcane with them. I also got to play Silksong, and it's the inspiration for a mural I'm working on with someone else on our floor.

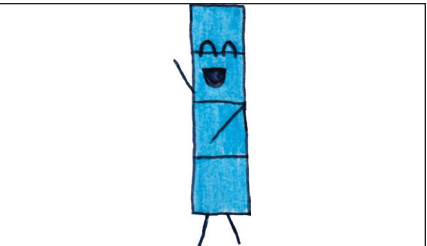


SHELLY YANG

I surprisingly haven't felt homesick a lot. Sometimes, though, my identity feels suspended. Perhaps this is where the pieces falling in Tetris come into play; I feel like I'm falling, but I don't know where I'll land. I'll be representing the self with the S Tetris block. Not only am I changing as I'm here, but I can't clearly remember the last time I've had to explain myself to someone from the very beginning. I taught a lot in high school, so if I cannot explain a topic to someone else, I equate that to not knowing the material at all. Not having a full grasp of who I am scares me; how do I know how I'm going to react under certain situations? I have a pretty decent idea of who I want to be, but sometimes, I'm not sure if I should strive for that image or if I should move the goalposts when necessary.

Because college is such a new environment, I've had to think about how I want to assert myself in it. I quickly found I'm someone who thrives with a lot of close connections, but those take a long time to form.

A support system I've been looking into is therapy. The tuition for MIT covers a lot of health-related resources, so I decided to investigate them. My sessions are through Mantra Health, and I'm currently seeing my therapist twice a week over the phone. I've actually been considering a therapist since high school and am glad to finally try it out!



SHELLY YANG

And when the world feels like it's going to become an absolute wasteland and nothing feels like it's working out, I turn to my friends and family back in Nevada, where I am from. It's incredibly satisfying to hit a Tetris in the game with an I block, which is what I'll be representing this group with. For me, home isn't a physical residence, because those change throughout life; rather, it's the people I built connections with. I'm lucky to have amazing parents and friends who I've known since elementary school. They've saved me more times than I can count. Even if I'm not the best at calling them, we catch up in no time when we do.

Each Tetris block represents a fragment of who I am and who I'm becoming. They don't always fit neatly, and sometimes I need to rotate them again and again before they settle. But the gaps remind me that growth isn't about perfection, but about trying again and again. With time, patience, and the people around me, I can see it happening: everything starts falling into place.

SPORTS SCIENCE WEATHER ENTERTAINMENT OPINION NEWS FEATURES CAMPUS LIFE ARTS

HUMANS OF MIT

It's time to listen to Kip Clark

He's been listening to MIT for years; now it's our turn to listen to him

By Augusto Schwanz and Shelly Yang

Imagine this: you're on your way to your dorm after a long day of classes, swarmed with psets from every class, projects from clubs, and missed messages from friends and family. You wish you could talk to someone, but it feels like no one is there to listen. Your eyes droop a little, but not quite because of a physical kind of tiredness. You feel a tightening in your chest, wondering if this struggle will ever end. Walking in the night, you wonder if this will be the last all-nighter you'll be pulling this semester, or if there will be more. As you pass the staircase in front of Lobby 7, you see a humongous sign with just two simple words: "Free Listening."

MIT is a place of relentless motion. Between psets, essays, and late-night study sessions, it's easy to mistake productivity for purpose. Sometimes, conversations feel like transactions, whether as a part of collaborations built around deadlines or friendships tied to shared workloads. In this kind of environment, connections can feel shallow, and the act of listening without judgment feels almost radical.

That's exactly what Kip Clark does. Every once in a while, he plants himself by Lobby 7 with that "Free Listening" sign, inviting anyone who passes by to stop and talk. He doesn't take notes. He doesn't offer advice. He just listens.

For some students, he's become part of MIT's landscape, like the Great Dome or the Infinite Corridor. People ask, "Ever seen that guy with the 'Free Listening' sign?" For others, he's the first person to hear truths they've never said aloud: fears about failure, uncertainty about belonging, the invisible weight of trying to live up to expectations. Kip's presence reminds people that being heard is not a luxury; it's a human need.

It is now Wednesday, Sept.17. Walking down the Infinite, eyes glued on your phone while scrolling your Dormspam feed, you briefly look up, trying not to run

into anyone. In the corner of your eye, you see a familiar person on a poster: "*He's been listening to MIT for years; it's time to listen to him.*" Even though you're drowning in psets, you feel the urge to listen to the guy who listened to you.

At 5:30 p.m., you enter the Number Six Club house, unsure what to expect as you walk up the wooden stairs. On the second floor, a large room filled with fruits, cookies, comfortable sofas, and a single chair at the center of the room warmly welcomes you. People quickly fill up the space, and soon, a familiar face appears, sitting in the center chair.

After a brief aside on the protein content of watermelon and an introduction to those unfortunate enough to not be previously familiar with him, Kip recounts why he does what he does. Born and raised in the Greater Boston area, he recalls what could charitably be called a tense relationship with his parents. Marked by rejection and emotional absence at some critical moments of his adolescence, he felt like he wasn't being heard. Kip makes a particularly apt metaphor, saying that one can be a great construction worker and make great buildings, but that might not translate into making a good home.

You soon learn that Kip got the idea of "free listening" from a friend named Debbie who did a very similar thing at other locations. In July 2018, he debuted this iconic activity at the School-That-Should-Not-Be-Named nearby; less than a year later, he made his way down the road to MIT.

At MIT, the very first person to confide in Kip spoke about his sexuality, something that he hadn't confided to anyone else about. Another spoke to Kip about her suicidal ideation — Kip gratefully recalls that he saw her around campus months later. Others spoke to him about impostor syndrome, parental expectations, the need for a sense of achievement, and many other things that plague our community's minds, yet don't get spoken of.

Invariably, you feel like you can relate to some of the things that Kip brings up.

One of the things you appreciate is Kip's emphasis on consent; just as no one forces him to listen, no one forces anyone to speak, to stop, or even to look at Kip while he sits at the stairs to Lobby 7. This is intentional, and it makes sense. The whole point is to emphasize authenticity and a willingness to connect; that authenticity may not hold if the other person spoke from a feeling of requirement.

Soon, the conversation turns back to the MIT community in general. While MIT is generally great and you enjoy your time here, you've had this intangible feeling that that doesn't sit right with you. In his infinite wisdom, Kip puts a good name to what causes this feeling: a culture of transactionality.

In a community that does so many great things, connections are inevitably made with the intention of reaching some sort of economical or logistical goal, rather than for the sake of making genuine connections. This happens often enough that you even recognize the name for it: "networking." You make friends with someone because they're part of the executive committee you want to join, or someone in-

troduces themselves to you because they want to join your study group. Here, it can feel like you're being incentivized to act as if you are going for a high score in a video game, but the truth is, as Kip puts it so succinctly, "Life is not an optimization problem."

If anything, Kip's listening is a rejection of this culture. When Kip listens and you speak, no party has any ulterior motives nor secondary goals. Kip listens because he is interested, not because he intends to fix your problems or make any sort of profit from your words; he listens simply to listen. You speak not to attract attention or to get sympathy; you speak simply to share your thoughts and to make your voice heard, because you are allowed to take up space.

The talk ends, and as you walk out of the Number Six Club, you feel a strange sense of hope. Strange because it has become quite apparent to you that *the* solution to the world's problems doesn't exist, and the fact that such a panacea doesn't exist should worry you. Yet, you still feel hope, because it is the little things that matter the most: when someone lets you in, or when you let someone in. Collectively, these moments can be far more meaningful and effective in our lives, if we let them.

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VIVIAN'S REFLECTIONS

Unpluq encourages users to unplug from their smartphones

The app's distraction barrier effectively reduces screen time

By Vivian Hir
NEWS EDITOR

From May to July, I used Unpluq, a phone habit tool designed for reducing screen time on smartphones. The app allows users to block certain apps, such as social media or email, for a set amount of time. However, what makes Unpluq unique is the tag it comes with, which unblocks apps when it is tapped against the phone. Although the tag is Unpluq's main barrier against distraction, other ways to unblock apps include actions such as tapping a specific pattern and shaking the phone.

Given that the app was designed to minimize distractions, the tag's unblocking capability may seem counterintuitive. However, having to complete a particular action to use apps requires users to make a conscious decision about their phone usage. By adding this friction, the app incentivizes people to spend less time on distracting apps. According to their website, the average Unpluq customer reduced their daily screen time by one hour and 20 minutes.

Unpluq has a free and premium version. The free version allows users to block up to two apps via two distraction barriers (tap pattern or shake) for a single schedule. On the other hand, the premium version (\$66 per year) does not limit the number of blocked apps or schedules; it also offers more than six distraction barriers, including the tag.

In my case, I used Unpluq Premium for 90 days on a free trial, courtesy of Unpluq. Instead of using the tag, I chose the tap pattern as my distraction barrier, which required me to click on random dots in a 3x3 grid seven times before allowing me to un-

block an app. Although I was not unhappy about my screen time (30-40 minutes per day) before using Unpluq, I was curious about how I could further improve my phone usage.

For context, I do not have social media or entertainment apps like Instagram, TikTok, or YouTube on my phone; the apps that contribute to my screen time are iMessage, Gmail, and Safari. Over the summer, I installed Discord and Messenger because I didn't have access to my personal laptop while at work and on weekend trips, but then deleted the apps once the school year started.

During the time I used Unpluq, I decided to create a schedule that would prevent me from using certain apps for about an hour before I went to bed and an hour after I woke up. These apps included iMessage, Gmail, and Safari. The only apps I could use were essential ones, like Maps and Camera. Although my phone isn't the main reason I stay up late (it's actually my computer), I still thought it would be good to encourage myself to not check my phone right before going to sleep or waking up.

At first, I was somewhat skeptical about the effectiveness of Unpluq, but the distraction barriers were surprisingly helpful. To unlock an app for just five minutes, I had to tap on random circles again and again. Fortunately, I only had to go through this ordeal a few times to send an important text before going to bed.

Although the tap pattern task was easy to complete and took less than ten seconds, tapping on random circles just to use an app felt very stupid, which was the point of the barrier. Not wanting to deal with the extra friction that Unpluq introduced, I simply accepted the block schedule I set for myself. As a result, I got used

to not checking my phone before bed or after waking up, and learned that I wasn't missing out on much by adapting to this change.

Technically, iPhone users can use Apple's app limits to block apps after a daily limit is reached or the Downtime feature to

changes that came with Unpluq were minimal. Nevertheless, I recommend Unpluq for people who want to reduce their screen time significantly by spending less time on TikTok or Instagram.

If you are someone looking for better alternatives to other tools to reduce



PHOTO COURTESY OF JORN RIGTER

The Unpluq Tag is a phone habit tool designed to block apps and reduce screen time.

limit phone usage during sleep. However, bypassing these limits is much easier, since there's no barrier to requesting more time. Meanwhile, the Unpluq app intentionally introduces friction to prevent one from accessing distracting apps.

