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WEATHER, p. 2

THU: 36°F | 22°F
Windy.

FRI: 34°F | 22°F
Sunny.

SAT: 38°F | 29°F
Cloudy.

Lisa Su to give MIT's 2026 Commencement address

AMD CEO Lisa Su '90 SM '91 PhD '94 is a leading executive in the semiconductor industry

By Jada Ogueh
NEWS STAFF WRITER

On May 28, 2026, Lisa Su '90 SM '91 PhD '94 will deliver MIT's 2026 Commencement address at the OneMIT Commencement Ceremony. "MIT has always held a special place in my life and career, and I'm thrilled to accept the invitation to speak at Commencement," Su stated.

President Sally Kornbluth commended Su's role as a mentor and inspiration for her classmates, highlighting how she "created instructions that guided generations of student researchers" in using the Institute's advanced equipment. "Lisa is renowned for her intellectual rigor, boldness, and originality," Kornbluth stated.

Su expressed excitement for the Class of 2026 as they prepare to share their skills and ideas in a time when AI is expanding possibilities for the future. In an interview with the Harvard Business Review, Su noted AI's role in accelerating "all aspects of business and humanity," including content creation, research, and healthcare.

Su was born in Tainan, Taiwan and grew up in Queens, New York. In 1991, Su obtained a BS/MS in Electrical Engineering (EECS) from MIT, where she participated in the 6A internship program, UROP, and Eta Kappa Nu, the national honor society for EECS students. Su also completed a PhD in Electrical Engineering from MIT, specializing in semiconductor device physics and integration, along with silicon-on-insulator devices.

After completing her PhD, Su went on to work at Texas Instruments as technical staff before becoming Vice President of Semiconductor R&D at IBM and later, General Manager at Freescale Semiconductor. Since 2014, she has served as the chair and CEO of the semiconductor company Advanced Micro Devices (AMD), where she is credited for transforming the company into an industry leader in "high performance and AI computing." Su joins only 11% of Fortune 500 female CEOs. According to WIRED, Su increased the company's market cap from $2 billion to $300 billion while gaining ground amidst competition from NVIDIA and Google. Su sports an AI-positive outlook, describing it as the "most transformational technology of our time."

Even in her position at AMD, Su remains tied to MIT. She spoke at the 2017 doctoral hooding ceremony, and in 2018, she established the Lisa Su Fellowship Fund, which supports female graduate students in nanotechnology. Furthermore, she served on the Electrical Engineering and Computer Science Visiting Committee for 10 years. In 2022, Building 12, which houses MIT.nano, was named the Lisa T. Su Building in her honor.

Su has been awarded the Global Semiconductor Association's Dr. Morris Chang Exemplary Leadership Award and the Robert N.

Commencement, Page 2

PHOTO COURTESY OF ADVANCED MICRO DEVICES (AMD)

AMD CEO Lisa Su '90, SM '91, PhD '94 will deliver the 2026 MIT commencement address.

Enoch Ellis '26 voted out of SGFC

Former UA president spent $298.06 without UA approval

VIVIAN HIR—THE TECH

The whiteboard in front of the UA office on the fourth floor of the Student Center on Sunday, Dec. 7, 2025.

By Jada Ogueh
NEWS STAFF WRITER

On Dec. 3, 2025, the MIT Undergraduate Association (UA) led by UA President Alice Hall '26 convened to discuss former UA President Enoch Ellis '26's unapproved use of UA funds for "coffee chats." UA Treasurer George Obongo '27 presented the case at the meeting.

In the meeting, Obongo stated that Ellis, who is also the former UA representative from the MIT Student Group Funding Council (SGFC), had spent $298.06 of UA funds on informal coffee chats over the fall 2025 semester. According to data obtained by *The Tech*, Ellis completed a total of ten transactions, each ranging from around $15 to $50, which amounts to an average of around $30 per coffee chat. The line-by-line breakdown of each Request for Payment (RFP) amount is unclear; according to Obongo, who was also treasurer during Ellis's presidency, these amounts were consistent with the RFPs Ellis submitted for coffee chats under his presidency. Last school year, Ellis went on about 20 coffee chats throughout the fall semester, spending an average of $27 each time.

Conversely, Hall stated that she has never spent more than $10 per person ($20) on a chat. In her opinion, coffee (or boba) chats are meant to facilitate and enhance conversations that increase the UA's positive impact that "would not otherwise happen." Hall credits ideas proposed in these chats for contributing to many UA initiatives and agenda items for meetings with the chancellor's team.

Hall added that she didn't find out about the apparent misuse of funds until she recently met with Obongo to review expenses. To her, the biggest disappointment was that student money had been spent in a way that was not approved by their representatives. Because the chats were organized by someone not in a UA leadership position, Hall wrote, they could not "enact change to benefit students."

Obongo was not the only person to receive the RFPs. Besides the treasurer, the other UA financial signatories are Hall, UA Vice President Mariam Abdelbarr '27, and each of the committee co-chairs, to whom the RFPs are evenly distributed. Obongo stated that he does not regularly review RFPs sent to committees' cost objects and does not expect chairs to send RFPs to him. Obongo first knew of the coffee chat situation in September, when a co-chair of a UA committee forwarded Ellis's initial RFPs to Hall for approval. These RFPs used a UA committee cost object that was separate from the Officer cost object. Hall did not approve of them, and assumed it would end there.

According to Obongo, Ellis asked him to use the Officer cost object to submit RFPs in September after his first rejection. Based on the meeting notes, it is unclear as to why Ellis sought funding from the UA, given that the SGFC has a $10,000 discretionary fund. At this time, Obongo knew that Ellis was not a member of the UA officer team; however, given that he was the former President and "had a strong relationship with Alice [Hall]," Obongo assumed that he had permission from Hall. Furthermore, Ellis knew the bylaws, so Obongo did not expect him to try to "run a scheme" by him.

When Obongo went over expenses with Hall in November, he was "mortified" to learn that Ellis had not received prior confirmation from Hall before asking him. He felt like he had disappointed the officer team and "betrayed the MIT undergraduates — whom the [UA officer team] serves within our roles." In Obongo's opinion, he has been very diligent to ensure the UA is "advocating [for], protecting, and improving the lives of students," so unknowingly compromising this responsibility hurt him "very personally."

Ellis, Page 2

In memoriam: Frank Gehry

Frank Gehry, a world-renowned architect, died on Dec. 5 at the age of 96. Gehry was famous for his postmodernist architectural style, which manifested itself in buildings like the Guggenheim Museum and MIT's very own Stata Center.

Stata was designed by Frank O. Gehry and Associates on the site formerly occupied by Building 20. The contract was awarded in 1998, and construction finished in 2004. In 2007, the Institute sued Gehry's firm and Skanska USA Building Inc., the construction company that built Stata, over several issues that included persistent leaking and cracking masonry. The lawsuit was settled in 2010.

Today, Stata remains one of the most iconic symbols of MIT. Maintenance of its facades is ongoing.

—Alex Tang

UAC to restructure for faculty leadership

Inaugural director Diep Luu let go by MIT

By Sabine Chu
ASSOCIATE NEWS EDITOR

On Dec. 2, Vice Chancellor for Graduate and Undergraduate Education (GUE) David Darmofal SM '91 PhD '93 emailed staff and student leaders of the Undergraduate Advising Center (UAC) about the creation of the new Faculty Director role. At the same time, former Senior Associate Dean and Director of the UAC Diep Luu was let go. His role no longer exists.

Luu joined MIT in 2022. As the UAC director, he led strategic planning for the Center, including the launch of its new offices earlier this fall, and managed its four "pillars" — Office of the First-Year, Academic Achievement Office, Strategic Initiatives Office, and Office of Academic Community, Empowerment, and Success (OACES). During a 2023 interview with MIT News, Luu shared his hopes that the UAC would allow students to be "well connected with the resources they need, when they need them, so that they can thrive and be their best and whole authentic selves." Luu also served as interim director of OACES this fall following its launch.

Darmofal will serve as Interim Faculty Director until the role is filled permanently. In his email, he stated that the creation of this position reflects the UAC's goal to increase faculty leadership. He believes that the future Faculty Director will bring "academic authority, experience advising students within a major, and the ability to work closely with departments as well as faculty governance on Institute-wide advising priorities." Darmofal also emphasized that similar units, including the first-year learning communities, have an analogous faculty-led structure.

The UAC and GUE teams have already started the hiring process for the new Faculty Director. Darmofal stated that a search committee will be formed by the end of the fall semester and that he plans to announce the appointment in the spring. The UAC's four

UAC, Page 3

PAULA HAMMOND IS NEW ENGINEERING DEAN

She is the first woman to hold this position. **NEWS, p. 3**

MIT VOCAL JAZZ ENSEMBLE

performs their fall collection. **ARTS, p. 11**

CONCERT REVIEW: H+H

Handel's 'Messiah' by the Handel and Haydn society. **ARTS, p. 12**

ORIGAMIT HOLDS 2025 CONVENTION

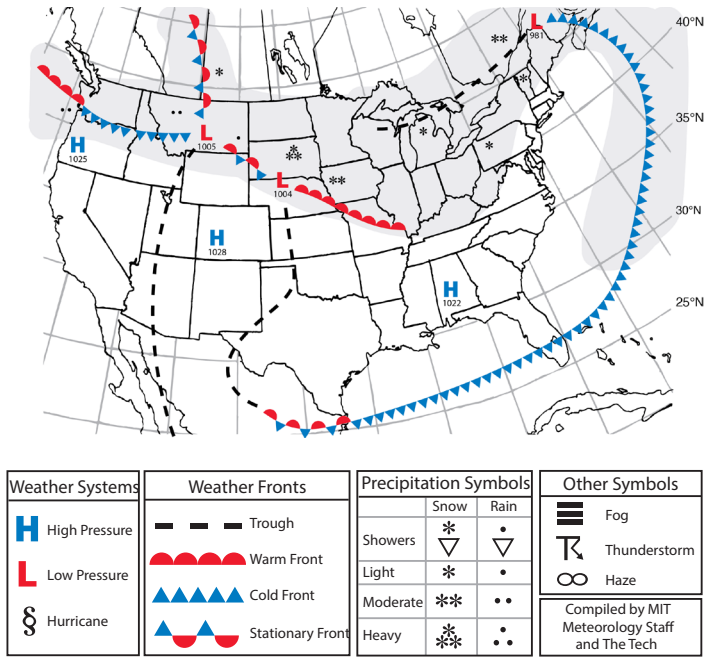
featuring displays of works and classes for al levels. **SCIENCE, p. 13**

I'M A THIRD WHEEL?

What do I do?. **CAMPUS LIFE, p. 5**

SECTIONS

WEATHER FORECAST



Cold to stick around

By Conrad Straden
METEOROLOGIST

Ice formed on the Charles river Tuesday. Might be the earliest in a long time. After a brief warmup yesterday, we are plunging back into below average temperatures. Today, campus will be blasted by strong westerly winds as a clipper system pulls out of New England. Temperatures will be steadily falling with windchills in the teens. Strong winds continue overnight into Friday morning with temperatures bottoming out in the low 20s with windchills in the single digits. Slightly better on Friday but still windy with feels like temperatures in the 20s. Saturday feels much better with temperatures in the mid 30s and little wind. Saturday night a system moves across the mid-Atlantic potentially turning into a Miller B nor'easter. If the timing of the energies is correct, Sunday will feature light to moderate snowfall. Regardless, another burst of Arctic air hits Sunday night, taking temperatures into the low teens. The Charles will probably freeze over entirely Monday, and temperatures remain quite cold early next week. In other news, we've reached the earliest sunset of 4:11pm so sunsets are getting later now!

DECEMBER 11
SITUATION FOR NOON (ET)

Extended Forecast

Today: Windy. Partly cloudy. High around 36°F (2°C). West winds 15-25 mph.
Tonight: Windy. Clear. Low around 22°F (-6°C). West winds 15-20 mph.
Friday: Sunny. High around 34°F (1°C) and overnight low around 22°F (-6°C). West winds 13-18 mph.
Saturday: Cloudy. High around 38°F (3°C) and overnight low around 29°F (-2°C). Southwest winds 5-10 mph..
Sunday: Chance for a winter storm. High around 31°F (-1°C) and overnight low around 13°F (-11°C). North winds 10-20 mph, gusting to 30 mph.

George Obongo '27: "My oversight was an upset"

Ellis, from Page 1

Financial lessons moving forward

To rectify the issue, the UA approved the motion to formally recommend Mary Mango, Financial Assistant of Student Organizations, Leadership and Engagement Office (SOLE) to audit Ellis and the coffee chat RFPs. Additionally, Hall and Abdelbarr told the UA Council they would cover the expenses. However, from the UA meeting notes, there was a motion to move $298.06 from UA reserves to cover Enoch's misuse of funds. Jackson Hamilton, UA Chief of Staff, voted against the motion "on principle," stating that the undergraduate student body should not have to pay for "one person's unauthorized spending."

With regard to plans to prevent future misuse of UA funds, Hall emphasized that all UA financial signatories should be aware of their responsibility and know to raise any concerns about suspicious RFPs. She stated that this specific situation arose from Ellis's "unique familiarity with UA processes" because of his former presidency, including having overseen Obongo. In addition, Obongo mentioned the positive rapport established under Ellis's presidency, which, according to Hall, led to less caution than the RFP approval process normally requires and allowed Ellis to "present requests in ways that were harder to flag as unusual."

Hall's priority is to foster "a culture of engagement, transparency, and student prioritization," and encourage more students to get involved to prevent situations like this from occurring again. In Hall's opinion, sharing incidents with the UA Council enables "immediate student awareness" and prompts necessary action from student representatives. She also emphasized that any questionable expense needs to be brought to her for approval. Furthermore, Hall is looking into ways to clarify in writing how certain parts of the UA budget should be spent to prevent future incidents of misuse.

As the replacement UA representative for SGFC, Hall is also advocating for all SGFC representatives to no longer be permitted to approve their own RFPs. She is working with SOLE and current SGFC members to ensure a more detailed breakdown of their operational budget is mandatory going forward.

Kiera Reed '27, the Association of Student Activities (ASA) representative in SGFC, agrees with Hall's plan. She hopes to advocate for dual sign-offs on all RFPs and to adopt a new SGFC constitution that clarifies spending using the operating budget. Reed also pointed out the low oversight of the SGFC and concerns that any SGFC member could reimburse "SGFC operating expenses" by directly contacting Mango instead of going through a treasurer. Reed is also concerned about the $10k operating budget SGFC gets, as she believes it is "far more than [SGFC] could ever reasonably need."

For the UA, Obongo personally aims to bring all matters, including "RFPs, Transfers, [and] Budget changes" to both Hall and Abdelbarr to keep everyone informed. He also wants to amend the current transition documents to include an initiative that clarifies matters regarding the budget, like line items, which are "usually fairly ambiguous until spoken about between the treasurer and current officer team," that were not done this year. "My oversight was an upset," Obongo admitted, "and a lesson about proper communication, trust, and reliability."

Ellis files complaint to UA Judicial Board

On Dec. 4, 2025, Ellis submitted a complaint to the UA Judicial Review Board regarding his removal as the SGFC UA representative. Ellis argued that the UA violated standard procedure in replacing its delegates in the SGFC, citing "constitutional voting thresholds" and "due-process requirements."

Ellis believes he acted with the President's approval in both setting up coffee chats and getting treasurer approval of the RFPs. In his opinion, the entire issue is, "at most, a good-faith disagreement about lines of authority" between Hall and Obongo. Ellis explicitly denounced labeling the situation as "embezzlement or theft" or "circumvention of financial controls."

According to Ellis, he had an "undisputed" conversation with Hall about expanding the coffee chats program and thus "reasonably interpreted" her response as supportive, causing him to submit RFPs through proper channels, receive Treasurer approval, and contact SOLE when questions arose. "'Cause' cannot include reasonable misunderstandings about authority," Ellis wrote, "or every management disagreement becomes grounds for removal."

Ellis emphasized how the UA's motion to replace him as their SGFC representative violated "multiple mandatory procedures." He highlighted that only 10 votes were cast; the UA Constitution requires a supermajority of 14–16 votes. Furthermore, he claimed that the Council violated the mandatory notice requirement before voting, citing Article V, Section D (4) in the Bylaws of the UA Council. Ellis did not attend the UA Council meeting on Dec. 3 since he expected it to be a discussion of a vote to transfer $300 from reserves to the UA instead of his removal from the SGFC. Ellis later wrote that the UA cannot "use [his] absence as an excuse for denying [him] due process."

Subsequently, Ellis referred to Article II(B)(10)(f), which prohibits the Council from voting until the Board first determines whether the stated grounds constitute "malfeasance, misuse of power, or other constitutional removal standards." He also called out the meeting notes for displaying a "lack of preparedness and constitutional standard," such as relying on speculation regarding "alleged past conduct and SGFC funds."

Furthermore, Ellis challenged the alleged grounds "Improper Use of UA Funds" as factually incorrect; however, this section in his complaint was deemed "frivolous" by the Board in the "interest of time and clarity" and was redacted.

Ellis requested the Board prohibit the UA Council and UA President from enforcing the Dec. 3 removal vote until it completes its review. He also asked for the Board to issue a "binding clarification" of constitutional standards for removal and grant a procedural reversal based on "insufficient votes and denial of due process." Lastly, Ellis aims for the Board to order the UA Council to amend the records of the Dec. 3 meeting, vote, and all discussion pertaining to "improper use of funds."

The Judicial Review Board has set a deadline of Dec. 11 to submit evidence and is scheduling oral arguments for the next two weeks.

As of publication, Ellis has not responded to *The Tech*'s request for comment.

Vivian Hir '25, MEng '26 contributed to reporting for this article.

Heba Hussein '26: Su "embodies" MIT's "spirit"

Commencement, from Page 1

Noyce Medal, among other accolades. She was named TIME's 2024 CEO of the Year and has been recognized as one of TIME's 100 Most Influential People and Fortune's Most Powerful People in Business. Su is also a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the National Academy of Engineering.

"Lisa Su has embraced MIT's 'mind and hand' motto over the course of her career," said Jim Poterba, the chair of the Commencement Committee, praising Su for her scientific discoveries in semiconductor design and engineering, as well as her business executive leadership.

Senior class president Heba Hussein '26 believes Su's journey "embodies the spirit of MIT," and expressed excitement in welcoming her at Commencement as the class of 2026 prepares to "step into the world carrying the same MIT values."

"I think all MIT students respect the 'lock-in' that must have been required to achieve all that she has, with AMD and beyond," says Alice Hall '26, president of the Undergraduate Association.

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Luu's former advisee "shocked"

UAC, from Page 1

associate deans and the rest of the senior leadership team will be supervised by the Faculty Director.

In his email and a statement to *The Tech*, Darmofal stressed that, despite Institute-wide fiscal stressors, the change at the UAC was not due to budgetary concerns. Luu was the only employee who was let go.

Vi Trinh '27, an associate advisor for Dr. Luu's cohort of first-year students, was advised by Dr. Luu in his freshman year. He praised Dr. Luu's commitment to "know us not only as students, but as people," citing Luu's attention to his advisees' extracurriculars and career goals. (Trinh, *The Tech*'s Junior Officer, was not involved in the writing or editing of this article.)

Trinh was "shocked" to learn that Luu would not continue as his UAC advisor. He learned of this development "not through any direct correspondence with me, but a random email sent to my advisees" without information about their future advising options. Trinh stated that the beginning of December was a particularly inopportune time to go through restructuring, as advisees typically met with Dr. Luu at this time to register for IAP and spring classes.

As of publication, Luu has not responded to *The Tech*'s request for comment.

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

Paula Hammond to be engineering school dean

Hammond '84, PhD '93 will be the first woman dean of MIT's School of Engineering

By Samuel Yuan
NEWS STAFF WRITER

MIT Institute Professor of Chemical Engineering Paula T. Hammond '84 PhD '93 will serve as the next dean of the School of Engineering, Provost Anantha Chandrakasan announced in an email on Friday, Dec. 5. She will be the first woman to serve as dean of MIT's largest school.

The decision ends a five-month search to find a permanent successor for Chandrakasan, who left the engineering dean post to become provost in July. Per the announcement, Hammond will begin her new role on Jan. 16, 2026. Professor of Mechanical Engineering Maria Yang will continue to serve as interim dean until then.

In his announcement, Chandrakasan praised Hammond's scholarship and noted her selflessness and kindness, evident through her resolve to enable "others' professional growth and success."

"She has developed and overseen new efforts to improve faculty recruitment and retention, mentoring, and professional development — all with the aim of helping everyone find a welcoming and productive place to do their very best work," he wrote.

Hammond, who is currently also the executive vice provost, has been a faculty member at the Institute since 1995. In 2006, Hammond became a full professor, and in 2021, she was named an Institute Professor. In addition, she was the head of the Department of Chemical Engineering from 2015 to 2023. Previously, Hammond earned her bachelor's and PhD at MIT, her master's at Georgia Tech, and worked as a postdoctoral fellow at Harvard.

Hammond's research focuses on designing nanomaterials and polymers for applications in areas such as medicine and batteries. Her publications have garnered over 50,000 total citations, and she is an elected member of all three National Academies (Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine). Her lab is part of the MIT Koch Institute for Integrative Cancer Research.

Hammond was awarded the National Medal of Technology and Innovation in 2024, and she was part of President Biden's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology. She is also a co-founder of LayerBio, Inc., a biotechnology company that develops nanotechnology for drug delivery, and has been a member of the scientific advisory board of Moderna.

As dean, Hammond will determine how the School of Engineering will navigate reduced federal funding for science and engineering, which has shrunk many graduate programs at MIT and has disrupted some students' postgraduate plans. For instance, in March, the Electrical Engineering and Computer Science (EECS) department announced a 5-10% cut to funding for its Masters of Engineering (MEng) program.

In a statement in MIT News, Hammond expressed her aim to build on the "cross-disciplinary efforts" in the School of Engineering launched by Chandrakasan when he was dean.

"I believe we have incredible opportunities to build at the interfaces of science, engineering, the humanities, arts, design, and policy," she said. "MIT should be the leader in providing educational foundations that prepare our students for a highly interdisciplinary and AI-enabled world."

Hammond also stated that she wants to "lower barriers" between engineering departments in terms of curriculum and teaching.

In an email to members of the School of Engineering, Hammond expressed her gratitude for the new role and her commitment to ensuring the school's excellence in terms of "deep engineering fundamentals."

"I look forward to getting to know and hear from all members of our community and visiting across departments to hear what is on your mind in the next several months," she added.

'The Atlantic' discusses 250th anniversary of USA

WBUR hosts talk with staff at The Atlantic, NPR, U.S. Rep. Jake Auchincloss

PHOTO COURTESY OF LIZ LINDER

Jeffrey Goldberg speaks with Jake Auchincloss during an event at WBUR CitySpace.

By Manaal Mohammed
ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR

On Tuesday, Dec. 2 at WBUR CitySpace, Jeffrey Goldberg, editor-in-chief of The Atlantic, and Meghna Chakrabarti, host of NPR's On Point, held a conversation about the United States' 250th anniversary. They were celebrating The Atlantic's release of "The Unfinished Revolution," a series of articles examining the history and lessons of America's founding era. Following their conversation was an interview with U.S. Representative Jake Auchincloss (D-MA) regarding his thoughts on America as it is and what it can or will be. The event was ticketed and open to the public; around 100 people were in attendance.

Over the next three years, The Atlantic will host events in all 50 states in a series called The Atlantic Across America, bringing journalists to communities across the country to discuss topical issues and ideas.

Goldberg first discussed the longevity of The Atlantic and what might have kept it alive over the last 168 years since its founding in 1857. He attributes the publication's success to "a lot of luck," joking that the owners "were too stubborn to let it die." When Chakrabarti asked him whether he believes the U.S. would make it to its 500th anniversary, he stated that the question is too open to answer, noting that "empires rise and empires fall."

Goldberg then discussed the difference between his experience of the 200th anniversary of the U.S. and this forthcoming 250th anniversary. For Goldberg, this time period feels more uncertain. "We don't have a Republican party that's putting forth ideas into the discourse," he stated, explaining that this factor has prevented substantive Republican pushback, unlike other events like the Watergate scandal. He went on to talk about rising American discontent in response to the uncertain political and economic environment, citing rising food and gas prices while President Trump is no longer holding rallies to energize supporters; Goldberg expressed that this combination would lead to increased dissatisfaction with Trump among his voters.

Chakrabarti probed Goldberg's thoughts regarding the recent strikes on boats the U.S. military alleges carried drugs. He expressed discomfort regarding the lack of reporting about the rationale for the strikes, and called for transparency. "There has always been an understanding that we have to, to some degree, explain our actions," he said, comparing the current Pentagon to those under previous administrations. Goldberg continued to go over the differences between the America of the past and its present state. "What George Washington did is the central responsibility of any president, which is to stop being president when it's time to go," Goldberg said, adding afterwards that he meant this in a nonpartisan way.

After Chakrabarti's talk with Goldberg, Goldberg interviewed Jake Auchincloss for the remainder of the event. Goldberg started by asking Auchincloss how he defines patriotism. In response, Auchincloss quoted Vice President JD Vance's declaration that people will not fight for an idea, but for their homeland, which he felt was a catalyst in the MAGA campaign. Auchincloss believes that Vance's idea of "blood and soil populism" is wrong, and that Americans will fight for ideas.

Regarding his military background, Auchincloss explained that his motivation for joining the Marine Corps after college came from his grandfather, who had joined the Marines in his own youth while studying engineering. He connected this to Vance's words once more, re-emphasizing the importance of fighting for ideas over homeland. He also thought that the "blood and soil nationalism" which he felt that Vance expressed would be "the shibboleth for the MAGA movement."