Overall, Unpluq is a great app for reducing screen time, though for someone like me who did not have issues with screen time prior to downloading Unpluq, the

screen time, you might want to consider trying Unpluq for free. If the free version of Unpluq is still not enough, then you can consider getting the Unpluq Premium subscription for \$66 a year. At the end of the day, time is money, and money is time. So why not give Unpluq a try to get back your time, attention, and productivity?

Note: Unpluq reached out to the author to review their product and app.

ALBUM REVIEW

Turn Off the Show, Girl

A lifelong Swiftie realizes her GOAT is indeed washed

★☆☆☆☆

The Life of a Showgirl

Taylor Swift

Republic Records

October 3, 2025

By Sabine Chu
ASSOCIATE NEWS EDITOR

This year, October in Cambridge began with a cold snap. At 11:57 pm on the 2nd, as I walked through Central Square in a ratty sweatshirt from my high school’s Science Olympiad team, I saw my phone light up. “Not life of a showgirl being out early,” wrote one of my best friends, whom I’ve known since seventh grade. She added a screenshot of her Apple Music; sure enough, there it was: Taylor Swift’s *The Life of a Showgirl*. These 12 sparkly orange-and-green tracks were ready for the world. But was I, a lifelong Swiftie, ready for *them*?

Short answer: no. If any aspect of the circumstances in which I first listened to *Showgirl* prophesied the album’s content, it would be the sudden change in temperature, not the nostalgic comfort of long-time friendship. *The Life of a Showgirl* is the nadir of T. Swizzle’s corpus in lyrics, production, vocals, and visuals. I don’t know if her reputation (ha) will ever recover.

The Fate of Ophelia
Pros: Max Martin/Shellback did a good job on the production. The tune is fun and danceable; I’m sure that it will soundtrack lots of homecoming dances this fall.

Cons: Swift’s remarkably light on the Shakespeare references, besides a throw-away reference to drowning that echoes the (hideous) album cover more than Millais’s famous painting. Why is there not a single reference to *Hamlet*’s “Paint an inch thick”? Especially for an album celebrating showgirls? I’m not faulting Taylor for misinterpreting literature, per se — “Love Story” is a stone-cold classic, and it ends with Romeo and Juliet driving off into the sunset — but I think she should stop claiming the title of “English teacher” if she doesn’t read.

Rating: 2.5/10
Elizabeth Taylor
Pros: This is my favorite song on the album — maybe more accurately, my least *least* favorite. The drums and judiciously placed backup vocals lend a much-needed urgency to the track. Unlike “Wood” (see below), her breathy “ah”s work here. I also liked the line “Be my NY when Hollywood

hates me,” although I’m not sure why — maybe because TS so consciously aligns herself with suburbia for much of the rest of the album?

Cons: The bridge is boring. It feels like she just Googled “elizabeth taylor’s most known characteristics.” I’ve always said that one of Taylor Swift’s best traits as a writer is her ability to imbue incredibly specific moments with universally relatable emotions; when she relies on someone else’s biography, I’m often let down.

Rating: 5/10
Opalite
Pros: Passable beat and vocals here. I would have definitely listened to this at 14 in a park with my friends.

Cons: I *know* that one million middle schoolers are about to go crazy over the whole “onyx night” versus “opalite sky” thing. The weather/sky metaphor is both underbaked — at some point, lightning becomes a speed bump — and pushed too far. (Surely a billionaire can find cowriters who can do better than “You had to make your own sunshine.”) It’s giving ChatGPT.

Rating: 3/10
Father Figure
Pros: Her voice has gotten better.

Cons: “Your thoughtless ambition sparked the ignition / On foolish decisions, which led to misguided visions” is characteristic of a 2020s-era Swiftian problem: bloated, adjective-heavy lyrics that make no sense. Plus, the George Michael sample doesn’t work. Skip.

Rating: 1/10.
Eldest Daughter
Pros: I guess it’s good that she knows her birth order?

Cons: Everything else, especially the lines “Every eldest daughter / Was the first lamb to the slaughter / So we all dressed up and we looked fire.” I felt my heart shrink three sizes over the course of this song. So, so lame. And for a Track 5? Guys.

Rating: 0/10
Ruin The Friendship
Pros: It’s interesting and impressive that she can make her voice sound younger when she sings about high school, but probably a consequence of being famous for 20 years.

Cons: I hate to criticize a song where she discusses a real person’s death, but I couldn’t get through this one. Sonically, it’s a snoozefest.

Rating: 2/10
Actually Romantic
Pros: I like the backing and tempo on this one. Also, I’m a “Better Than Revenge” fan, so it feels a little weird to criticize a Taylor song for putting down another woman...

Cons: BUT. This song is really quite misogynistic, and I’m also weirded out by the fact that Charli XCX’s “Sympathy is a knife”

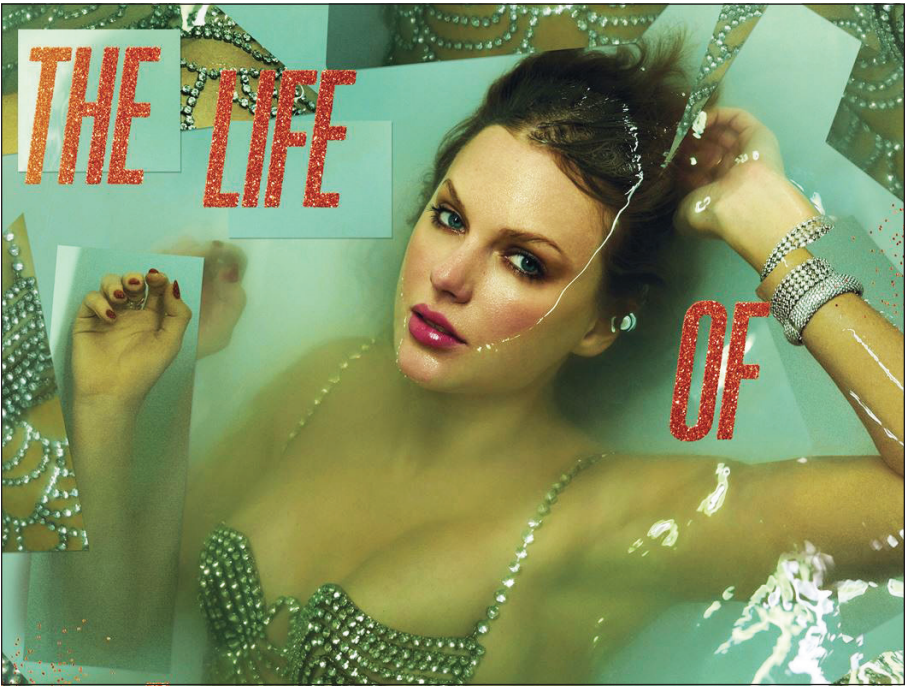


PHOTO COURTESY OF REPUBLIC RECORDS

Despite the sparkles, Taylor Swift’s ‘Life of a Showgirl’ disappoints.

isn’t a diss track and Taylor chose to react with an openly hostile, aggressively sexual but deeply unerotic hairflip.

Rating: 0.5/10
Wi\$h Li\$T
Pros: No way.

Cons: Come on. In what world would this song be romantic? Why is one of America’s most famous self-proclaimed feminists romanticizing being barefoot in the kitchen? Also, “Please God, bring me a best friend I think is hot” — are *those* your vows? If I was Travis Kelce, I’d be offended.

Rating: 0/10
Wood
Pros: The instrumentals (which are straight-up stolen from the Jackson 5). I’m happy that she and Travis are physically compatible!

Cons: It’s all too much information, none of it very well expressed, but despite all the fawning over Kelce’s “manhood,” I still know very little about him as a person.

Rating: 1/10
CANCELLED!
Pros: ???

Cons: Babe, get offline. “Did you girl-boss too close to the sun” is just stupid. To what “underworld” do you belong? The NFL wives’ club? The simultaneous victim and villain personae are making less and less sense as she spends more and more time topping charts and receiving undue adulation from formerly respectable music critics.

Rating: 0/10
Honey
Pros: I always like it when she draws out words: *huhhh-knee*. Plus, “forever night stand” is a legitimately fun play on words.

Cons: She’s had much better love songs that acknowledge the pressures of fame. I don’t know what to say. Stream “Ours” or “Delicate.”

Rating: 3/10
The Life of a Showgirl (Ft. Sabrina Carpenter)

Pros: Sabrina Carpenter has a lovely, rich voice and a great sense of humor when she sings — the whispery note that “her mother took pills and played tennis” is perfectly tongue-in-cheek. I wish this song was just her.

Cons: “Legitly” rhyming with “Kitty,” “pretty,” and “witty.” The lyrics generally. Taylor’s vocals, which pale in comparison to Sabrina’s.

Rating: 3/10
Final Verdict

The Life of a Showgirl is several times worse than its predecessor *The Tortured Poets Department* (2024) — no easy feat given that *TTPD* contained the lyric “touch me while your bros play Grand Auto.” At least last year’s Taylor was memorable. This time around, she just sounds like she’s out of ideas. Comparing this record to even older ones, like my personal favorites *Speak Now* and *Red*, filled me with outrage. I felt myself wondering why I had listened; even more, I asked why I’ve adored Taylor Swift for half my life.

There’s no clear answer to either question — inertia, loyalty, masochism, hope, an utter lack of taste? In any event, I’ve grown tired of Swift’s utterly lifeless show.

CONCERT REVIEW

An evening of grandeur from Jupiter’s grace to a Hero’s glory

The BSO dazzles the audience with Mozart’s Jupiter Symphony and Strauss’ Ein Heldenleben

Mozart’s Jupiter Symphony and Strauss’s Ein Heldenleben

Boston Symphony Orchestra (BSO)

Conducted by Andris Nelsons

Symphony Hall

September 27, 2025

By Serena An and Cristine Chen

The air inside Symphony Hall crackled with anticipation as the Boston Symphony Orchestra (BSO) took to the stage, delivering a mesmerizing performance of Mozart’s final masterpiece Symphony

No. 41, *Jupiter*, followed by Strauss’ autobiographical tone poem *Ein Heldenleben*. The evening carried listeners on a beautiful journey from the radiant, regal brilliance of Mozart’s melodies to the sweeping heroism and emotional depth of Strauss’s orchestral storytelling.

Symphony No. 41, dubbed *Jupiter*, alludes to the magnanimous Roman ruler of gods of the same name. Mozart never gave this name to his composition, but it was rather awarded posthumously based on his work’s grandeur and majestic scope. As Mozart’s final symphonic work, it stands as a triumphant bridge to the future of the symphonic form, elevating it from the intimate setting of private music rooms to the centerpiece of grand concert halls.

The first movement in Mozart’s last symphony (*Allegro vivace*) unfolded with a crisp, courtly elegance, like a lively scene at a royal gathering. The piece is marked with hints of romance and mischievous wit. Bright and precise, the symphony’s notes and graceful crescendos filled the hall as the strings moved in perfect syn-

chrony. The flutes fluttered lightly, reminiscent of chirping birds, while a buoyant,

Symphony Orchestra, Page 11



PHOTO COURTESY OF WINSLOW TOWNSON

Andris Nelsons and the Boston Symphony Orchestra take a bow following the concert Thursday night, Sept. 25, 2025.

The BSO’s rendition of Strauss’ Ein Heldenleben beautifully encapsulates the hero’s journey

Symphony Orchestra, from Page 10

cheerful melody returned again and again. The violins and cellos engaged in flirtatious banter throughout the movement.

The second movement, *Andante cantabile*, shifted into a tender and introspective mood, gilding with an air of poised restraint. The muted violins introduced a smooth, flowing theme that never quite settled. The basses occasionally took up the melody, grounding the texture with quiet warmth, while the woodwinds traded gentle phrases back and forth in subdued conversation. Beneath this calm surface was a sense of timidity and anticipation, as if the music was still gathering the courage to express itself fully.

The third movement, *Allegretto*, was a spirited minuet that leapt with jovial energy. Its lively rhythm, with the first beat followed by two upbeats, conjured the image of dancers spinning gracefully across a bright, sunlit floor. The melody, built on a playful pattern of long and short notes, rippled through the orchestra with infectious vitality. There was an unmistakable sense of joyfulness here with moments of hearty laughter and carefree motion.

The final movement, *Molto allegro*, burst forth with breathtaking brilliance. Marked by dazzling precision, the musicians turned their pages rapidly, almost in unison, their focus unwavering. Throughout the piece, their instruments built upon one another, each section introducing layers rising towards radiant crescendos. The

energy was exuberant and luminous — a triumphant close to the grand symphony.

After the intermission, the orchestra launched into Strauss’s *Ein Heldenleben*, translated “A Hero’s Life.” The work is not only a self-portrait, but also an accompaniment to the composer’s earlier satire *Don Quixote*, which drew upon Cervantes’s eponymous literary text. Although Strauss conceived of *Ein Heldenleben* first, he completed the mock-hero *Don Quixote* before returning to this more earnest reflection. In *Ein Heldenleben*, Strauss examines his own life, his internal and external struggles, and above all, his deep love for his wife.

Ein Heldenleben began with a bold and heroic force, horns and cellos rising together in unison and cutting through the hall with commanding power. The tone was darker and more dissonant than Mozart’s symphony, evoking the Hero’s courage in the face of uncertainty. Piercing trumpet calls and resonant horn lines shimmered like the first light of dawn breaking through wispy clouds. It felt like the start of the Hero’s brave voyage set against the backdrop of an early sky painted in shades of Monet’s foggy blue-gray.

The piece progressed quickly as a cacophony of winds and low brass drove the momentum with rapid, forceful phrases. The winds, representing Strauss’s critics, chattered and sniped in biting tones, while the tuba and tenor tuba echoed their presence with an ominous four-note motif in parallel fifths. The pace quick-

ened as the Hero pushed forth against his adversaries.

The next movement featured a richer, deeper sonority as an expanded section of basses and cellos lent their weight and warmth to the orchestra. Concertmaster Nathan Cole’s solo violin shined at the center, employing double stops that created a fuller, more impassioned tone. As the piece unraveled, the violin’s voice became increasingly prominent, symbolizing the Hero’s introspection and his tender companionship with his wife, captured through a lyrical, intimate love scene.

The Hero’s return to the battlefield erupted with thunderous intensity. Muted horns rumbled like distant storms, while pounding drums and rapid bowing drove the music forward with an unstoppable momentum. The cellos plucked their strings sharply, adding to the sense of urgency and motion as the Hero faced their adversaries. The energy was electric and unrelenting, a surge of sound that captured both the chaos and courage of combat, propelling the listener head-first into the fray.

The music then turned more tender and less hurried, enveloped in a contemplative, serene atmosphere that invited quiet reflection. It called forth the warmth of domestic life with the Hero’s wife and son. However, within this stillness, the Hero’s original theme reemerged, marked by the horns and timpani, gently steering the work toward its finale.

Flowing naturally from the previous passage, the final piece began with the

familiar motive briefly stirring the music into a moment of agitation before yielding to a peaceful, pastoral interlude. The finale unwinded gradually and deliberately with a long sustained note from the low brass while familiar characters made reappearances. The solo violin returned to offer a soothing voice, the winds repeated soft motifs, and the strings drew their bow slowly. A final brass fanfare marked the Hero’s fulfillment and the completion of their journey.

As conductor Andris Nelsons lowered his baton, a rapturous ovation filled the symphony hall. The audience rose to their feet, clapping in a thunderous, unbroken wave of applause, commemorating the end to an unforgettable evening of magnificent music.

The program encapsulated the breadth of the human condition in the rollercoaster of life, from jubilant, sky-high celebrations to quiet canyons of solitude. In Mozart, there was tension between moments of self-assured brilliance and tender introspection — universal experiences common to all. In Strauss, the arc of the Hero’s journey mirrored the experience of setting out into the wilderness of life, facing challenges, seeking respite in companionship, and ultimately finding one’s own meaning amid life’s grand tumult. The evening was a reminder that beauty can be found in life’s conflicts, as well as how triumph cannot exist without struggle and how heroes cannot exist without adversaries.

CONCERT REVIEW

The Handel and Haydn Society opens the 2025–26 season with a captivating rendition of Handel’s *Saul*

H+H has not staged this oratorio since 2016

★★★★★

Handel’s *Saul*, HMV 53

Handel & Haydn Society

Conducted by Jonathan Cohen

Boston Symphony Hall

Oct. 5 2025

By Luke Kim

The Handel and Haydn Society (H+H) opened its new season with Handel’s *Saul*, a monumental three-hour oratorio tracing the fall of Israel’s first king and the rise of David. Beginning with David’s epic battle with Goliath, the work follows the events leading to the battle of Mount Gilboa and the kingship of David.

For a modern audience, the plot of the oratorio might look rushed, even unrealistic. [1] However, in the mid-18th century, the audience would be expected to know the whole story, so this quick turn of events was natural by those standards. Therefore, it’s more appropriate to view this oratorio as a musical drama based on a well-known tale.

Interestingly, H+H broke from the norm in historically informed performance, changing the strings’ positions to a more modern arrangement with violin I, violin II, viola, and cello/bass arranged clockwise from left to right. One possible explanation is that Cohen chose to interpret the oratorio as a semi-opera with 20C-style seating. [2]

The oratorio began with a beautiful overture in Italian style, consisting of three parts played with great precision; the organ solo in the third part was particularly impressive. The singers were then introduced, and it became quite clear that Cohen’s intentions were to treat the performance as a semi-staged opera. Con-

sidering the strong, almost textbook elements of “Greek tragedy,” [3] *Saul* has all the elements to be a great source of opera.

Act I revolves around the triumph of David and King Saul’s resulting jealousy. Every soloist delivered the music and the libretto beautifully, treating it as a musical theatre piece. Praise should be given to Sarah Brady, who wonderfully demonstrated passionate disgust towards David in her aria “What abject thoughts a prince can have” as Merab. Equal acclaim is warranted for Neal Davies as Saul. He brought to life the two accompagnatos “To him ten thousands, and to me but thousands” and “What do I hear? Am I then sunk so low,” along with the aria “A serpent, in my bosom warm’d.” In all three, Davies expressed intense rage and suspicion, which only made the audience more engrossed in the plot.

Act II continues the stage-setting of Act I, outlining Saul and David’s uneasy reconciliation despite Saul’s continued suspicion and treachery. The chorus reached a climax on the heavily fugal first chorus “Envy, eldest born of hell” and the final choruses “Oh, fatal consequence of Rage” and “From crime to crime he blindly goes,” which were perfect renditions of a sneering and whispering crowd.

Despite the last-minute substitution, Amanda Forsythe showed great grace and exuded a strong voice as the protagonist Michal throughout the performance. Her voice was particularly prominent in the aria “No, no, let the guilty tremble,” the sound of her declaration reaching the very ends of the hall. Playing Jonathan, Linard Vrielink complemented Forsythe’s performance, with his arias “But sooner Jordan’s stream” and “Sin not, O King” portraying opposite characters with incredible matching expressions. Vrielink and Davies’ interaction during “Where is the son of Jesse” also deserves a special mention, duly evoking shock and horror even to those who knew the plot.

Act III is the shortest act, showing Saul’s conjuring of Samuel and eventual death in a battle against the Philistines, as well as David’s mourning and rise to kingship. Samuel’s curse of Saul was incredibly haunting, with Saul left without

a response. [4] This act includes the oratorio’s most famous movement, “Dead March.” However, the most impressive musical number was Christopher Lorey’s performance of “Impious wretch, of race accurst!” as David.

The final piece, “Gird on thy sword, thou man of might,” was also excellently sung by the H+H Youth chorus and H+H City Sing. Inherent to the play itself, the mourning scene is quite long and not very enjoyable. While crucial to the plot, David’s sorrows take up half the act, which ultimately felt redundant.

The imbalance between the five soloists was a small blemish in an otherwise near-perfect performance. In some ways, this is understandable, as the five characters play very different roles. However, Lorey’s countertenor voice projected slightly less compared to the remaining four. Keeping in mind how difficult it is for a countertenor to project as much as other vocal ranges, a big round of applause is still well deserved.

Overall, Handel and Haydn delivered an almost flawless performance of this difficult oratorio that calls for a vast range

of emotions. A special honorable mention should be given to the five members of the H+H chorus who readily took on minor solo roles. Also, the H+H Youth Chorus and H+H City Sing should be congratulated for their brilliant contributions as the extended chorus prominent in Act III. Bravi tutti!

MIT students can purchase the H+H Masterpass for a discounted rate of \$10, which allows students to attend every H+H concert this season through Arts at MIT.

Footnotes:

[1] For example, the friendship of Jonathan and David seemed to form quite abruptly. However, the whole course of events took years; for most of this time, David was on the run from Saul.

[2] This shift is called the Stokowski shift.

[3] The performance is similar to an archetypical Greek tragedy only in the sense that its plot fits the structure. This story, of course, long predates any Greek tragedy.

[4] God has left Saul by this point, which was mentioned in the libretto. Note that the conjuring of spirits via a magician is considered a great sin by itself.



PHOTO PROVIDED BY ROBERT TORRES

The Handel and Haydn Society presents Handel’s *Saul* at Symphony Hall on Friday, Oct. 3, 2025.