Auchincloss continued to discuss present-day issues with the Democratic Party. He stated that Democrats should move towards ideas expressed in Ezra Klein and Derek Thompson's Abundance, which argues that America is suffering from self-inflicted scarcity caused by excessive regulation that hampers technological progress. Auchincloss stated that "the country that builds and invents faster wins the 21st century," naming China as the country doing so in the present day. He maintained that "you don't need to subsidize more things on the demand side", as he believes there is more of a need for supply.

Afterwards, Goldberg questioned Auchincloss regarding Ben Rhodes' piece in The New York Times on the Democrats' stance on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, asking him what he believed caused Democrats to lean towards pro-Palestinian sentiment. Auchincloss stated that the Democrats' stance is due to a "flood the zone problem," referencing a term Steve Bannon coined for a strategy involving overwhelming the media with a barrage of information to control the political narrative. Auchincloss believes the solution is to "get a handle" on social media to prevent it from influencing politics.

Auchincloss also opined against identity politics, saying that such discussions have led politicians to "lose the median voter." When Goldberg asked Auchincloss what Zohran Mamdani's victory in New York City might mean for the Democratic Party, his response included a shout-out to Majority Democrats, a group he chairs. "These mayors [of the Majority Democrats] are ones I look to for the future of the Democratic Party," Auchincloss said, explaining that they have years of experience and had delivered on public safety.

Goldberg then asked Auchincloss about his analysis of the Venezuela campaign and if he believes Pete Hegseth may have committed a war crime. Auchincloss stated that although this is possible, this distracts from the bigger picture of Hegseth's involvement in Venezuela being "blood for oil 2.0," reminding the audience of the Iraq War and its consequences. He affirmed his belief in a "strong and lethal" military, stating that the way to maximize the efficacy of the military is to have Congress "[take] back its war powers."

Auchincloss then suggested having the Democratic Party offer "our own vision of the good life" for the people. He reiterated previously expressed stances, including support for 50-year mortgages, permitting reform, and speaking against the invasion of Venezuela. Then, the discussion transitioned to the regulation of social media. "The three most powerful gatekeepers of news media and information in the world today are Mark Zuckerberg, Elon Musk, and the Chinese Communist Party," Auchincloss said. He continued to talk about TikTok and the issues the app poses because of its ownership outside of the US, stating that he had just introduced a package of bills to address issues such as teenage social media usage and the inability to sue social media corporations for defamatory content.

Finally, Auchincloss shared his thoughts on the gender gap in voting. He believes the way to solve Gen Z's large voting gap is to tell young men they are needed in the country. "Go to work, go to the trade school, join a local union, join the military," Auchincloss urged.

Right-wing pundit Ann Coulter comes to MIT

The controversial commentator vehemently opposed immigration in a Dec. 7 talk

VIVIAN HIR—THE TECH

Conservative media pundit Ann Coulter gives a talk about immigration at an MIT Open Discourse Society event on Thursday, Dec. 4, 2025.

By Vivian Hir
NEWS EDITOR

On Thursday, Dec. 7, controversial conservative commentator and author Ann Coulter gave a talk titled "Dissolving Borders, Decriminalizing Crime, and Demonizing White Men: Unpacking the Liberal Agenda." The event was organized by the MIT Open Discourse Society (MODS), which aims to promote free expression at MIT, and The Leadership Institute, a conservative nonprofit organization.

Over 70 people attended the event in Room 54-100. As the talk was open to the public, many of the audience members were not affiliated with MIT; some came from other universities, including Suffolk University and Dean College.

A lawyer by training, Coulter became well known in the late 90s for her criticism of the Clinton administration while working as a legal correspondent at MSNBC. Since then, Coulter has been a weekly columnist and author, writing conservative commentary on issues such as immigration and terrorism. Known for her provocative and confrontational speech, Coulter has been condemned for remarks that her critics allege target racial minorities.

Coulter was 20 minutes late to the MIT event due to logistical issues, according to MODS president Spencer Sindhusen '27. Coulter's prior talks at universities such as UC Berkeley or Cornell, her alma mater, have had significant pushback from students, resulting in major protests. At MIT, however, there were no protests before the event. Likewise, there were no interruptions or disruptions from the audience during the event.

Coulter began the talk by stating that the majority of Americans agree with Trump's immigration policies. She cited findings from a 2025 New York Times/Ipsos poll that found that 55% of Americans support the deportation of all immigrants who entered illegally, and 87% support deporting undocumented immigrants with criminal records. The poll surveyed 2,128 U.S. adults from Jan. 2 to Jan. 10. "87% is basically unanimous on that," Coulter stated. "Try to call another country's embassy someday and ask them, 'I don't have any money or skills, but I hear your country doesn't get cold or [has] food. Would it be okay if I come there with my boyfriend and our six kids and live there if we can't make it?"

Coulter then criticized the recent immigration of Afghan refugees to the U.S. She stated that the suspect who shot two National Guard members in D.C. on Nov. 26 was an Afghan national. Under the Biden administration, around 200,000 Afghans resettled in the U.S. after the Taliban took over Afghanistan in 2021. Coulter condemned Biden's decision to resettle Afghans, calling them a massive drain on social services and taxpayer money. Many Afghans cite language barriers and difficulties in having their credentials recognized when finding employment in the U.S.

After expressing discontent with the country's immigration system for not taking the "crème de la crème" of individuals, Coulter criticized various immigration programs, including the diversity lottery and the family-sponsored immigration visa program. Referring to the H-1B visa program as "indentured servitude," Coulter stated her belief that the program leads to "a net loss" for the average job applicant because of increased competition "against cheap foreign labor." A U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) report found that the median annual salary for an H-1B visa holder in the computer science field was $123,000 in 2022, with the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reporting a median of $100,000 for workers in the computer and information technology field in 2023.

Coulter's remarks echo a presidential regime more openly hostile to immigration than at any other point in modern history. Recently, President Trump called Somali Americans "garbage" and stated his belief that they should be removed from the U.S. He also claimed that many Afghans are "criminals" in response to the National Guard shooting. Trump's comments have led to significant backlash from various leaders and politicians across the country, who have characterized them as xenophobic and bigoted.

Following Coulter's harsh critique of immigration, she turned to denouncing the country for "decriminalizing crime," focusing on shoplifting in major cities and the 2020 George Floyd protests. She cited an FBI report stating that the national homicide rate increased by 30% in 2020 and blamed the increase in crime during the pandemic on the Geoge Floyd protests. However, analyses from the Council on Criminal Justice found that the homicide rate decreased over the last three years, with peak years being 2020 and 2021.

Continuing her discussion of race relations and "identity politics," Coulter expressed vehement objections to the concepts of white fragility and white privilege. She stated that these ideas "demonize" white people. She then criticized the Democratic Party, stating that it was originally known as "the party of the white working class," but asserted that it no longer was after Clinton's presidency "crushed people working in manufacturing." During his presidency, Clinton agreed to allow China to join the World Trade Organization in 2001, which elicited criticism from opponents because of concerns about the loss of manufacturing in the U.S.

Coulter's discussion of the "demonization" of white people, the "poor working class" in particular, led her to raise what she called a "very uncomfortable" point regarding her views on white voters. She argued that "the only swing voters in the country are white voters," specifically white men with no college education. She credited Trump's win in 2016, loss in 2020, and second win in 2024 to voting shifts in the non-college-educated population of white men. In a 2016 ABC News/Washington Post poll, Trump had a 41-point lead for non-college-educated white men, and lost the most support from white men in 2020 according to an exit poll from Republican firm Fabrizio, Lee & Associates.

Although white people make up most of Trump's voter base, minorities also shifted to the right during the 2024 election. Notably, double the proportion of Black men under the age of 45 voted for Trump in 2024 compared to 2020. Similarly, the percentage of Hispanics who voted for Trump increased in the past three election cycles, from 28% in 2016 to 48% in 2024, according to a Pew Research Center article.

Coulter maintained that the Republican Party should not focus on increasing votes from minorities like Black people and Asian people, but concentrate on increasing the white vote. She believes Republicans are "embarrassed" about securing white voters, stating that "[Republicans] seem very nervous that Democrats will call them racist, because so many white people are voting for them."

Coulter concluded her speech by claiming that current American society is an "utter dystopia," and that immigration and "wokeness" should be addressed significantly. She ended with a cynical and pessimistic outlook on the country's future. "The more time we spend on identity politics, the less we're doing the other things — it is just being dragged on [in] society," Coulter said. "And in the new world, there will be a few really super rich people."

After Coulter's speech, the audience gave a round of applause. For the rest of the event, multiple attendees lined up to ask Coulter questions about her thoughts on the recent developments of the Republican Party, the Trump administration, and political issues such as birthright citizenship. Before asking their questions, a number of attendees thanked Coulter for taking the time to give a talk at MIT.

When the last person in line asked his question, however, audience members started to smell smoke, causing a few to leave early. The smell did not set off a fire alarm. Despite this, Coulter answered his question. The event ended shortly afterwards, as attendees quickly left the lecture hall. According to MIT spokesperson Sarah McDonnell, the MIT Police determined the cause of the smell to be the building's heating system turning on, and not from a fire or safety concern.

Facilities prioritize greenery and sustainability

McDermott Court near Green Building is anticipated to be restored next spring

By Samuel Yuan
NEWS STAFF WRITER

Reflecting on MIT's move from Boston to Cambridge in 1916, Professor of Architecture Mark Jarzombek PhD '86 said that the Institute "welcomed the gritty, industrial landscape that was its back door," unlike other universities who "wanted to be in beautiful landscapes."

But the area around MIT is defined by a different kind of industry these days: Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED)-certified glass office towers for technology companies now reside where factories, parking lots, and smoke stacks used to be. In turn, the Institute, in line with the City of Cambridge's climate priorities, has been adapting its own campus to fit this trend, too.

Over the past few years, MIT has actively tried to "strengthen the campus tree canopy" and improve sustainability while still being "cost-conscious," shared Monica Lee, Communications Director for Campus Services and Stewardship, in an email statement to *The Tech*.

Still, there remains work to be done. Based on *The Tech*'s calculations, in terms of trees and green space on campus, MIT still lags behind other Boston-area schools with urban campuses. In particular, while MIT has around 13.7 trees per acre, Northeastern and Harvard have around 19.2 and 23.9, respectively.

Recently finished work

When students walk through Amherst Alley to return to their dorms after a long day of classes, they might not pay much attention to the new trees planted in recent years, which include maples, birches, and honey locusts.

But Lee noted that these new trees, in the Alley and elsewhere, are important for reducing the "urban heat island effect" in the summer, controlling stormwater, and campus beautification. These new trees are just some of the easily missed recent efforts campus stewards are taking to improve sustainability.

"Recent construction projects have also included new high-performance landscapes, including green roofs, permeable pavements, and bioretention systems," Lee wrote, referring to new buildings such as the Schwarzman College of Computing (Building 45) and the Edward and Joyce Linde Music Building (Building W18). "When installing new plantings, we improve the below-grade conditions and soils to ensure long-term health," she said.

Lee added that, as part of the Tina and Hamid Moghadam Building (Building 55) construction (underneath the Green Building) completed in 2023, "impermeable hardscape was redesigned to provide a new treed and sunken rain garden."

Upcoming construction

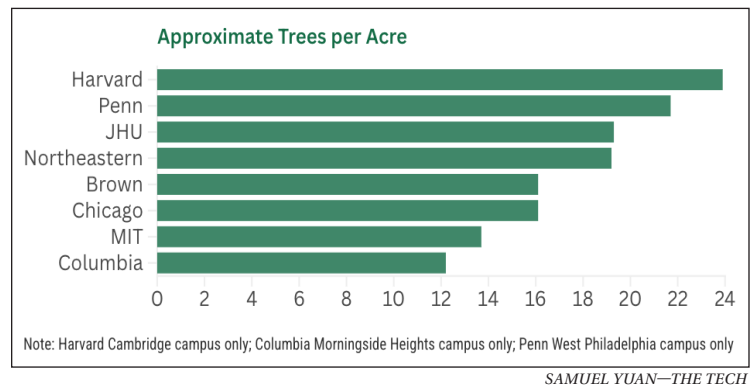
Given the mounting financial pressures on the Institute and efforts to rebalance budgets, Lee stated that new efforts to improve campus greenery would require a "cost-conscious approach."

In particular, Lee noted that when considering improvements to green spaces, the Offices of Campus Planning and Facilities, which steward the spaces, were looking carefully for opportunities to integrate upgrades as part of existing or underway projects.

Current green spaces slated for reopening soon include the Julie Fassett Garden near Baker House and McDermott Court adjacent to the Green Building.

Lee wrote that Fassett Garden was renovated in spring 2025 and will fully reopen once a utility project concludes soon. She also wrote that the work to restore and reopen McDermott Court is anticipated for spring 2026.

Beyond these green spaces, Lee added that MIT Grounds Services is prepared to convert "all blowers to electric" by early 2026 and that most of their equipment is already electric.



SAMUEL YUAN—THE TECH

Approximate trees per acre for various peer universities with urban campuses. For schools with multiple campuses, only the main campus is considered.

MIT's Office of Sustainability has set ambitious goals for the campus too. The Office aims for the Institute to achieve net-zero carbon emissions by 2026 and eliminate direct emissions by 2050. In addition, the office seeks to convert campus shuttle buses to zero-emissions buses by 2026. They even want to "employ AI strategies to reduce building energy consumption."

Despite MIT's signature gray brutalist buildings, administrators are bullish about transforming campus to be more sustainable for the future. Joe Higgins, Vice President for Campus Services and Stewardship, told *The Tech* that he believes green spaces would benefit both the campus and the city.

"We prioritize creating green spaces that are designed to be inviting for the broader community, help create a sense of calm and reduce stress, and cool our urban environment," said Higgins. "As part of the City of Cambridge, we also work to further the city's goals to create a stronger urban forest."

When longtime grounds manager Norman Magnuson retired after a 48-year career at the Institute in 2022, he told MIT News that Grounds Services at MIT went from an "afterthought" to an integrated department over the course of his career.

Magnuson said that when he first started, Grounds Services "worked with whatever extra budget money there was," but it became truly professionalized when he retired.

ADVICE

Dealing with third wheeling

Advice for a third wheel

By Auntie Matter

"hi auntie matter! so i have a bit of a Situation on my hands... i'm a transfer student, so i was at a different school last year. i was friends with someone (let's call them K), but we had a friendship fallout last semester. since i transferred, i thought we would both just move on with our lives.

however, my close friend T just told me they've been dating K for a while now, and long story short, they both want to stay in my life. i'm a little conflicted... on one hand, i don't think K meant any harm during our fallout, i just handled it badly and was really overwhelmed at the time, so i feel like i owe it to them to be a less shitty person myself. on the other, it's awkward being the third wheel and i really did want to start fresh, yk? now i don't know what relationship/friendship i should have with either of them anymore. any advice is appreciated!"

—conflicted capybara

Dear conflicted capybara,

This sounds complex.

First, let's focus on T, who you describe as a "close friend." You express confusion at what sort of relationship you should have with T.

If T is someone who has stuck it out with you not only through the good times, but also the bad, and if you still feel like their friendship is valuable to you outside the context of this relationship, then it seems like you should consider an honest, if perhaps initially awkward, continuation of your friendship. If this is not the case, then they may not honestly be a "close friend," but that's a separate issue. I would urge you against abruptly cutting off or muting your friendship with T.

The way forward with T is honesty. Reaffirm to T that you are their friend, but that you also have history with K (in case they don't know). And it seems like the friendship fallout with K was not one-sided: you acknowledge that you handled the situation badly at the time. Explain that it will take time, but you support them, even if from afar from a bit. Perhaps also explain that if you seem distant to T in the presence of K (whether physically or in conversation), that this is the reason why. This gives you the space to "start fresh" while also staying communicative and not ghosting your friend.

The way forward with K is probably going to be a bit more difficult, I imagine. Plus, if you talk to T, they will probably talk to K, so you'll want to talk to both individually. Here, I think you should reiterate a lot of the points from before, but now framed as you wanting to be cordial and as un-awkward as possible for everyone's sake.

There are two main directions for this conversation, though. You could rekindle a friendship with K for T's sake. Alternatively, you could rekindle the friendship independent of that, in the context of your specific friend breakup. In many circumstances, this second option seems healthier — K will feel like it's more authentic, rather than something you're forcing yourself to do for T's sake. Of course, if you go with this option, it may still be obvious to all that you are at least partially trying to rekindle the relationship only because T is dating K.

But there is a middle ground here: that T dating K inspired you to reflect on your relationship with K independent of T. This, I think, is a decent compromise because it disentangles your relationship with K from that with T, while still acknowledging the elephant in the room. I would hope this leads to more authentic conversation and less overthinking on everyone's part.

There's a world where this doesn't totally work out. Maybe you stay close friends with T, but you and K agree to be cordial, nothing more, and support T. That scenario is still a partial win because at least everyone, including you, understands where everyone else stands. But — unless you don't have the emotional capacity right now — automatically distancing yourself from both T and K without talking to them would not be the move.

Finally, the fact that you've thought through this whole situation and are seeking advice already suggests you are a conscientious person. However the situation plays out, I'm proud that you have spent time mulling it over. Sending virtual hugs from afar.

Best,

Auntie Matter

ADDALA FOR YOUR THOUGHTS

I went to the museum

Maybe it's worth reconsidering what place art museums play in our modern world – and in our lives

By Vaibhavi Addala

CAMPUS LIFE STAFF WRITER

As a self-proclaimed History Buff™, I've always thought of myself as an art museum person. The idea of strolling through the annals of time in a *vibey* atmosphere, surrounded by the past and communicating indirectly with people who lived thousands of years before you, all while seeing things that make you either suddenly extremely grateful for modern medicine or go "oh my gosh, they were *so advanced*" is, without a doubt, quite compelling. Museums are a wonderful way to broaden your perspective and get an idea of the world at large. This is no doubt a commendable and worthwhile effort, especially in an age of often vapid and insular internet islands. Not to mention it makes you sound so *intellectual* and *sophisticated* when you respond nonchalantly to the question of "What did *you* do this weekend?" with "I went to the museum."

Unfortunately, however, no matter how worldly they might make me seem, August saw me swearing off art museums for a bit. Why? Going to museum after museum in a short span of time tired me out.

Between May 19 and July 27, this "museum enthusiast" went to at least five so-called "world class" museums: the British Museum in London, the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, and three on the Museuminsel in Berlin, along with many "smaller" museums (ah, the privilege!). After seeing what felt like a dynasty's worth of Ancient Egyptian sarcophagi and about a million Madonna and Child paintings, I was tired. Turns out there's a limit to how many mummies I can see before they all start looking the same, and honestly, I shouldn't blame myself for that. Maybe it makes me naïve — or maybe it makes me human.

You see, I try not to have too many pretensions of intellectual sophistication these days. I go to an art museum with the blind hope that I will find something there that expands my narrow world, that maybe I'll find a painting that truly moves me or see the product of some sort of technological advancement I didn't know an ancient civilization had. I want to walk away from the museum with a sense of wonder, with the feeling that I've truly grown from the experience, seeing something I've never seen before. But by the end of my summer of museums, my only takeaways were a dazed expression and tired feet. I was getting to the point where I was just trying to get through it, and I masked that sad fact by taking those slow museum steps we all take when pretending to be mesmerized by something we've seen before.

Because, in a way, I had seen it before. Here's the thing about "world-class" art museums: their collections are too big for their primary audience — ignorant harried tourists with impossible checklists. There's too much to see and much of it we've already seen, either in this museum or in the last one. And if each of them is world class, they are all of a similar class with similar things. From the layperson's perspective, their collections overlap, even if they each are high quality. Each museum has an enviable collection from Ancient Egypt, the classical worlds, the Renaissance. Each has somehow procured fifty Bronze Age pots. So if you showed me a Bronze Age pot from one of these museums and asked me where I'd seen it, I could give you many guesses. It might be an exquisite pot, but I've seen apparently "exquisite" Bronze Age pots in several different museums now; what can I say? At a certain point we stop growing — seeing one more isn't teaching me anything I didn't already know.

But that's not all. Maybe it's the oversaturation, but as I wandered through the Bronze Age section of the Bode Museum in Berlin, I started to wonder why all these pots were in the museum in the first place. They looked rather ordinary to me (gasp!). I can understand having one or two, so we realize our ancestors were pretty advanced back before the sea peoples of the Late Bronze age came and took them, [1] but forty in one room? Does no one else find that to be a little too much? And do they really deserve to be in this room, one story up from that exquisite bust of Nefertiti (which I now realize is somehow *not* overrated at all), simply because they survived three thousand years of human strife?

Perhaps this is the product of the content-saturated Internet Age life we live in, where our short attention spans need to constantly be enchanted by something new, and we can just close the tab and open a new one if we get bored. Maybe people a hundred years ago saw these pots and were rooted to the spot in awe of their endurance and that incredible scoring technique that somehow predicted the nuclear age, not to mention the fact that they were spun on a wheel (oh my!).

Maybe people didn't feel this way about museums back in the day, probably because besides blurry images in hard-to-access books, the physical artifacts could only really be seen in museums. These items were exotic and were never seen before, instead of being just a Google search away. Museums brought the world to a person who couldn't expect or afford to see much of it on their own or anywhere else.

I can imagine that, in a time not as content-saturated as ours, these collections opened up history and the world in a fascinating, in-your-face kind of way to people who might have never expected to leave their homeland. To someone who has never been outside their country (and most likely, a small radius from their home), seeing Ancient Egyptian sarcophagi or that Botticelli might have truly changed their world and brought them closer to the outside one. (Who knows, maybe our Victorian "ancestors" [2] were simply pretentious, or, in an age of stifling social norms, so bored that even these pots were a welcome distraction).

But either way, we're in a different time now. Even an "average" person can expect to visit a couple of world-class museums in their lifetime; when it gets boring, they can also — for better or worse — simply scroll online. This reality is sad, but it's true.

So I argue, maybe it's worth reconsidering what place art museums play in our modern world and our lives.

Don't get me wrong, I still love a good museum visit. I still feel like I reclaim some humanity and some connection with the world whenever I go to one. I do grow in some way every time — but only when I actively try and avoid the "gotta see 'em all" mentality and instead make an effort to see something I want to see, to see something new. I've been lucky to see many amazing things in museums over the years, but that also means I don't need to gawk at them again. If there's something else in the next exhibit that could teach me something new, it would serve me better to go there.

So maybe in the future I'll stay away from mindlessly wandering through the Ancient Egyptian or classical Greek sections (and certainly the Bronze Age!) if there are other things I'd rather see. (I'd highly recommend the Benin bronzes at the MFA, for example.) I certainly think I'll only go to a museum when I really want to, and not, in the words of Mt. Everest mountaineer George Mallory, "because it's there."

Over the past couple months, I've realized that art museums are great in small, concentrated doses and at intervals — they're not mountains to be climbed, or marathons to be run. They should be *enjoyable*. They should teach you something. Ideally, they should make you feel awe at people and what they've been able to achieve, and at your own smallness tucked within the human narrative.

There's something incredible about a place that can simultaneously make you feel seen and invisible at the same time. I know that when I go to an art museum and see the right things, I feel proud to be a human, proud of the vastness and brilliance of what humans have done and are capable of doing. But I also feel incredibly humbled. I remember I'm just a small link in a long, long chain, and together, these things ground me and inspire me in a very powerful way. Isn't it incredible that it's possible to get such a thing just by going to an art museum?

Sure, those are lofty words, but here's the thing: two months of Europe may have gotten me tired of museums, but two months at MIT made me run right back to the MFA. And I felt all those things there, I really did.

Maybe it's because I didn't go to the Ancient Egyptian section this time.

JOJO'S BIZARRE MUSINGS

Have we forgotten the joy of creation?

Why perfectionism and the 'right' answer is the enemy

By Jojo Placides
CAMPUS LIFE STAFF WRITER

The biggest revelation that I've had my freshman year (so far) is that there's a huge part of me that is a *humanities* student. And where else to realize that than at MIT, perhaps the most prestigious STEM university in the country?

I mean, listen, don't blame me: I had to sacrifice that humanities side of myself to lock in on STEM to get into MIT in the first place. In high school, I scoffed at the thought of reading sheet music (from eighth notes to the "every good boy deserves fudge" mnemonic), analyzing *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*, and writing essays about modern issues. Now, however, it may seem a bit crazy, but when I'm not agonizing over Green's Theorem, I like to listen to some of my favorite artists [1] and pretend that I'm the one playing the music, strumming the guitar, and hitting the high notes. When I'm not thinking about Le Chatelier's Principle, I play scenes on YouTube from some of my favorite shows [2] and act out the main character's dialogue, pretending I'm the Doctor trying to stop the Zygons and humanity from waging war with each other, or I'm Josuke stumbling onto his final confrontation with Kira.

I decided that I should give myself the chance to do the things I've daydreamt about for a while, since I never had the chance to in high school. This led me to join MIT Musical Theatre Guild's *Rocky Horror Show* production, take Electronic Music Composition I (21M.361), and write for *The Tech*. When the constraints disappeared and the chains [3] were cut, I immediately went to explore territories I've never even bothered to glance at before. At the time, I never really knew why. And, to be honest, I'm still trying to figure out why I immediately began doing these things in college. Perhaps there was something within me that wanted to be let out?

One afternoon, while working on a simple composition with my music teacher on a cool music creation website, we recreated the Amen break so frequently sampled in many rap songs. [4] All I needed was a hi-hat on every eighth note, some syncopation on the snare, and kick drums; the familiar beat blasted out of the laptop after I executed the code! You can't even picture the beaming smile I had on my face once I realized that I had created THE Amen break. My imagination went wild.