FOOD REVIEW

MINCE unveils Untitled, a mysterious first event of the year

An innovative seven-course meal full of surprise and novelty

★★★★☆

MINCE *Untitled*

Fine dining, \$

Long Lounge (7-429)

Oct. 4, 2025

By Augusto Schwanz

For their very first event of the academic year, MIT culinary group MINCE pulled out all the stops with an extremely ambitious pop-up, *Untitled*, shrouded in tasteful mystery and suspense. In an Instagram post advertising the event, a brief comment thread even revealed that a previous design was scrapped for revealing too much.

On the evening of Oct. 4, I walked into the Long Lounge in Building 7 filled with anticipation. I had never attended a MINCE event before, but I'd only heard good things, so I walked in with high expectations. I was seated at a table with very knowledgeable people, including a sophomore, an MEng student, and a linguistics Ph.D. student. I am grateful for their gracious company and found their comments on the dishes — some of which I incorporated into my own review — to be quite insightful.

The Long Lounge was quite elegantly set up, focused more on the intimate table arrangements rather than elaborate decorations, which I found appropriate for the black-tie style of the evening. After a brief introduction from MINCE staff, we quickly dug into the dishes of the night.

The first dish, the amuse-bouche, consisted of a seared tilapia served on a spoon with a strawberry-lime consommé in a shot glass with a salted rim. We were informed that we were intended to eat the tilapia and then take the consommé as a shooter. The presentation of this dish was creative and the process of eating even more so. The pairing of the fish and the shooter was perfect; the tilapia on

its own, seasoned with amchoor, paprika, and gochugaru was slightly spicy. The consommé was slightly too sweet and acidic on its own, but the pairing of the two made for a delightfully engaging and balanced tasting experience.

Following the tilapia shooter was the pomelo shrimp dumpling, a large dumpling served in a delicious broth of coconut milk, fish sauce, bird's eye chili, and Thai basil. While I thought the broth was a bit light on the coconut milk (it was almost entirely clear), the spiciness and seasoning were excellent and flavorful, which worked well with the dumpling. It was at this point that we were also served our first drink pairing, a pineapple coconut blend with pandan, yuzu, and sparkling water. The pineapple and coconut reminded me of a piña colada, with the pandan giving the drink a lovely green color and the yuzu providing a nice acidic flavor. The drink was very refreshing, which paired well with the spicy, flavorful broth of the dumpling.

Soon after came the third course, octopus crudo with watermelon and capers in a green mojo verde dressing and roasted tomato oil. An attentive reader may notice that the octopus crudo was originally intended to be the second dish in the menu above — not the third. Taste-wise, the freshness and slight crisp of the watermelon paired well with the soft, lightly seasoned octopus, but I was slightly disappointed by the ratio between the watermelon and octopus. Even after being very conservative with the amount of octopus I ate with each cube of watermelon, I found myself having multiple pieces of watermelon left over; alone, the watermelon and the green dressing just wasn't my favorite. However, this is likely related to the change in course order, and the MINCE staff handled this change gracefully.

The fourth course was a miso-marinated cod ochazuke, a Japanese dish made of a fish filler served on top of rice with a tea-based broth. Instead of its traditional watery consistency, the dashi green leaf broth was blended to incorporate lots of air, creating a light and fluffy texture instead. The dish was also served tableside, with each plate of broth

poured individually in front of us. I really enjoyed this course; the earthy flavors of the green tea broth and the lightness of the miso cod with radish scales on top was a nice contrast to the previous dishes.

With the ochazuke came the second drink pairing, a Japanese ambrosia. This was a fruity, sweet drink that had a thick mouthfeel (potentially from sugar cane juice?) and pear, along with a slightly acidic flavor that potentially came from the yuzu or pomello. I found this drink to sharply contrast the subtler flavors of the ochazuke, but I enjoyed the way that the two vastly different flavor profiles matched each other.



AUGUSTO SCHWANZ - THE TECH

Octopus crudo with green mojo verde dressing, watermelon, capers, and roasted tomato oil served as the third course at MINCE's event "Untitled" on Saturday, Oct. 4, 2025.

The main course of the evening was an elote risotto. This dish was particularly impressive in using all the parts of the corn: substituting it for rice, drying and grinding the husk down to make a "corn husk ash" seasoning to put on top, frying the silk as a crunch topping, and more. The dish also featured fresh fresno chiles, chive oil, cilantro-lime gel, and parmesan crisp to top it off. For me, this was one of the best dishes of the night due to its high level of creativity and ability to satisfy a craving for a more "traditional" and filling dish. I found the presentation a little basic, but the flavors more than made up for it.

The elote risotto also came with another drink, a hot hibiscus tea drink served with a taijin rim. This was the most interesting drink of the night, with the deep herbal flavor of the tea and the slight spicy and acidic kick from the taijin offsetting the heaviness of the creamy risotto. While the drink would have been better cold to be more refreshing following the risotto, I appreciated the creativity and uniqueness of the hot drink.

We moved on to the dessert courses, which contained my most anticipated dish, a black peppercorn white chocolate ganache. I was very curious about how far MINCE would go with the peppercorn. I soon found out that the ganache was well-balanced with the peppercorn, allowing the very finely ground spice to add an aroma to the ganache without introducing any spiciness. The ganache was served with candied lemons, a lemon and

olive oil espuma sauce, and salted meringue.

At first, I was slightly confused by the presentation; there was a sand-like dish component under the ganache, as well as whole meringues to the side. They both had a similar texture and dryness that made me think that the component was also a meringue, but ground up. However, I found it to be saltier than the whole meringue, which caused my puzzlement. The espuma strongly tasted of olive oil, but it fit together with the sweet ganache and salty meringue.

The last dish of the night was a beetroot cake with a raspberry glaze, cardamom meringue, and white wine sabayon sauce, in-

spired by "the feeling of summer ending, foreseeing the holiday to come." The cake itself was tasty, with a light earthiness, deep red color from the beetroot, and a nice level of sweetness. However, I found the glaze had solidified quite a lot, leaving a thick, somewhat chewy layer on top of the cake that I did not particularly care for. The wine sauce was a somewhat foamy, not too sweet addition to the cake that I enjoyed a lot.

The beetroot cake also came with the last drink pairing of the evening, a cold brew with grapefruit that was intended to be a digestif: a refreshing, uplifting way to conclude such a long evening. While I questioned the idea of having caffeine at eight o'clock at night, I appreciated the spirit of the drink, not dissimilar to a post-meal espresso or cup of coffee. I also found that the digestif actually helped with not feeling so full after a seven-course menu. Overall, the cold brew was a positive addition to the menu.

As a whole, I greatly enjoyed the event. MINCE was largely successful in achieving their goal of an "interactive" event experience through dishes such as the tilapia with strawberry-lime shooter and the foamy tableside ochazuke. While the octopus crudo fell short, MINCE handled any challenges with a type of grace that befitted the event they were holding. For \$20, MINCE truly offered the MIT community an amazing introduction into the world of fine dining, and I would highly recommend the experience to anyone interested in the culinary group.



AUGUSTO SCHWANZ - THE TECH

Black peppercorn white chocolate ganache with salted meringue, lemon olive oil espuma, and candied lemons served as dessert at MINCE's event "Untitled" on Saturday, Oct. 4, 2025.

FOOD REVIEW

PopUp Bagels 'pop up' in Harvard Square

As the stars of the show, these bagels have to make a good impression

★★★★☆

PopUp Bagels

Bagels, \$\$

1440 Massachusetts Ave

Cambridge, MA 02138

Open daily 7:00 a.m.–3:00 p.m.

By Grace Zhang and Augusto Schwanz

Already a fixture in Somerville and Seaport, the social-media famous — or as they would say, "known" — franchise PopUp Bagels has opened a new location in the heart of Harvard Square, just a minute's walk away from the Harvard T Station.

Originally made in a "backyard pickup window" store founded by Adam Goldberg and Jeff Lewis during the COVID-19 pandemic, the bagels quickly became a neighborhood favorite. Their success in

New York City in 2022 and 2023 led to a Seaport debut in February 2025, followed by a second shop in Somerville in July 2025.

PopUp Bagels serves freshly toasted bagels in batches of three, six, or twelve, along with a rotating set of schmears; this week, they partnered with Kraft Mac & Cheese to create "Mac & Cream Cheese." Available bagel varieties include plain, salt, sesame, poppy, and everything, while regular schmears include cream cheese, scallion cream cheese, and butter.

The Tech was invited to participate in a VIP bagel drop. Here's what we thought.

Bagels

As the stars of the show, these bagels have to make a good impression — and they did! While we found them to be on the saltier side (especially the everything bagel), they weren't to the point of being unpleasant. Even though they were delivered, the bagels were still warm and fresh, which was a major plus.

There was a large contrast between the fluffiness of the inside and the hardness of the outside. At times, the bagels were difficult to cut because of their tough exterior. On the

CONCERT REVIEW

The BSO offers fresh takes on Debussy and Mahler

Nelsons conducts Debussy's *Nocturnes* and Mahler's fourth symphony

Debussy's *Nocturnes*, Mahler's Symphony No. 4

Boston Symphony Orchestra (BSO)

Conducted by Andris Nelsons

Featuring the Lorelei Ensemble and Nikola Hillebrand on soprano

Boston Symphony Hall

Oct. 4, 2025

By Luke Kim

The Boston Symphony Orchestra (BSO) continued its exploration of the *fin de siècle* repertoire. The two orchestral works featured this week, Debussy's *Nocturnes* and Mahler's Fourth Symphony, both featured choral additions in their last movements.

Nocturnes is the first of Debussy's three-part structured orchestral works following his *Prélude à l'Après-midi d'un faune*, a single-movement piece. While many describe his music as "Impressionist," Debussy disliked the adjective when applied to his own works. However, there is little doubt that he intended his pieces to evoke certain images or "impressions."

Nocturnes begins with *Nuages*, a slow motion of the clouds swept along by a stormy wind and a general feeling of uncertainty. Conductor Andris Nelsons showed particular restraint in this movement. At points where contrast should be given, there were subtle touches depicting quick changes of mood, only to return to its original cloudy landscape as if nothing happened.

In many ways, the second movement *Fêtes* sounded like a bird's eye view of a festival with a distant, observational perspective. At various points, sounds gradually died off in an almost

ominous way. Nelsons had great control and balance over the various sections of the orchestra throughout the movement.

The Lorelei ensemble shined through the final movement. While the ensemble was initially too loud and timbre too heavy compared to the orchestra, the movement ultimately succeeded. Debussy intended *Sirènes* to be mysterious, even hypnotic; the matted and underlying voices achieved this with great effect, creating just the perfect amount of simultaneous blending and distraction that were uncomfortable in a good way. Interestingly, the choir was positioned towards the back left of the stage unlike its standard location at the center back. It is unclear whether or not this was a deliberate attempt to create asymmetry across the hall by relocating the choir to a corner.