But later that night, I was distraught! I had tried any drum beat I could think of, any progression I could play on a MIDI synthesizer. None of it sounded good to me. The melodies led into nothing, the chords were dissonant, and the drum beat didn't have the same "oomph" of the Amen break.

At some point during the music composition process, I asked myself, "What is the best possible sequence of chords to complement the melody? What is the right combination of notes to complement the chords? What is the correct answer to any of this? If there was a formula to generate the correct tunes, had I been plugging and chugging wrong this whole time?"

"This wouldn't be the next Magdalena Bay, no," I thought. "It wasn't the next Daft Punk. It wasn't the next modern electronic music masterpiece." Then, I asked myself, "What was the point?"

As a result, I procrastinated endlessly on the assignment. The wonder faded away. Perhaps, I feared I wasn't good enough, so I avoided the work by not doing it at all. For a whole month, I created nothing. Nothing at all. Instead, I waited. Waited for the spirit of Mozart or Beethoven or Jeff Buckley to possess me to make masterpieces. Waited, constantly, for the right moment to create. For a whole month, I had forgotten the joy of creation.

To beginners like me, the world may seem a bit cruel. Every time I play the guitar, for every string that buzzes and mutes, any chord I mess up, I hear the sneering laughter of a thousand listeners. Every time I write an article, for every poorly structured paragraph or poorly articulated idea, I feel the judgemental glares of a thousand readers.

Going through this whole process made me realize something. In our constant pursuit of the correct equations and correct algorithms and correct answers on our psets and midterms, we box ourselves within unrealistic cages of expectations. As a result, we stand there, paralyzed, subconsciously trying to look for the "right formula" so we may proceed with the next notes, words, and strokes, afraid of the big red X — the thought of making a mistake.

Don't believe me? Try composing a song. I did. I bet the first question that will come to mind is: what's the best method for coming up with the music? In other words, what's a formula I can follow to get the results I need? Knowing MIT students, many of you will probably be thinking about these questions and mulling over them for a long time.

But the truth is there is no such "formula." Maybe in STEM, correct answers and formulas are the name of the game, but in music, theater, reportage — art — those don't really exist.

When I tell you that the first four chords of *Rises the Moon* by Liana Flores are Am7, Am6, Am7, and C7, do you think the artist followed some sort of formula to come up with that sequence of chords? Sure, in music creation, your choices are limited to what "sounds good" in Western music theory, but a near-infinite number of choices are being made anyways; it's almost as if music creation is random and arbitrary!

Sure enough, there is music that is totally random but still sounds good! Brian Eno's *Music for Airports* was made by recording a few piano notes and creating loops of varying lengths; when played together, the out-of-sync tapes create different musical phrases every time. Another example of musical notes played from every pixel is an instance of Conway's *Game of Life*.

The point is that there is no "right" answer in creating music — there is no formula that determines the best note that comes next in a melody or chord. This applies to any art form! When Vincent Van Gogh made *Starry Night*, he didn't plug and chug into a formula to determine his next stroke. The same goes for me: in writing this article, I'm not using any specific format. I'm just going with whatever feels right to me. And that's fine!

I think perfection and the concept of "correctness" were made by schmucks to prevent the rest of us from making art. That's right — perfection is a conspiracy meant to paralyze those who want to express themselves. If the words they write, the chords they strum, and the strokes they paint aren't a part of the next Mona Lisa, they just throw it out! And if people are this paralyzed, they end up not taking any step at all.

Even I, dear reader, am spending a lot of time trying to figure out the most perfect way I can convey how I feel in this article. I spent weeks mulling over the details before saying, fuck it, I'm just gonna start writing. And the fingers... the fingers sure do type fast without the heavy burden of perfection. But once you forget about the ideal version of your creation in your head and start actually creating instead, you'll find that you'll get a lot closer to that ideal version than if you just constantly stressed about it.

Lastly and most importantly of all, perfection is what makes you forget about the joy of creation. You spend hours stressing about the right answer and getting frustrated when that imaginary big red X appears in your head. Suddenly, you hate making music, you hate writing, and you hate painting because the stress and frustration makes you feel like absolute shit.

But if you had just remembered the joy of creation — the wonder of experiencing the process, the pride of finishing a project, the joy of holding your work in your hands, the feeling of realizing the artwork is an extension of yourself — maybe you would've come back to the canvas and started painting again.

Look, if you're stressing about not being good enough to make your first song, your first poem, your first article, all I'm saying is: shut up and start creating. If all you do is daydream about being a rockstar, a painter, a writer, or an actor, then a daydreamer is all you will ever be and your ideas, and by extension, yourself, will remain stuck in your head for the rest of eternity.

But if you gather the strength and the courage to make dissonant chords, create messy paintings, write imperfect paragraphs, everything else will follow from that first step. It might take a few, a hundred, or a thousand iterations and practice sessions, but eventually, you will realize that every chord, every drum beat, and every melody is simply a reflection of you. Every one of those characters in a play you act out, every one of those paragraphs in an essay you write, every one of those sculptures you mold... all of them are extensions of you. One day, you will stare at your creations and realize that you are simply surrounded by pieces of you. You will then realize that you are the most you that you have ever been.

In the words of the great Kurt Vonnegut: "Practice any art, music, singing, dancing, acting, drawing, painting, sculpting, poetry, fiction, essays, reportage, no matter how well or badly, not to get money and fame, but to experience *becoming*, to find out what's inside of you, to make your soul grow."

(PS: I'm working on a cover album of Sweet Trip's *You Will Never Know Why*. That's the art I'm practicing!)

1. Such as Panchiko and Magdalena Bay

2. Doctor Who and *JoJo's Bizarre Adventure*, specifically

3. Better known by its more terrifying name: the college application system

4. This sample is especially prominent in breakcore, a genre I listen to a LOT; I recommend "SR20DET" by Blksmiith.

AUGUSTO'S ANGLE

Crashing out: MIT culture or a sign of something deeper?

A conversation on the progression of the work and mental health culture at MIT

By Augusto Schwanz

A crash out (n.) is when, simply put, someone freaks out, usually because something pushes them over the edge during an already difficult time. Sometimes, crash outs are loud and dramatic; other times, they are silent and internal, but equally painful to experience. Many people claim to know when such an episode is going to occur, leading to phrases such as, "I'm going to crash out" (even though sometimes it may not actually happen).

It is no secret that MIT has a reputation and culture of being difficult and fast-paced. Given the surging popularity of the phrase "crashing out" in recent history, it is perhaps not totally unexpected that this phrase is being repeated by many stressed, sleep-deprived students. In some ways, this is normal; everyone will inevitably go through challenges, whether MIT-related or not, that they struggle with.

However, one student is pushing back on this notion, questioning whether crashing out is becoming too normalized here. In a recent Dormspam thread, Mahdi Afshari '27 began a dialogue with the MIT community, asking whether or not the culture of work at MIT and focusing on "being better" has led to a deterioration in students' levels of empathy towards others and the relationship between people here.

Many responded to the Dormspam email with interesting thoughts. One anonymous person noted a trend of becoming burnt out because of an inability to accept "doing less." They mentioned a friend who refused to drop even a single class or extracurricular activity, despite showing signs of depression and falling significantly behind in classes, because it would imply that they were not capable of doing the work.

Alumni have also chimed into the conversation; one notes that such a culture of overwork is much more prominent today than when they were a student (class of 2004), and from their perspective, taking anything more than four classes in a semester seems highly excessive. They believe this trend may be caused by increasingly competitive admissions standards. Another alum that attended MIT as an undergraduate and stayed for graduate school shares that conversations with other grad students who did their undergrad elsewhere often reveals this aspect of student culture as fairly unique to MIT, at least in its pervasiveness.

In an effort to get a better understanding of the MIT community's perspective of this culture as a whole, I sent out a Dormspam email with a Google Form. Here are my thoughts on the results:

Many people have their own interpretations on crashing out, which are actually quite varied and sometimes contradictory. One individual speaks broadly and simply, saying "feeling uncontrollably upset," whereas others reference specific aspects of MIT. One undergrad compares crashing out to the feeling of being, "basically bummed... the workload getting tough, no motivation, almost like burnout but not really. Feeling lonely. No motivation to do anything besides grind psets, and even that is dry, hollow."

Others view crashouts as more dramatic: a current junior describes crashing out as "severely overreacting to an event or situation, either mentally or through actions," and compares it to a meltdown. One first-year even turns to a microeconomic-style definition, explaining that a light level of stress is acceptable. In their opinion, a crash out only occurs when "the speaker believes the marginal unit of stress, in addition to being unpleasant, is also now a net-negative" in regards to productivity.

Between these and other responses, three broad types of the use of the phrase "crashing out" stand out: slow-burning isolation (most akin to what one might more traditionally refer to as "depression," or perhaps "burnout"), loud meltdown, and bemused resilience. "Bemused resilience" was the hardest of the three to pin down and characterize, but I refer to it to describe the pattern of people who feel like they *should* be leaning more towards one of the other forms of crashing out, but aren't. One good example of this is a response by a first-year who says, "honestly when most people say they're crashing out it's just a turn of phrase to indicate that they're going through it, not that they're actually gonna crash out." Someone who says that they are going to "crash out" in this context seems to refer more to a high level of stress and workload, but nevertheless, the individual continues on with their work.

So, what appears to be causing the crash outs?

First, the normalization of a high workload. Several respondents and alumni point out that what used to be considered excessive is now treated as standard. Four classes used to be the upper limit; now, people pile on credits and activities until something breaks.

Additionally, some mention the social cost of stepping back. As mentioned earlier, one student refused to drop a class or extracurricular because doing so would look like failure, even though it was taking a visible toll on them. That refusal to accept doing less is a recurring theme in both the thread and the survey replies, suggesting that students don't feel comfortable taking time for themselves at the risk of failing to reach their "true potential."

What is not a simple problem, and what we should resist treating as one, is the idea that every mention of crashing out is necessarily pathological. Some people used the phrase casually or ironically, and a few explicitly said MIT has been a wonderful place for them, reminding us that the phrase is not entirely dire. Treating every "I'm going to crash out" as a crisis even when it isn't one (and wasn't meant to signal one) risks diluting the subset of those instances in which they *are* representative of a crisis.

That leaves us with some interesting, and perhaps uncomfortable, questions. Is crashing out a symptom of changing admissions and competition, or is it an intensification of behavior that has always existed? Are the loud crash outs simply easier to notice and therefore more likely to shape campus life? How much of the problem is institutional (based on official MIT policy, such as the lack of credit limits) and how much is cultural (based on student experience, feeling the need to "compete" against other students and even against themselves), driven by peer expectations and expectations about what it means to "grind?" Who gets to decide whether doing less is acceptable, and how do we make that social decision visible?

Some of these questions are particularly difficult to answer due to some level of sampling bias; while some alumni have chimed in both in the Dormspam thread and in the survey about how MIT hasn't always had the culture it does today, it begs the question of whether or not alumni who didn't particularly enjoy their time at MIT would still be involved in the community and be active on Dormspam. Similarly, those who may experience the most extreme forms of crashing out may be unlikely to respond to an email/survey about crashing out, while those who particularly enjoy their time here may see it as a harmless turn of phrase and say as much.

The original Dormspam thread also raises a moral question: Is the use of the phrase a form of public catharsis, letting people blow off steam and feel better, or is it a normalization of undue stress and poor mental health? Again, feelings here are mixed; one junior thinks that crashing out can be a form of bonding with friends, and notes that they "don't think it's great to be judging people for their use of the phrase to indicate that they're overly stressed." They also worry that an overemphasis on doing away with "crash out culture" may, in fact, be counterproductive and "discourag[e] people from discussing their issues with others, [which] is not a good thing." A senior disagrees, reflecting on how a personal mindset change helps them stop "wanting to complain about [their] workload and classwork" and has led to a genuine improvement for them. Now, they say that "it bothers [them] when [they] hear people complaining a ton." They view these complaints as "generally self-inflicted and/or a mindset issue." While I don't necessarily agree with the notion that the stressors that lead to a crash out are mostly self-inflicted, I do understand how feeling as if one should crash out could result in a crash out, leading to a culture of behavior that further perpetuates this mindset.

Ultimately, it may feel like I end with few definitive conclusions, but this is intentional; both because nearly none of MIT's issues can be resolved with just a single article or Dormspam thread, and because we, as of now, still have far too little information (both from the survey and from MIT institutional data) with which to act on. Instead, after you have a chance to reflect on how your own life resonantes with what was mentioned prior, I'm choosing to end with encouragement to you all — encouragement to use the language that you feel best reflects you and whatever you're going through. However, I also urge you to reflect on whether or not your language reflects on the broader culture of where you are (MIT or elsewhere), and if that is a culture you want yourself and others to exist in. There is no single answer about how to (or whether to) address "crash out" culture at MIT; language and culture are defined by our use of words, and individually being intentional about if and when we use phrases like "crashing out" can make all the difference collectively.