Mahler's Fourth Symphony is one of his shortest symphonies and is the last work of his "early" or "Wunderhorn" period. This symphony, along with the Second and Third Symphonies, form a trilogy with each work containing choral movements based on the poem collection *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*. Choral movements would not appear again in Mahler's works until the Eighth Symphony.

Nelsons started off the first movement with a bold approach for the tempo, noticeable in the brisk pace of the main sleigh bell theme. The heavy rubato and tempo changes in different sections was also immediately distinguishable. Another overarching aspect throughout the performance was the freedom Nelsons gave to the brass section, which were much stronger compared to typical performances.

The first movement was largely successful while occasionally veering into risky territory. The relative emphasis of countermelodies and themes was helpful, especially during the development and navigation in this relatively straightforward but lengthy sonata-allegro form. The strong foreshadowing of the eventual return of these themes also make this movement compelling.

The same approach for the second movement, however, was less successful. While this was less troubling during the trio sections (which are gentle *Ländler*s), the scherzo section contains one of the most delicate interplays in Mahler's oeuvre. In particular, the single solo violin must fight off the whole brass section, especially at the second and



PHOTO COURTESY OF WINSLOW TOWNSON

Nikola Hillebrand performs the soprano solo in the final movement of Mahler's Symphony No. 4 on Thursday, Oct. 2, 2025.

third scherzos. While the *Todtentanz* theme was clear at the beginning, it was difficult to discern the same theme later due to the overwhelming brass, despite concertmaster Nathan Cole's compliance with the score and passionate playing per Mahler's instructions.

The third movement consisted of themes and variations that revert to the G Major home key. The cellos stated the form beautifully in a slower tempo than usual. The themes were clearly stated and the variations were appropriately emphasized based on their links to the original theme. The anticipated E Major climax was also highly satisfying; the orchestra avoided losing focus afterwards and the bass figures were done justice by the timpani and the double bass. Nonetheless, some issues of the second movement, such as the slightly overwhelming brass, persisted.

Due to the exposed writing of the movement, there were a few moments where the coordination between instrument groups was either not smooth or divided in their interpretation. For example, some players were playing vibratos and some were not at moderately quiet sustained notes.

The last movement is unique in that the perspective now moves to a (child's) vision of heaven. Soprano Nikola Hillebrand's performance was excellent, finishing the symphony in a high note with an appropriate mix of both unwavering optimism and juvenile naïveté. An easy pitfall is being so naïve that the interpretation becomes mocking, a pitfall that Mahler himself was quite worried about.

Nelsons took a relaxed, sensible tempo, rightfully assigning the communication of the important theme to Hillebrand — a decision that avoided the possibility of misunderstanding. The earthly troubles represented by the sleigh bell theme was a fresh contrast to the otherwise serene movement. It is worth commenting that the last strophe deviates from the home key and finishes the symphony at E Major, indicating that the listeners are "in heaven" as the symphony concludes. This "ascent" comes with a sense of calm and otherworldliness that Nelsons masterfully delivered with very fine control of the woodwinds — an instrument group that was mostly on top form throughout the night.

Overall, the concert was an enjoyable evening with a mostly successful performance of Debussy (4.5/5) and a pleasant but relatively uneven rendition of Mahler (3.5/5).

Plain and sesame bagels come out on top

PopUp Bagels, from Page 12

bright side, the firmness of the crust paired nicely with the light interior, the latter of which set these bagels apart from their competition.

Out of the different types of bagels we were offered (plain, salt, sesame, everything), we loved plain and sesame the most. The plain bagel is always a classic, and it was the best out of all the bagels in



GRACE ZHANG - THE TECH

Bagels and schmears from the PopUp Bagels drop.



GRACE ZHANG - THE TECH

The PopUp Bagels storefront in Harvard Square on Sunday, Oct. 12, 2025.

terms of saltiness. The sesame bagel offered a really satisfying crunch to match the chewy, fluffy interior; the lightly toasted sesame seeds also added a light aroma that made this bagel particularly appealing.

The everything bagel was salty as aforementioned, and it had so many poppy seeds that we almost confused it for a poppy bagel. However, the taste and texture were still appealing. Finally, the salt bagel was about just as salty as the everything bagel, but given that it's named a salt bagel, this bagel ranks a little higher for us.

Schmears

Of the three schmears we received (plain cream cheese, scallion cream cheese, and butter), our favorite was by far the scallion cream cheese. Both cream cheeses were smooth, creamy, and easy to spread, but the scallions added a sharp-

ness that paired incredibly well with the bagels. As for the butter, we found that it had a strong milky flavor that clashed with the bagels themselves. Unfortunately, we didn't get to try any of their specialty schmears, but we suggest stopping by to sample them yourself!

Overall

Compared to the existing Seaport location, there doesn't seem to be much of a difference in the quality of bagels; they seem just as good. Since we got our bagels delivered, we can't comment on the ambience or in-store experience at the Harvard Square spot, so you'll have to check it out on your own. If the service is anything like their bagels, though, it's bound to be satisfying! And although we can't make any guarantees, if the setup is similar to the Seaport store, you'll be able to get some aesthetic photos too.

A night at the MFA with Daveed Diggs

The Hamilton musical star talks about storytelling and acting

Daveed Diggs

“Storytelling Across Stage and Screen”

The Ruth and Carl J. Shapiro Celebrity Lectures

Museum of Fine Arts (MFA)

Oct. 9, 2025

By Beatriz Valero de Urquía

On Thursday, Oct. 9, actor, producer, and musician Daveed Diggs opened the 2025–2026 season of the Ruth and Carl J. Shapiro Celebrity Lectures at the Museum of Fine Arts in an evening framed around celebrating community, art and creativity. Best known for his dual roles of Thomas Jefferson and Marquis de Lafayette in the musical *Hamilton*, Diggs entered the packed auditorium to roaring applause from a crowd of all ages and backgrounds, ranging from theatre fans to rap enthusiasts.

In conversation with Catherine T. Morris, Director of Arts and Creativity at The Boston Foundation, Diggs discussed his storied career, which includes acting in *Soul* and the live-action *Little Mermaid* as well as writing, producing and starring in *Blindspotting* and singing in the experimental hip-hop group clipping., among many others.

During his speech, Diggs came back to a central question: How do we choose which stories to tell? For him, the answer was clear: the people we tell them for, and with.

Artistic origins

Diggs began the conversation by reflecting on how his upbringing influenced his approach to creating art. Born in Oakland, California, Diggs described his hometown as a place saturated with art, but noted the lack of an industry to establish a creative

career. “There was just music everywhere,” he said, adding that his mother was a DJ in the ’70s and ’80s before becoming a social worker. Working day jobs to support themselves, the artists that Diggs knew growing up created “from a space of relative freedom,” making art that spoke solely for themselves and their communities. “I grew up around a lot of artists who’ve made really challenging work, and were unafraid to do it,” he recounted.

Performing came naturally to Diggs. When he was nine years old, he recalled a teacher asking his class to memorize a poem; even as a kid, he decided to act it out. “I wanted to make people laugh,” Diggs said. “And they did. They laughed when I wanted to. I was a very shy kid and that was the most powerful I’d ever felt in my life. And that’s literally the reason I still do this.”

Another formative experience in Diggs’s childhood was when he first saw Marc Bamuthi Joseph perform a piece about the history of tap dancing and its connections to the slave trade at his school. The combination of poetry and dance left a deep impression on Diggs. Years later, he saw Joseph perform the same piece again as part of the play *Word Becomes Flesh*, and would go on to work for Bamuthi at *Youth Speaks*. Diggs was later cast in the tenth anniversary performance of *Word Becomes Flesh*, and got to recite “that poem,” which he described as a crazy and wild experience.

Creativity through collaboration

Those core memories led to a deeper exploration of art and performance. After watching the 1998 documentary *SlamNation*, Diggs and his friends created their own slam poetry competition. “I sort of fancied myself a slam poet,” he joked. When acting piqued the group’s interest, they put on a play. At 14, one of his friends started making beats and asked Diggs to rap on them; that’s how his first band, *Metaphor Play*, was born.

During his artistic journey, Diggs was also inspired by singer, songwriter, and producer George Edward Clinton and his Parliament-Funkadelic collective. “Are there other P-Funk fans here?” he asked, eliciting cheers from the audience. In Diggs’s view, these musicians were able to come together and make musically

complex pieces that were also incredibly “smart, fun and silly,” a balance often difficult to achieve.

In a similarly collaborative style, many of Diggs’s most meaningful projects have been those he’s pursued with his close friends. “My favorite things I’ve ever made and, if I’m [being] honest, the most fruitful ones, [...] have always been with people I was already friends with,” he said. Take one of his clipping. bandmates, William Hutson, whom Diggs met when he was nine, for example. Similarly, Diggs had already been friends with Lin-Manuel Miranda for over a decade before he was asked to take part in *Hamilton*. Diggs has also known Rafael Casal, his *Blindspotting* co-creator, for a long time. They met through a mutual high school friend who set up a “rapper play date” for the two of them when Diggs had just returned from college. “We rapped until four in the morning,” Diggs said. He’s spoken with Casal every day since.

Project themes

When selecting a project, Diggs focuses more on the “who,” rather than the “what.” From Diggs’ point of view, the work itself is outside of his control, and he has been both “pleasantly surprised” as well as “totally mortified” at seeing a finished product. What he can control, however, is the environment around him — choosing people to collaborate with that share the same interests and understand the stories that move him.

Even with that clarity, Diggs admits that explaining why he chooses to work on some projects over others isn’t easy. “If the words are good, I probably want to do it,” he said. As a producer, Diggs sometimes struggles with finding where he can add value, which wasn’t the case before. Diggs remembered when he had “a lot of *Hamilton* fairy dust” after rising to fame; he felt like he had the power to make projects happen and help stories get off the ground. Nowadays, though, he is more cautious when selecting projects because his creative process often slows others down. “I like to take my time with things, and this isn’t a world that’s particularly geared for that,” Diggs explained. “I live in the process part.”

Many of his projects are linked by a common thread of social justice. Topics such as

race, Blackness, and the history of the United States are common in his work. He also gravitates towards stories that push the envelope. One of these works is the play *White Noise*, in which Diggs portrayed a Black artist who asks his white friend to make him his slave for 40 days. He described the project as “one of the most challenging things” he’s ever worked on.

Similarly, Diggs reflected on playing Frederick Douglass in *The Good Lord Bird*. He was deeply interested in the project, saying that “it seemed impossible” it would be made. The same feeling made him want to be involved with *Hamilton*. Director Thomas Khail pitched the idea as a rap musical about the life story of Alexander *Hamilton*; Diggs joked that he first thought it was “a terrible idea,” which made him immediately say yes.