FROSH FILES

Fail loudly, dream louder

Soon, the failures will seem like nothing at all

By Shelly Yang

CAMPUS LIFE STAFF WRITER

At the start of the school year, I decided I would document all my failures.

I locked myself out of my room seven times this semester.

Near the start of the year, I was cooking what my friend called "Japanese prison food." Was it just miso paste, noodles, and vegetables boiled in a pot and hastily adorned with sesame seeds and furikake seasoning? Perhaps.

When I was looking for 32-004 to take my first 6.1010 quiz, I got lost navigating the twists and turns of Stata. At one point, I found myself in some kitchen storage area. Mind you, I had stumbled upon this spot before, but in my panicked state five minutes before the quiz, I completely lost my navigation skills.

These are just a sampler; believe me, there are many, *many* more.

We should be more open with our failures. Usually, we only see each other's outcomes, so what tends to happen is we show off our successes and hide our failures. As a result, I think failures are underrepresented. There's also a general sense of shame surrounding failure — either that, or it gets brushed off. While it's very natural to tell someone "it's okay" and provide encouragement, it's also worth revisiting the failure and discussing what can be learned from the experience.

A natural question might be, "What constitutes a failure?" To me, a failure counts as an event that results in an undesirable outcome initially; in hindsight, I might be grateful for said failure, but there's an initial feeling of disappointment. This might range from flunking a test to having an application rejected.

However, I think the term "failure" is a little heavy for some of the events I want to share. So instead, to keep up with Gen Z (or at this point, alpha?) slang, I'll call them "cooked moments."

For each month, I kept a list of my cooked moments just for you all!

August

-I applied to be an MIT admissions blogger over the summer, but got rejected. I wasn't expecting anything, but was still quite sad, as one of my main personal projects in high school was my blog. However, in their rejection letter, they recommended I write in the Campus Life section of *The Tech*, and here we are!

-Caught in the preliminary firehose of deciding between ASEs, I chose to take the 5.111 ASE. I was *completely* slammed by this exam (that kind of rhymed!). I took the equivalent of AP Chemistry in high school, but I had heard this exam was diabolical. It indeed was. We were given three hours for this exam; I walked out 75 minutes in.

-I nearly got a concussion from falling backwards and hitting my head really hard on a shoe rack. I was fine and the injury was nowhere as severe as I thought, but it was still not fun. At least it got me familiar with MIT Health!

September

-Around the first week of this month, I tried out for six acapella groups with minimal singing experience and got rejected from almost all of them, though I yielded a 33% acceptance rate! Not too bad for my first rodeo, honestly; I only had some piano experience and elementary school choir experience going in.

-I pulled an Icarus and flew too close to the sun. Or more accurately, the sun flew too close to me. Ask me in person for the details, if you're curious.

October

-I applied to be a part of Borderline exec, specifically for web development, but got rejected. In hindsight, I'm glad this happened, because I was absolutely swamped and shouldn't have tried to commit to an exec position.

-The first midterms for 6.1010 and 6.1210 happened, which were both pretty rough for me. Somehow, I passed both!

November

-Unfortunately, I didn't do as well on a 6.1010 quiz. I'm glad it's not too big of a deal in the long run.

-The second midterm for 6.1210 was also rough, but I somehow passed. At one point, I was six lectures behind, which was quite a demoralizing experience.

-This month was also not the best, but I started calling my parents every day instead of at sporadic times, which helped a lot.

At the time of writing, December hasn't really happened, but I'm quite worried about finals week. In the end, as all things are, I'm confident things will work out in their own ways, just like how everything else has before.

Although there were a lot of failures, there were also some surprising moments I was quite happy with:

-I got into and joined the MIT-Wellesley Toons this semester. I've enjoyed seeing how an a capella group actually plays out!

-Originally, I didn't plan on taking on a UROP, but I surprised myself. Back in April

First Year, Page 10

JOJO'S BIZARRE MUSINGS

This one time my friend and I hiked at night like dumbasses

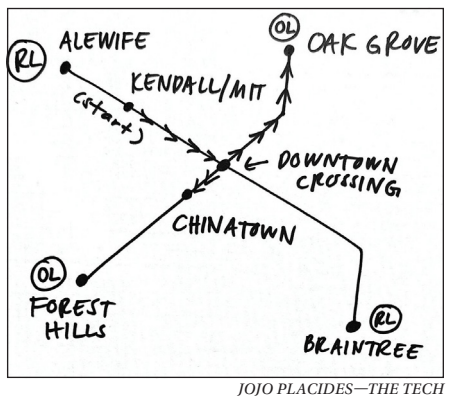
The art of the sidequest, and why time is ticking by faster

By Jojo Placides
CAMPUS LIFE STAFF WRITER

It's not a good idea to go out alone hiking at night. There might be bears. But maybe the only bear that night was me.

One dark and stormy night, my friend and I had a really dumb idea to go out hiking. Now, generally, when the weather is rainy and the surroundings are gloomy, many people would be scared. "Oooh, you'll catch a cold," they say. "You might slip and fall to your death." These are only thoughts conjured up by the bourgeois to trample on the hopes and dreams of the people to explore freely in the land of a world without an ultimate enforcer of rules. But I digress.

So, down to the Kendall subway station we went! We rode the Red Line to Downtown Crossing, transferred to the Orange Line, and then made it all the way to Oak Grove. Here, I'll draw it for you. (Take note of where Chinatown is!)



JOJO PLACIDES—THE TECH

Map of the Red and Orange Line in the Boston subway system.

Keep in mind, I'm an immigrant who came from the Philippines three years ago, so my eyes are still fresh as hell. I don't think I've seen much of America outside of my rural coastal town up in Maine and the hyper-urban scene in Boston. So seeing the non-rural, not-quite-hyper-urban side of America was a bit surreal to me. It's probably a bit insane to you, dear readers, considering many of you grew up in that part of the country. But to me, the old houses and vast forests interrupted by industrial trains and subways were a bit surreal. Most importantly, I was going back to a place that wasn't swarming with people, much like my hometown Rockland. A place not so crowded — a place with empty, dark roads lit by rows of street lights that stretch to infinity, covered by fallen leaves scattered everywhere — was refreshing compared to the constant activity of Boston and Cambridge.

We walked for 20 whole minutes with the goal of hiking at night, surrounded by scenes like these. And then we finally made it to our destination. However, the road ahead was this evil stretch of Darkness™ that not even our phone flashlights could illuminate. The conversation then went a little something like this:

"Sasha?" I turned to my friend. "Did we happen to bring any flashlights? Actual ones...?"

Carrying a huge backpack full of snacks, Sasha answered, "No."

"So you're telling me... we both had this dangerous plan to hike at night, and we didn't even think about bringing a light source?" I asked.

Sasha shrugged. My palm flew to my face. We were already far away from the city, so we had to trek an additional 20 minutes. No worries! We still had a lot to talk about. He talked about things like how boring his life was and how he's constantly swamped by psets. I found the talk quite unrelatable. Haha, couldn't be me! Hahaha...

Then, we realized that the "civilization" — which consisted of two sketchy convenience stores — also didn't have any light sources. So we resorted to a quick Uber to a nearby Target to get some flashlights and more snacks before returning back to the evil stretch of Darkness™.

How has time passed by so quickly? I mean, I just got here. I had just arrived on campus and checked into East Campus. I was in the company of myself and my innocent eyes, with my suitcase full of clothes and dreams, and you're telling me we're already in the twilight times of the fall semester?

Anyway, onward we went to our doom! At first, street lights shone through the trees, but soon we found ourselves at a point where luminance was naught. We were surrounded only by the silhouettes of trees and the gray sky.

In the past, we often joked that we would find a trapdoor to an evil basement like the ones found in found footage films like Marble Hornets. So I had an idea: What if I livestreamed this entire trip? However, there were multiple problems: 1) my battery was running low, 2) service was running out, and 3) I didn't have the requirements to livestream in the first place. In fact, this was a really rare moment that forced me not to have my phone on. Dark and scary surroundings. Bears, no doubt lurking in the shadows along with the ghosts of those who perished along the way. There were also slippery stones; I could slip, crack my head, and forget I was ever a silly MIT student named Jojo. You'd think I'd be gluing my eyes to my phone like an idiot?

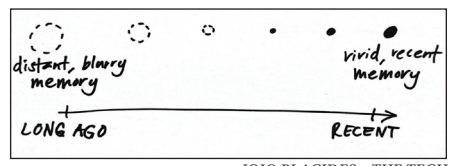
Eventually, we stumbled across a rock that overlooked the rest of the forest, which was still dark, save for the small circles of light from our $10 flashlights. For once, I was actually savoring the mundane moments. The swaying of the trees — no fireworks, no explosions, no headlines or anything — just the breathing of the forest. I vividly remember realizing that, for once, the seconds felt like actual seconds.

What does this mean? I'll preface this by saying it's a bit funny walking up and down the Infinite. I catch glimpses of people so busy and determined. I almost never say a word to them, but what's on their mind is crystal clear: the next thing. The next pset. The next midterm. Their next partner, and so on.

Not only in the Infinite, but everywhere. I notice it while walking to the Stud. That beautiful spot on campus across the street from Lobby 7, where the ground is made of small pebbles and surrounded by tall trees. Here, the Alchemist looks like a metal being appreciating the view. Yet, I don't really see people enjoying this view. Their eyes are fixed downward, always thinking about the next thing, and the next, and the next... I don't really look up either, busy looking at my phone or rushing to rehearsals for Rocky Horror. That's when the seconds feel like mere milliseconds. It's like everyone — I included — always tries to fast forward past the current moment to go to the next.

But when Sasha and I were at that rock, the seconds felt longer. There was no phone to distract me, and no psets to worry about (at least, in the moment). Just me and him, overlooking the dark, raging silhouettes dancing in the rainy wind.

How do you measure time? No, not literal time. Not with a stopwatch, nerd. How do you discern between a "long time ago" or "just recently"? I used to measure the amount of time since an event by its blurriness in my mind. For example, I don't remember my 4th birthday vividly, so therefore, it feels long ago.

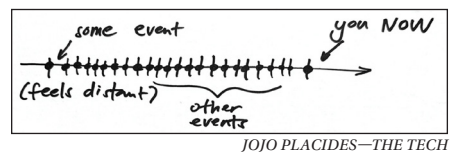


JOJO PLACIDES—THE TECH

How we measure time. Memories that are blurry feel "distant" and memories that are "clearer" feel more "recent."

I also measure the amount of time by how many events have happened since then. In 2024, I went to MIT for RSI for six weeks. A lot has happened since then: sailing in the fall, submitting the MIT college application, getting my heart broken six times, sailing in the spring, submitting my JSHS application, getting my heart broken another six times, realizing that I was the problem, and then finally graduating... Within the last year, I have fundamentally grown and changed as a person.

But college has really distorted this definition; it's been a whirlwind of events, from the Pumpkin Drop and the student government election to Rocky Horror, FredFest, and apple picking. The events within that whirlwind feel very blurry because, well, it's been a whirlwind. Thus, they seem so long ago now. But because I still vividly remember my life before college, the day that I arrived at MIT feels rather fresh. In other words, the more recent events feel distant, and the more distant events feel recent. I feel like I've done a lot, but haven't done anything at all.

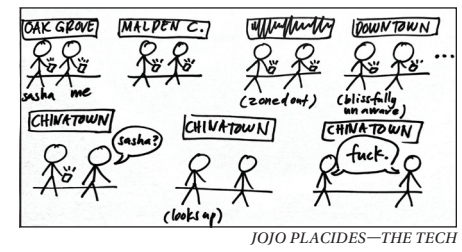


JOJO PLACIDES—THE TECH

Distortion of the perception of time and memories.

By the time Sasha and I got to the train station, we felt that it had been a long time since we began this adventure. Furthermore, without our cellphones, our time together felt more full. But we were tired. REALLY tired. We rode the Orange Line train toward Forest Hills, meaning to hop off at Downtown Crossing and transfer over to the Red Line to go back to Kendall/MIT. It was NOW that we pulled out our phones to catch up with civilization. Maybe Half Life 3 came out while we were dillydallying? Maybe Magdalena Bay released a new album?

"Who knows," I said. "Let's zone out!" I'll draw out what happened next:



JOJO PLACIDES—THE TECH

A comic depicting me and a friend zoning out and missing our intended destination.

I think we were in a state where seconds did feel like seconds. But when we went on our phones, the seconds shrunk to milliseconds again, even though we were unaware of this. We thought we had more time than we did. We fast forwarded a bit too far, and thus, we ended up at Chinatown. With a billion psets due at home and million other commitments demanding so much back at MIT, we were initially worried, but thought, oh well, this place is so demanding anyway. At MIT, time flies by, and the seconds shrink. So we just explored Chinatown, enjoying a hotpot restaurant before we went back to MIT and savoring when seconds felt like seconds.

Here's the real art of the side quest: I think side quests are a resistance to this strange system where we are constantly forced out of the present — constantly forced to think about the next big thing. You're never really given a moment to just breathe.

So whenever you find yourself subconsciously wanting to skip past the present by looking at your phone, breathe for a second! Notice the environment around you. The leafless trees, the metal giant made out of math next to the Stud, the lights of cars endlessly reflecting into the infinite darkness of the road.

Time feels so fast nowadays because you're in the midst of college. It's completely natural. Don't worry about it. But when you're presented with those rare liminal moments, whether it's from Oak Grove to Chinatown or from East Campus to the Stud, don't let your phone steal your time. The truth is, those mundane moments are the ones that make up the most of your "time." Skipping these moments is like throwing away the meat. You'll just end up with two slices of plain bread.

It may not be a good idea to go out alone hiking at night. But at this point, when you're the equivalent of a twig helplessly tumbling and flowing down the river of time that only continues to accelerate, you might as well...

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Patrick Mang and Katherine Panebianco: Dual Perspectives on Physics at MIT

This Student Spotlight interweaves two diverse perspectives on both Physics at MIT

By Alor Sahoo
EDITOR-AT-LARGE

Trigger warning: mention of suicide

Hello! The Student Spotlight column is back—with an alumni twist this time.

Instead of just one student, we're putting two Course 8s in conversation with each other. First, we have Patrick Mang '98, a Course 8 alum who moved to London after his PhD and runs the non-investment side of a hedge fund, Trium Capital. Second, we have Katherine Panebianco '26, who is a double major in Courses 8 and 18, President of the Society of Physics Students (SPS), and is doing research that involves analyzing James Webb Space Telescope data.

All together, their experiences show what Course 8 can look like and feel like across generations and careers.

These interviews have been edited for length and clarity.

Why did you choose Course 8 as a major?

Patrick:

For Patrick, it started with a museum gift shop. During his childhood, he went to the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum and bought a popular science book. "Probably about black holes and gravity and general relativity," he recounts. Once he read it, he got hooked on the subject. The challenge enticed him.

"I wanted to study physics because I guess I thought it was hard," he says.

Katherine:

Katherine first gave what she calls the stereotypical "cheesy" answer.

"I always liked physics in high school," she said. "I always liked how mathematical it is, like the way it's just using math to describe the world."

Her interest does not only derive from the coursework, though: "I've always found the physics community to be a very welcoming environment," she noted.

When you were an undergraduate, what did you think you would do as a career? Alternatively, as a current undergraduate, what do you think you will do as a career?

Patrick:

Patrick's initial plans were straightforward. "I wanted to be academic. I wanted to be a professor. I didn't become a prof, but that's what I wanted to do."

After graduating, he went to Japan via MISTI's MIT-Japan program to work at an American manufacturer's Japanese office. Within two months, he realized it wasn't for him, so he decided to apply to grad school. As he made this decision, one empathetic MIT professor told Patrick a funny story about his own struggles with culture clash in the corporate world: specifically, dress codes at IBM. With this professor's support, Patrick went to Stanford for a PhD.

The actual career he ended up in—banking and then Trium Capital in London—came later, accidentally.

Katherine:

Katherine didn't exactly have a five-year plan at the start.

"When I was in high school, I was like, okay, I'm going to get into college, and then I'll figure out what I want to do with my life after I'm in college," she says. "And then as a freshman, I was kind of like, okay, well, I just got here. I don't need to have everything figured out."

At some point, for a multitude of reasons discussed later, physics filled that void.

"I've kind of just fallen into [physics]," she says. "I've done a bunch of physics things, and so now I'm applying for grad school."

For her, graduate school is the natural continuation of what she's been doing all along: falling deep and deeper into physics.

What are you doing now, and how is it similar or different to what you imagined?

Patrick:

Patrick finished his Stanford PhD and fully intended to remain an academic. But life had different plans. His best friend was in finance and was emphasizing Wall Street as a career path. Patrick's mother was also an amateur commodities trader, so careers in finance were always in his periphery.

He tried returning to Japan, this time in banking. Deutsche Bank wanted to hire him in Tokyo, but it wasn't working out. They made a compromise:

"They said, 'Look, we need you to go to London, which is kind of the headquarters of the investment bank.'...I flew to London, and then this guy who's very influential, guy who had studied physics at Stanford, actually said, "Look, we're going to make you an offer, but we're going to give it to you from London, because we think it's better for you and we think it's better for us."

Patrick had one job offer, an almost completed PhD, and no other options. He took the offer.

"So for financial reasons, I went into banking. For accidental reasons, I came to London," he summarizes. He has been there since.

"I think many things in life are accidentally true."

Katherine:

Right now, Katherine is close to the academic pipeline. She is applying to grad school, inspired by her current research in the Professors Eiler's Lab on a gravitationally lensed quasar. "[The research] is a lot of things that are kind of high redshift, so very early in the universe, think like 12 billion plus years old, which is crazy. It's crazy that we can look that far back in time and just see these things," she says.

"And that's definitely influenced the sort of physics that I want to do in grad school."

How did you find (or build) community in physics?

Patrick:

Patrick speaks more broadly and bluntly about his MIT experience.

"I felt my MIT experience was actually quite horrific," he starts. "I had a really hard time there. I found it very, very difficult. I was sort of glad to leave."

This sentiment wasn't from the drinking-from-the-fire-hose, academic-overload sense. "It wasn't the work that bothered me," he notes. "It was the uncaring environment of everything around me and the cold, sterile concreteness of it."

He vividly remembers crossing the Harvard Bridge and talking to his friend about this. "[My friend] Wilson said, 'MIT is not a college, a university. It's an institute—an institute where they, like, queue up the machines."

Despite those experiences, he still trusts MIT people more than almost anyone else.

"Even today, I'd say, if I could preferentially hire any person, I preferentially hire an MIT person, because I feel like you could trust them to do, you know, complete a task that they were told that they would."

Katherine:

Katherine, in some sense, is actively building those communities that Patrick desired.

Freshman year, she participated in a physics freshman pre-orientation program (FPOP.)

"...[the physics FPOP] was a lot of fun," she said. "And I met a lot of people who... I'm still friends with now...we still pset for physics classes together several years later."

After her FPOP, she was drawn into the Society of Physics students, SPS, since many physics FPOP counselors were also in SPS. "They did a really good job of kind of creating this sense of community...making me feel more comfortable...," Katherine notes.

Her sophomore year, she became treasurer of SPS. Now she is the SPS President. She remains committed to the organization because of its rule in building the physics community here at MIT.

"The community has always been a big part of why I enjoy physics," she emphasizes. "So it's always been important to me to kind of try to help other people also feel that way."

On top of all this, she became a social chair for Undergraduate Women in Physics, UWiP, organizing "community dinners" and connecting different physics sub-communities.

"Through my involvement in both [organizations]," she concludes. "I've kind of been able to encourage more people from UWiP to do things with SPS...which I think, or I hope, is helping to bridge the gap and make physics as a whole feel more welcoming."

Is there anything specific you learned in Course 8 that you still use?

Patrick:

"I think very highly of mens et manus," he says."...you just got to get started. You get your hands dirty, you'll learn something...but I think a lot of people don't have that. They feel that there should be a procedure. It should be established."

One canonical Course 8 class embodied the mens et manus spirit especially well for Patrick: Junior Lab.

"When I did Junior Lab, it was a full-year course," he said. "We had 24-hour access [to the lab.]...I learned a lot about experimentation."

He was laser-focused during this Course 8 major requirement. "My partner and I might have been the only people in our year group who never were late with anything," he noted. "And you got one free [late report]. You could submit the report late. We never did."

All that time in the lab left a strong impression on him. At some point, at any time of day, he recalls, he could tell you where the "center of the hydrogen 21-centimenter line" was above the horizon.

Katherine:

Katherine's answer humorously delves into "physics BS."

"I think this is maybe not answering that question," she admits. "But there are some things that are like...physics BS."

"Things that we do in physics classes, it's fake math, or whatever, that I just think is funny," she continues.

In 8.06 (Quantum III), she learned a classic thought experiment. Even though 8.02 (Physics II) taught that magnetic monopoles don't exist, assume that they do. From that assumption, you can show that electric charge has to be quantized. We already know this to be true, so that's fine. However, if we have multiple magnetic monopoles, an immediate logical contradiction arises.

"So you can do this weird workaround logic to argue, 'Okay, so there could be one magnetic monopole in the whole universe, and we just haven't found it yet," she jests. "...this is probably not true, but...I think it's a really funny thought experiment."

It came up again in 8.07 (Electromagnetism II), making it a recurring joke for Katherine.

While the jokes are funny, they are the perfect example of how Katherine says Course 8 has changed her perception of reality.

"I think [physics] made me appreciate the world around us and the universe more. And maybe that's kind of cliche, but the fact that we're able to kind of describe everything with these essentially mathematical models..." she says.

What was the highlight of your undergraduate experience? (And, if you're comfortable, the lowlight?)

Patrick:

Patrick's lowlight at MIT is clear: a suicide at his dorm. The pain of that memory is still something he carries.

"I guess I wasn't very close [to her], but to this day it bothers me...A person I know jumped out of my dorm."

Patrick also highlighted his friendships:

"I had good friends right there [at MIT]," he says. Even though he was "maybe not so much in touch with [them] since I left America," those friendships are ones he always felt like he could "trust."

Katherine:

Katherine could hardly narrow down her highlights.

Academically, one of her favorite memories is from real analysis. To her, the class material converged in a beautiful and elegant way:

"Towards the end of the semester, we had this one 30 minute stretch in a lecture where we proved product rule, chain rule, and quotient rule...rigorously proving these calculus, things that we kind of take for granted. So I thought that was a really neat experience."

She doesn't pinpoint a specific low, but her advice hints as what she's observed throughout her time at MIT:

"My biggest point of advice would be to get enough sleep. Get eight hours of sleep every night," she said. "I know that it's hard, but truly, it's so important."

What would you tell a Course 8 student now, trying to navigate MIT?

Patrick:

Patrick zooms out and implores students to think about the big problems our world faces. Income inequality is one issue that is particularly salient.

"I also worry there'll only be like, you know, one trillionaire and everyone else is on universal basic income," he says.

Climate change and global warming also concern him. Solving these issues will "require some technologies," but he stresses that it cannot be solved by "a technology solution" alone.

"Technology has the ability to make [climate change] right. It has the ability to make it worse," he says.

While technology is a double-edged sword, Patrick remains confident that the people best positioned to tackle those problems are MIT alumni who were transformed by their MIT undergraduate experience.

"'Pressure makes diamonds,'" he says, quoting another alumnus. "It's a challenge that will make you who you are, and it's those people who are going to be important for solving...the problems of the future."

HUMANS OF MIT

Kip Clark Convos

MIT students are always in motion, but what do we miss when we never pause?

By Shelly Yang
CAMPUS LIFE STAFF WRITER

On Oct. 27, 2025, I had just finished dinner with a group at New Vassar at 5:58 p.m. and was rushing to a club meeting. I felt like I was running around like a headless chicken, thinking about how I would catch up on a class that I was several lectures behind on, how to meet an imminent lab due date from another class, how my next day was going to go, and how I was going to turn this seven-minute walk into two. As I was crossing Mass Ave., I saw Kip Clark, the "Free Listening Guy," sitting in front of Lobby 7 with his signature "Free Listening" sign.

Wonderful, I thought. I meant to run into him at some point. A friend and I had written an article for *The Tech* about him about a week prior, and I wanted to give him a physical copy of the newspaper with this article. At the same time, however, I didn't want to be late to the club meeting. I'm ashamed to say this, but I considered blazing by him so I had a chance to make it to the meeting on time; I figured I could find him another day anyway, but I stopped myself. *Why the rush?*

So I greeted him, handed him the newspaper, and he asked me how I was doing. I said that I felt behind on everything. He prodded me to consider if these feelings were self-created. At the time, I didn't think about it too much; still in a rush but less so, I darted to the meeting.

A few days later, I sat at a little cafe table inside Lobby 7 with Kip. I had just asked him what he would tell someone who wants to connect more with people but didn't know where to start.

"Slowly," he said.

I'd been thinking about how we could connect with anyone, provided infinite time. The problem is, we *don't* have infinite time. I think back to when I was rushing to cross Mass Ave., constantly thinking about the next task I had to get done.

But that's exactly Kip's point.

> **"So much starts with the individual. One of my major complaints with our society is, I think that's where a lot of stuff ends. That's the entire story. 'I have to take care of myself. I have to be a one-person army.' I don't think that's how it should be. Evolutionarily, I don't think that's how we got here. Maybe there are some species of animals that thrive on independence, but I don't personally think that's us." — Kip Clark**

When I'm running around thinking about the next block on my calendar or speedwalking through the Infinite, I'm not paying attention to much else. Maybe I have my AirPods in, listening to a podcast to feel more productive, or I'm too caught up in my head, feeling like I'm behind on everything. I might wave to someone I know walking by, but I miss an opportunity to catch up with them. I don't slow down to do that, because in my mind, I *can't afford* to. I feel like I'm always in a chokehold, but in reality, I've created this cycle myself.