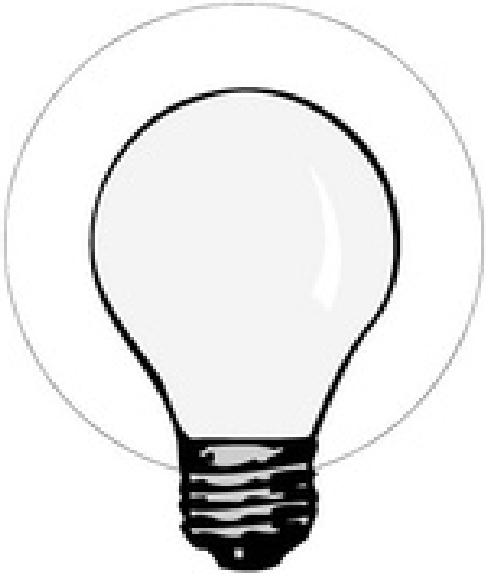
Regarding his musical career, Diggs has done his fair share of experimentation, particularly with clipping. The group’s most recent album, *Dead Channel Sky*, was written to resemble a compilation CD found in a cyberpunk world. To create the album, Diggs dug into fiction from the ’80s and ’90s, discovering that the future these books imagined is not dissimilar to the world today, which he referred to as the “apocalypse we currently live in.”

Words of advice

Throughout the conversation, the audience listened attentively, responding with good-natured curiosity about his life during the Q&A section. Besides the jokes and laughs, though, Diggs conveyed a deep wisdom about the artistic process. For Diggs, creating is a powerful thing to do. At several points in the talk, he highlighted how “making things is hard,” whether they are good or bad.

When an audience member asked him to give advice to young artists, Diggs told them to focus on creating. “Writers write,” he said. “Artists make art.” He also stressed the importance of pursuing a passion in spite of challenges and of taking initiative rather than waiting for permission. For aspiring actors and musicians, he recommended acting on inspiration immediately with friends alongside them. “Inspiration is a really fleeting thing,” Diggs said.

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Tequila isn't good for you, but the derivatives of this production byproduct might be

Zinc-oxide nanoparticles are a 'promising' antibiotic with a waste-reducing source

By **Veronika Moroz**
SCIENCE EDITOR

Scientists at the Tecnológico de Monterrey in Mexico have found a surprising new use for tequila's main ingredient: manufacturing zinc-oxide antibiotics.

In a paper published last May, the researchers heated, evaporated, and ground up a mixture of a zinc-based salt, water, and agave, the primary ingredient in tequila. The result was a grayish powder full of zinc oxide (ZnO) nanoparticles that were deadly to bacteria, confirming other scientists' findings about the antimicrobial potential of plant-synthesized ZnO.

Now, the team is partnering with tequila companies to produce ZnO nanoparticles out of the shreds of pulp left from the tequila production process.

"We're trying to show that there could be green methods that can be used to synthesize zinc oxide nanoparticles that keep these types of antibacterial properties," explained Tecnológico de Monterrey Professor Marcelo Lozano, an author of the paper. By re-using agave pulp that would otherwise be discarded, Lozano hopes his project will give "some value to this waste" from tequila production.

Though scientists don't know exactly how ZnO kills bacteria, one hypothesis is that the oxygen atoms in ZnO pull on the electrons of nearby atoms, wreaking havoc on lipids, proteins, and sugars inside bacterial cell walls. The other main hypothesis focuses on the potential toxicity of zinc to bacteria. Because of their positive charge, zinc ions create a charge imbalance on ei-

ther side of a bacterial membrane, damaging the bacteria by disrupting their uptake of useful molecules and expulsion of harmful ones.

Size and shape are especially critical to implementing ZnO nanoparticle technology. "If you have enough surface in the particle, you can obtain better results because it's exposed," explained Tecnológico de Monterrey Professor Jackeline Iturbe-Ek, the second author of the paper.

Think of a bar of soap: the bigger and rounder it is, the more times you can wash your hands with the bar before it disintegrates. That's because of the bar's low surface-area-to-volume ratio: a lot of the soap molecules aren't on the outside, so they can't come off the bar when you wash your hands.

The equivalent idea is true for zinc-oxide nanoparticles: a smaller, more rod-like shape will allow a larger fraction of the atoms to split into ions and terrorize the bacteria. Agave, one of the three fruits that the Tecnológico de Monterrey team worked with in their original paper, produced some of the smallest ZnO nanoparticles known in the literature. This experiment alone, however, isn't a strong enough reason for researchers to produce all ZnO nanoparticle antibiotics out of agave: according to some of the nanomedicine researchers consulted by *The Tech*, the size of the nanoparticles isn't necessarily dependent on the source of the material.

Still, the research offers a potentially cheaper technique for manufacturing something that Iturbe-Ek described as "promising for new applications."



STAN SHEBS—WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Agave, the primary ingredient in tequila.

In addition to its antimicrobial uses, ZnO nanoparticles with other shapes are a common active ingredient in sunscreen, reflecting UV rays to protect people's skin. Scientists are also exploring how to use ZnO to purify water, produce clean energy, and even make cancer cells less resistant to medication.

Despite getting to purchase fresh tequila while visiting production facilities

to collect agave samples, Lozano's favorite part of the project was the opportunity to make ZnO production more affordable. "I try to have fun in the laboratory, [...] in the measurements, in the characterization," he said. "[But] when you realize a potential application, you smile and you say, 'I probably discovered particles and solved a problem for society.'"



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Free speech needs defenders, not gatekeepers

By *The Tech* Editorial Board

Free speech faces new challenges in all corners of America, and MIT must stand firm in its defense.

Campus tensions have been rising for the past few years, and we have seen the campus administration address this issue to mixed results. President Kornbluth has previously announced that the MIT Police will take an increased role in monitoring of- fensive speech on campus. The Office of the Vice President for Finance at MIT removed the Brown Book, the authoritative docu- ment on the sources of MIT research fund- ing, from public view earlier this year. MIT’s “time, place, and manner” policies, which restrain some forms of public expression “as not to disrupt essential activities,” ap- peared to be an attempt to allow respon- sible free expression while maintaining order. However, the Institute has been rather heavy-handed with this approach. For example, the poster policy bans all non-Massachusetts or non-MIT flag dis- plays on campus, be it a Palestinian or Pride flag. Recently, the Broad was one of several

institutions that fired individuals for mak- ing statements about Charlie Kirk after his assassination.

While these actions may be well-inten- tioned attempts to maintain order, they risk curbing legitimate expression and eroding the foundations of open dialogue. We hope MIT continues to encourage students to en- gage in face-to-face dialogue, such as Dia- logue@MIT and realk@MIT.

We condemn the hate speech and sym- bols that have appeared on campus. Anon- ymous or bad-faith attacks have replaced honest discussion to become the language of much of our campus and institutions around the country. The consequences of such behavior are especially clear on so- cial media, which has become the platform housing the discussion of controversial top- ics. Behind screens, students across the po- litical spectrum lash out at one another, im- press discriminatory titles and affiliations onto others, and contribute to an ever-more polarized environment on our campuses.

MIT is home to a wealth of ideologi- cal diversity, and this is a strength among many that makes the Institute a hub for

innovation. Thus, we have a duty to pro- tect the right to freedom of expression on campus. Indeed, the MIT administration faces pressures from all sides and will take actions meant to preserve funding and protect the institution’s status quo. MIT has recently been challenged to acquiesce to extreme federal oversight by the Trump administration in a proposed compact. This compact is antithetical to MIT values, and we are proud that President Kornbluth has rejected these measures.

As MIT’s oldest and largest student-run newspaper, *The Tech* remains committed to protecting speech on campus. Student journalists have a duty to cover global and local issues, including conflicts with pro- found humanitarian consequences, with accuracy, context, and without fear. As campus communities navigate deep dis- agreements over events in Gaza, our role is to inform, to listen to all voices, and to create space for understanding. The tar- geting of student protestors, leaders, and journalists – Rumeysa Ozturk, Mahmoud Khalil, and many others – underscore the importance of freedom of press and re-

mind us that open discourse is essential to reconciliation.

Journalism is the first draft of history. At the start of our term as an executive board, we prioritized restoring neutrality and due process in our opinion section. We reinstated and broadened our Edito- rial Board to ensure multiple perspectives in every opinion decision. Each submis- sion to our Opinion Section is reviewed by each member of the Editorial Board – as well as Editors-at-Large on an as needed basis – debated, and returned to authors with questions as necessary. Furthermore, we have modified our anonymity policy to better protect international students and those who may draw the ire of the federal government.

A plurality of voices is what we strive to represent. When only a few people domi- nate, everyone may suffer.

We remain committed to publishing and giving due diligence to diverse perspec- tives of our students, faculty, and alumni. True dialogue begins when we can respect speech we dislike — because only then can understanding grow.

OPINION POLICY

Management
The Opinion department is collectively managed by the Editorial Board of *The Tech*, which consists of the Publisher, Editor-in-Chief, Managing Editor, Executive Editor, and Opinion Editor.

Editorials
Editorials are the official opinion of *The Tech*. They are written by the Editorial Board.

Guest Submissions
A Guest Submission, which may be designated as either a Guest Column or a Letter to the Editor, may be written and submitted by any member of the MIT community.

Guest Columns express a particular opinion on campus-relevant matters;

and a Letter to the Editor is an open letter addressed directly to the “Editor,” in reference to a Guest Columns express a particular opinion on campus-relevant matters; and a Letter to the Editor is an open letter addressed directly to the “Editor,” in reference to a particular piece or set of pieces published.

Electronic submissions are encouraged and should be sent to tt-opinions@mit.edu. Hard copy submissions should be addressed to *The Tech*, P.O. Box 391529, Cambridge, Mass. 02139-7029, or sent by interdepartmental mail to Room W20-483. Electronic submissions will be prioritized over hard copy submissions. All submissions are due on Thursday two weeks before the date of publication (i.e. by the publication prior to the target publication).

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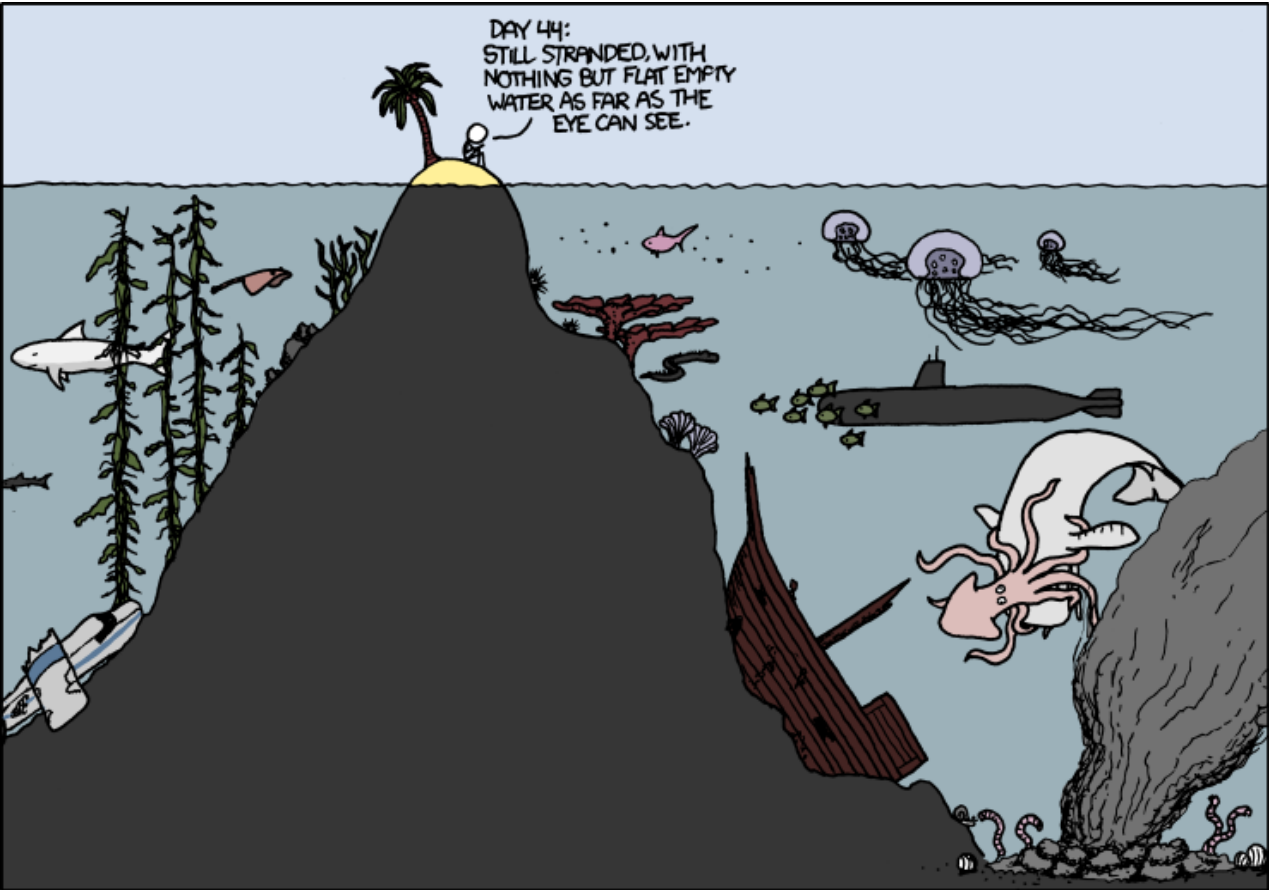
Crash

Solution, page 6

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

[731] Desert Island



by Randall Munroe

Telescopes and bathyscaphes and sonar probes of Scottish lakes, Tacoma Narrows bridge collapse explained with abstract phase-space maps, some x-ray slides, a music score, Minard's Napoleon war: the most exciting new frontier is charting what's already here.

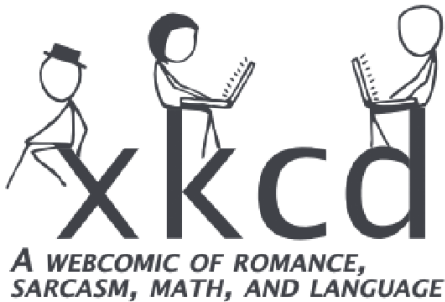
Out

Solution, page 6

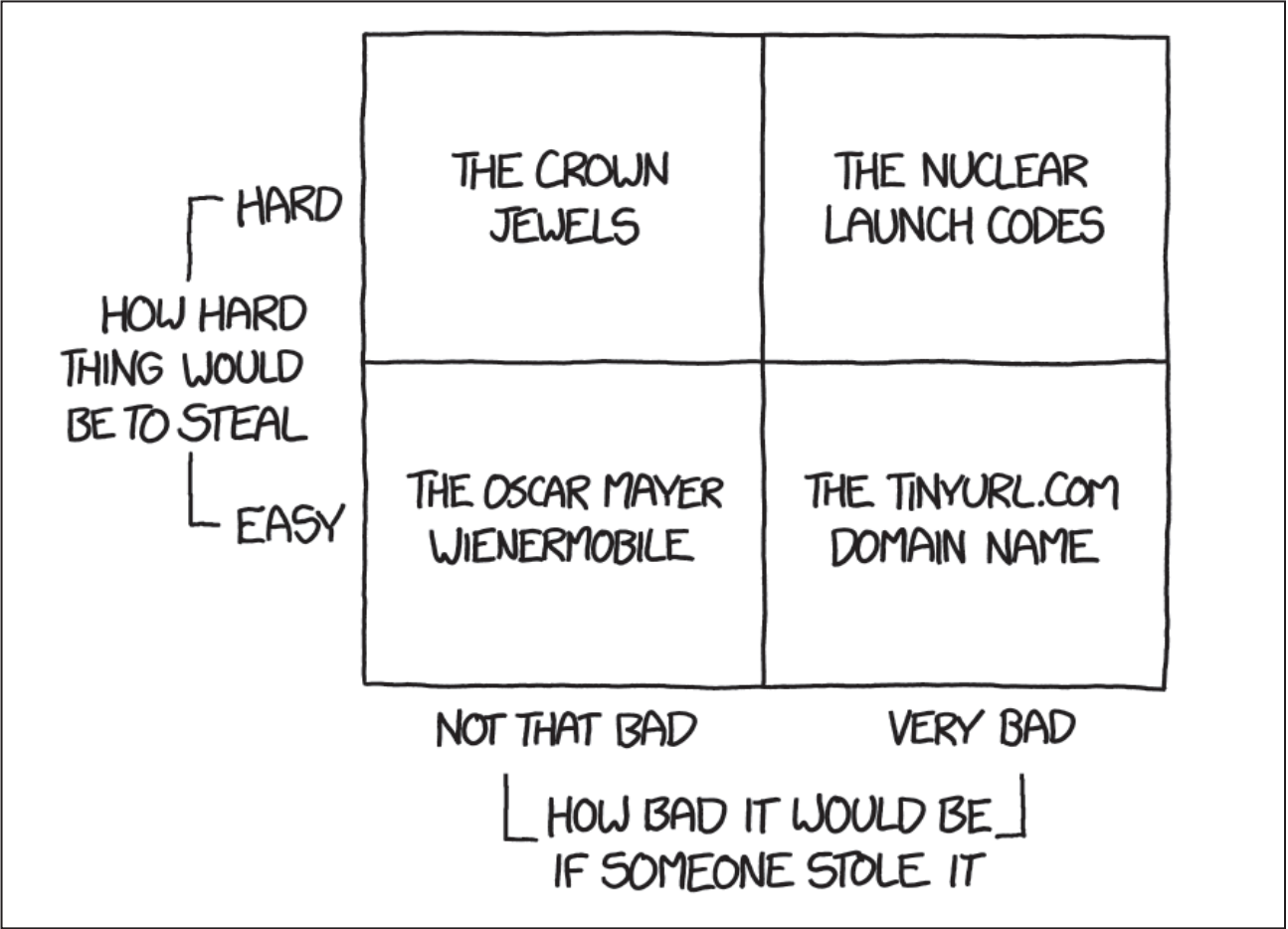
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3				×6		
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Instructions: Fill in the grid so that each column and row contains exactly one of each of the numbers 1–6. Follow the mathematical operations for each box.

[1698] Theft Quadrants

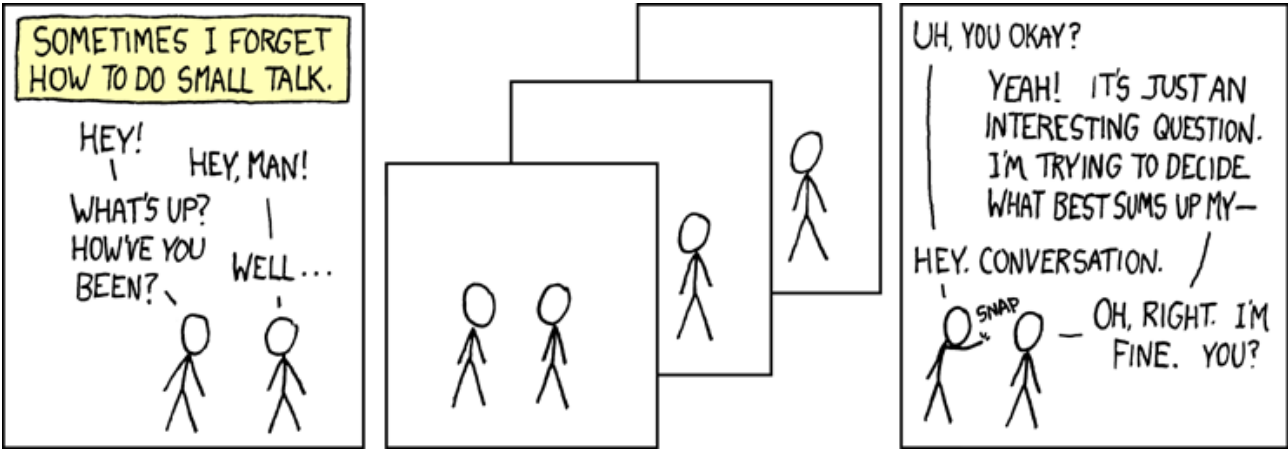


by Randall Munroe



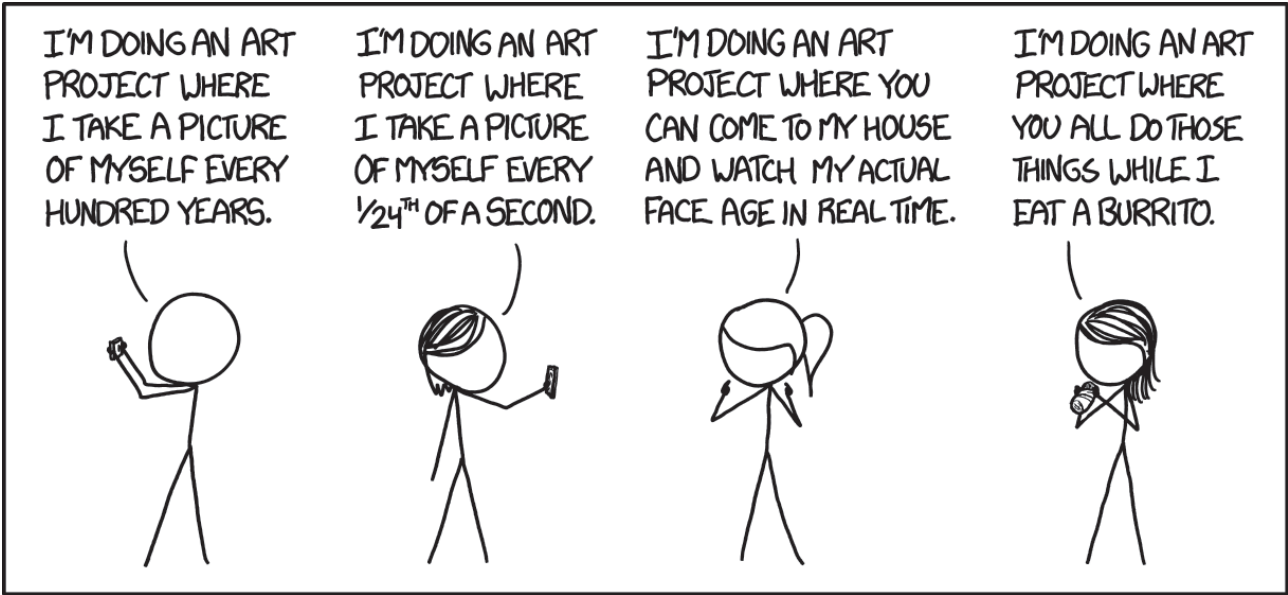
TinyURL was the most popular link shortener for long enough that it made it into a lot of printed publications. I wonder what year the domain will finally lapse and get picked up by a porn site.

[222] Small Talk



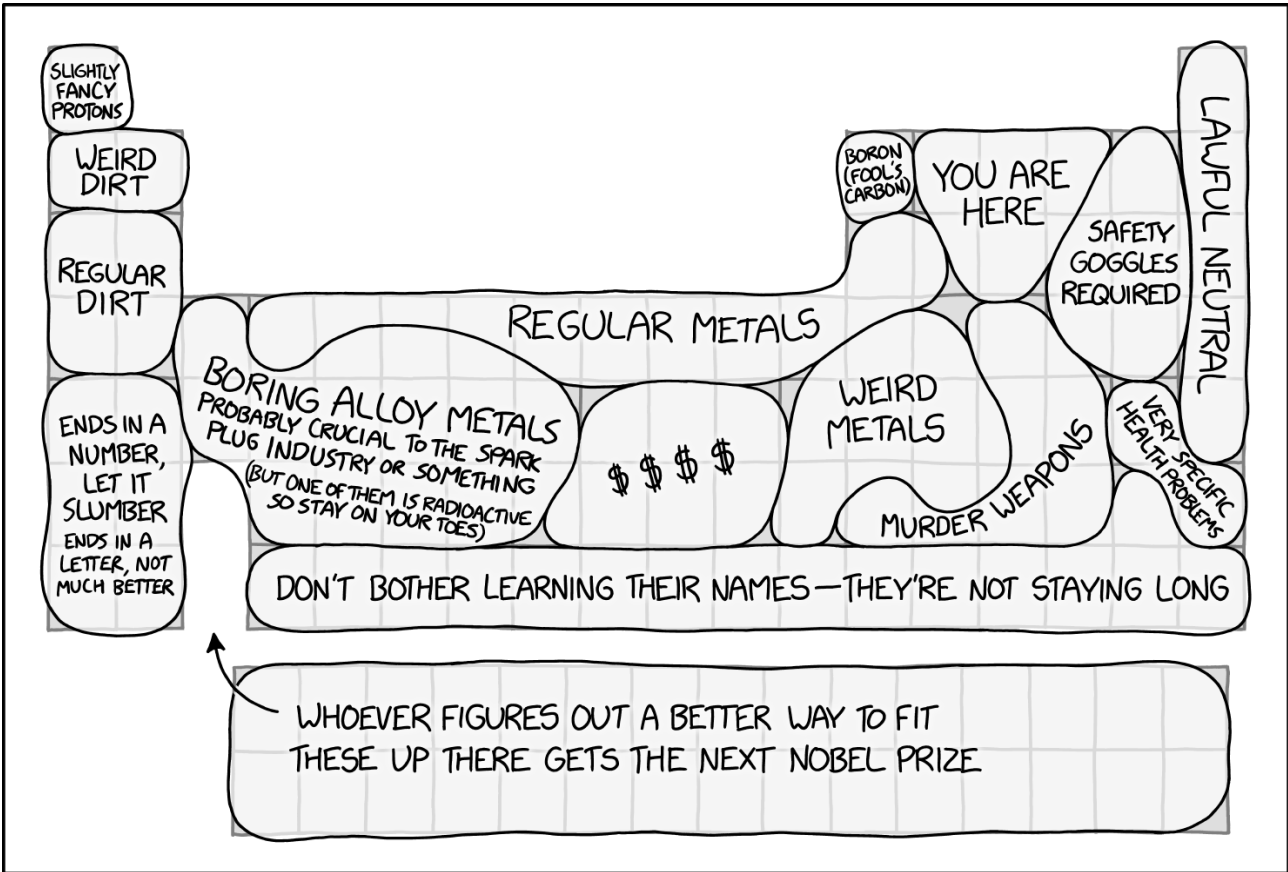
But surely I owe you an accurate answer!

[1496] Art Project



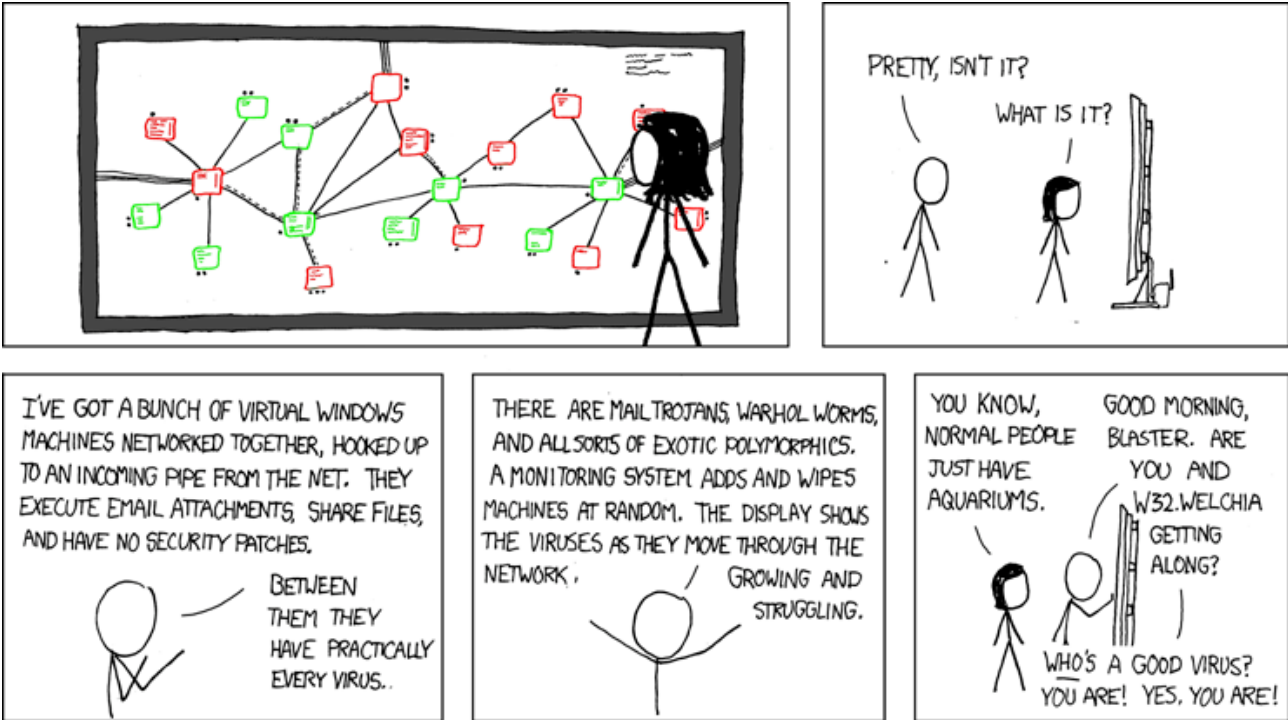
It's my most ambitious project yet, judging by the amount of guacamole.

[2913] Periodic Table Regions

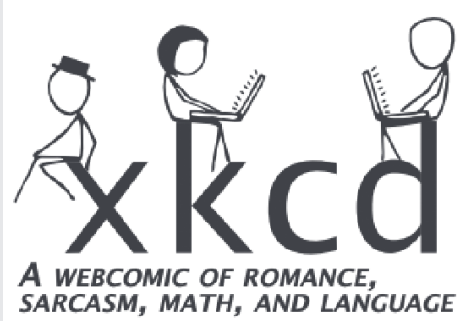


Cesium-133, let it be. Cesium-134, let it be even more.

[350] Network



Viruses so far have been really disappointing on the 'disable the internet' front, and time is running out. When Linux/Mac win in a decade or so the game will be over.



by Randall Munroe

MIT Health flu clinic now requires appointments

Previous flu clinics allowed walk-ins for MIT Health patients and MIT affiliates

By Vivian Hir
NEWS EDITOR

This year, MIT Health flu clinics are by appointment only; all appointments must be made 48 hours in advance. The campus clinic is from Sept. 22 to Oct. 10 in Building E23 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., whereas the Lincoln Laboratory clinic is from Oct. 20 to Oct. 23 in AC-120 and AC-122 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

No walk-in appointments are available this year, and patients must provide their health insurance information when making an appointment. Eligible patients include all MIT ID holders and MIT Health patients ages 18 and older. The flu vaccine is trivalent and protects against two strains of influenza A and one strain of influenza B. COVID-19 vaccines are not available at the clinics.

In prior years, MIT Health held walk-in flu clinics. In 2024, the flu clinic took place from Oct. 7 to Oct. 10 in Walker Memorial, and eligible members older than six months could get the vaccine.

According to Marketing & Communications Director David Tytell, MIT Health decided to offer flu vaccinations by appointment instead of walk-ins this year due to a steady decrease in drop-in flu clinic attendance since 2019, when MIT Health vaccinated about 10,000 individuals in the walk-in clinic. In 2024, just over 5,000 individuals received a vaccine. This year, as of Oct. 3, MIT Health plans to administer about 4,500 vaccines.

In a statement to *The Tech*, Tytell stated that before the COVID-19 pandemic, the MIT Health flu clinic was “the easiest way for the MIT community to be immunized.” However, after the pandemic, many pharmacies such as CVS and Walgreens, including the CVS in Kendall Square, began to offer flu vaccines. “For many members of the MIT community, we are no longer the most convenient pathway,” Tytell wrote. Regardless, Tytell recommended receiving the flu vaccination this fall at the flu clinic or a retail pharmacy.

MIT Health plans to hold flu clinics by appointment only in future years as well, as the model provides patients flexibility when scheduling and is more efficient for staff.



VIVIAN HIR - THE TECH
A sign in the MIT Health lobby Monday, Oct. 6, 2025, says flu vaccines are by appointment only.

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