I know I'm not alone in having a packed schedule. It appears to be the quintessential MIT experience: to squeeze out every minute possible into doing *something*. But perhaps it's worth reflecting on this lifestyle. I know that for me, at least, it's not the most fulfilling life that I can create for myself.

Kip observes that from the students who stop by and speak to him, saying they're in "a survival mode of sorts." He adds, "We fill our schedules because we don't know how to fulfill our lives; it is too scary and too complex." This definitely resonated with me. I see people around me doing *so much*, who seemingly have a good grasp on what they want to do in the future. Indirectly, I feel like I must also commit to a myriad of activities to fulfill my self-worth, and maybe it works in some ways; after all, I'm definitely exploring a wide range of activities that feel worthy of my time. But when I've spread myself so thin, I don't think I have as deep of a grasp of where the future would lead for these activities or how fulfilling they are to me.

Part of me wonders if I'm just trying to run away from myself when I'm filling up my schedule; what's most fulfilling to me is spending time with other people. While enjoying activities with others can serve that purpose, it's not exactly the same as deeply connecting with them. I feel like all I know about most people are the classes they're taking, the extracurriculars they're a part of, and some pset problem they're struggling with, but I'm curious about how they think about the world and what their hopes, dreams, and fears are.

However, if the classes I'm taking, the extracurriculars I'm a part of, and some pset problems I'm struggling with are all I think about, perhaps it's worth sitting down with myself first.

Kip brings up another point, which is simply that not everyone might "value connection, because it is raw for some people or has been tainted for others." Connection is beautiful, yet vulnerable.

> **"There are obviously people who abuse that trust and make other people either feel deeply violated or uncomfortable and cause psychological and other harm … that really upsets me because I think it's a theft of someone's ability to experience things, to experience one of the coolest parts of being a human being. I think anything we, as a society or culture, can do to prevent and hold accountable actions that violate the human connection." — Kip Clark**

If you're an MIT student, you've probably experienced a lot of pressure to get here, to say the least. Perhaps this doesn't apply to everyone, but some of this pressure can come from external factors that later become internal. "Given the U.S.'s relationship to higher education, this builds an impossible standard for MIT students to live up to, almost like Sisyphus' efforts," Kip said.

Parental pressure plays a big role as well. Most people have the desire to make their parents proud; after all, we were given the gift of life from our parents, and we may feel like we owe them something. In the pursuit of repayment, however, children can feel like their parents do not approve of them, or do not have faith in what they are doing unless they pursue a certain path their parents expect of them, even if this is implicit. A student might feel like they have to do something not because they want to, but because they think others want them to. Perhaps this is where the appeal to connection can backfire, because we can form a warped perspective of what people want out of us. For me, this pressure then becomes internal: I have a vision of what I think would be a "successful" life, even if it doesn't feel fulfilling to pursue that path.

Kip notes that many people feel an "unspoken necessity to do [what they do]" and often tell him they must continue with their backbreaking work for their research project, or perhaps they must go down the pipeline of becoming a software engineer. Many parents feel affection and protectiveness for their children and wish for them to have a good life. But this desire for their children to have a good life can sometimes manifest as unattainable standards. Especially before applying to college, some high school students feel like they must get into a prestigious university to feel worthy. But after getting in, then what?

I do think more people should discuss this topic. Attributing your value to a number can feel very isolating, which I think is more common than people realize. By sharing our experiences, we get to go outside of our bubbles and create an opportunity to connect with each other.

> **"[At MIT], I see a lot of very, very considerate compassionate students; in some cases, so much so that I think they are not always comfortable taking up space, which is why I'm grateful when those do choose to speak." — Kip Clark**

Addendum

I was delighted to hear that Kip was touched by our previous article about him. After six years of sitting with his "Free Listening" sign and receiving that acknowledgement, he felt seen and honored. I too felt quite touched by our conversation.

As both of us are artists in some form, our work can get lost if it is not recorded. I tend to overshare my struggles in the hopes of making others feel less alone, but I don't know if any of my output has helped anyone. But regardless, writing for *The Tech* gets words on a physical piece of newsprint. I understand what it feels like to see my work *somewhere*, or as Kip described it, to know that "a pebble I've dropped in the water had a ripple." Even if no one knows exactly how I think, at least a snippet of it is out there, which hopefully becomes useful to someone. In our own respective art forms, that is how we choose to communicate the human experience.

I don't know exactly what ripple my own writing will make. But I do know that pressing pause opened up the space for a genuine conversation that I'll remember for a long time. And maybe that's the point. In a place where everyone is striving so hard, connection isn't just a luxury. It's a way to connect to ourselves and to one another.

ARTS WANTS YOU

A semester of both surprises and failures

First Year, from Page 7

during CPW, I saw a poster for the Biomechanics of Piano Playing. It was outdated though, so I didn't think they were going to take anyone. I ended up running into the PI at an academic expo, and it turns out they were still taking people! I really wanted to continue doing something piano-related, and this seemed like an interesting project to work on.

-A friend did a MISIT internship in the Netherlands over the summer, so I decided to check out the program. MISTI allows for students to travel outside of the country to either study abroad, take on an internship, or teach a group of students. I applied to Global Teaching Labs, the last option. For some reason, I decided to start writing my essays the day the application was due and somehow got in for IAP. Even though this had a good ending, I would *not* recommend starting this application so late; there's a lot of essays, which reminded me of college applications season all over again.

-I applied to be the DormCon i3 chair, which takes on the task of organizing the videos that showcase dorms across campus. I couldn't even attend the event to represent myself, so I had to ask a friend from Next House to stand in for me. I thought this position was more competitive, but it turns out no one else ran for it. I'll be starting next semester.

At the beginning of the fall semester, I made an effort to do some boundary testing, meaning I would try to push the limits of what I could achieve. Now that we're at the end of the semester, I still think I didn't actually reach the boundary; there are still more clubs, places, and activities to explore.

If you never climb, you never fall. But if you were told you were *guaranteed* to fall, perhaps even thirty times before you finally found your footing, wouldn't you try to fall as soon and as quickly as possible?

CONCERT REVIEW

MIT Vocal Jazz Ensemble performs their fall collection

The performance featured two original, student compositions

Fall Collection

MIT Vocal Jazz Ensemble

Directed by Laura Grill Jaye

Thomas Tull Concert Hall

Nov. 23, 2025

By Chloe Lee
ARTS STAFF WRITER

On Sunday, Nov. 23, the first snowy evening of the year, the MIT Vocal Jazz Ensemble (VJE) performed their fall collection, which included Chet Baker's "A Dandy Line" (1954), Olivia Dean's "So Easy (To Fall In Love)" (2025), and original songs by VJE students Mariabelle Azemar '27 and Alejandro Reyes '26.

The atmosphere inside Tull was atypical. Before the performance began, VJE director Laura Grill Jaye encouraged the audience to whistle, clap, jazz moan along, and lean fully into the looseness of jazz. "I want you to feel like you're in a jazz club," she said.

The night opened with the VJE band, whose rotating lineup of soloists included pianist Coleman Gliddon G, bassist and guitarist Sebastian Franjou '22, drummer Hector Falu-guzman, trombonist Alex Jin '27, and tenor saxophonist Rushil Srikakolapu '29. The performance's first piece, "Honeysuckle Rose" (1929/2025), arranged by Grill Jaye, featured just the singers. With a crisp and steady tempo, lively scat-like syllables, and a standout bass voice anchoring the ensemble, the piece immediately set the mood for an exciting show.

The program unfolded as a series of solos backed by varying combinations of the band. Chelsy Goodwill '27 delivered a smooth, velvety performance of Ronnell Bright's "Sweet Pumpkin" (1959), supported by piano, drums, and bass. Following Goodwill, Anikita Ghoshal MBA '26 gave one of the most technically precise performances of the evening in "Time After Time" (1947). Her pitch was so effortless and clean, and her musical connection with the band made the piece glow with personality.

With piano accompaniment, Nicholas Wei '26 sang a heartfelt "Skylark" (1947), a piece chosen for him by a friend. The mood shifted again with Rachel Loh '25, who sang Olivia Dean's "So Easy (To Fall in Love)" (2025) accompanied by the full band. The tenor saxophone solo in this number was a particular highlight, blending well with the vocals. MIT staff member Claire Walsh followed with a warm-toned, expressive version of "I Can't Give You Anything But Love" (1928). Piano and bass both had compelling solo moments, and the band's dynamic control made the arrangement shine. Maxine Perroni-Scharf G followed with a Laufey-like softness to "Bewitched, Bothered, and Bewildered" (1941).

One unique moment of the evening was "No More Blues" (1958), sung by Charlotte Wickery G, who doubled on flute, a surprisingly natural color in the jazz style. Her vocal range and timbral control were impressive, making the piece memorable. All VJE members returned for "The Nearness of You" (1937/2018, arr. Graveley), a lush, highline-style ballad carried by rich harmonies and accompaniment by bass, saxophone, and drums.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CAROLINE ALDEM

Laura Grill Jaye directs the MIT Vocal Jazz Ensemble.

Two original compositions brought a unique, personal aspect to the concert. Mariabelle Azemar '27 sang her own piece, "The Two That Shouldn't Be" (2025), an allegro-tempo work that showcased her expressive voice and compositional clarity. Alejandro Reyes '26 followed with "Tus Entrañas en la Arena" (2025), inspired by a vivid personal dream. Sung in Spanish and supported by three additional vocalists, it stood stylistically apart from the evening's jazz-centered repertoire.

The full band returned for a seasonally fitting "Autumn Leaves" (1945), complete with an energetic drum solo and an arrangement that pushed beyond standard jazz conventions. The singers then reunited for "A Quiet Place" (1969/1988), a Take 6–style ballad with close harmonies. The night closed on a joyful note with the well-loved "A Dandy Line" (1954), arranged by Grill Jaye. Featuring all VJE members, the final piece radiated the enthusiasm the director had hoped for from the beginning.

Overall, the concert's combination of traditional pieces and modern arrangements, and even original compositions, was alive with personality. While there were occasional issues of balance between voices and instruments, it was difficult to tell whether these moments stemmed from the hall acoustics or the ensemble itself. Nevertheless, the performers and director's artistry made the concert memorable.

THEATER REVIEW

The Huntington's 'Fun Home' is devastating, joyful and necessary

Alison Bechdel's musicalized memoir returns to the stage

Fun Home

Book and lyrics by Lisa Kron

Based on the graphic novel by Alison Bechdel

Music composed by Jeanine Tesori

Directed by Logan Ellis

The Huntington Theatre

Nov. 14 – Dec. 14, 2025

By Beatriz Valero de Urquia
NEWS STAFF WRITER

The Huntington Theatre's production of *Fun Home* asks how one can find joy in the most serious moments. The musical won five Tony Awards in 2015, which includes Best Musical. Based on Alison Bechdel's graphic memoir under the same name and directed by Logan Ellis, *Fun Home* presents a moving story about family, identity and grief that still manages to make you laugh in the most unexpected moments.

Fun Home follows Alison as she grapples with her past and her relationship with her parents. In the production, older Alison (Sarah Bockel) shares the stage with her younger counterparts (Maya Jacobson and Lyla Randall). Through her now-adult eyes, Alison looks back at her childhood in Pennsylvania, where she grew up in a family-run funeral home. She recalls the college days that led her to discover her sexual orientation, which then causes her to reflect on her father's role in her life and make peace with his death. "He was gay and I was gay," Alison says at the top of the show. "He killed himself and I… became a lesbian cartoonist."

The one-act musical jumps back and forth through time using a series of songs. The first half of the story is more fast-paced; Alison paints a succession of short images of her childhood through choral, dynamic musical numbers that flow from one to the other. The second half, however, becomes darker and slower as each of the characters gets their much-awaited self-confrontation moment in which they examine their inner conflicts and expand on their experiences. Although necessary, the pacing of the story suffers slightly and leaves the audience wishing for an expanded run time that would allow them to meet the rest of the characters in the present, especially Alison's mother Helen and her two brothers, who are never mentioned by Older Alison.

Performance-wise, Jacobson and Randall are standouts. As Young Alison and Medium Alison, they delivered the two key numbers, "Changing My Major" and "Ring of Keys" with incredible humor, heart, and skill. The first is hilarious while the second is heartwarming, but they both perfectly depict Alison seeing herself for who she truly is and what she aspires to become, freed from her father's heteronormative expectations.

Bockel has perhaps the hardest role in the show, as well as the most thankless one. For most of the story, she is asked to remain onstage as a silent witness to her past. She only makes short interjections during awkward moments of her childhood, such as seeing herself draw or attempting to flirt for the first time. However, the audience gets no details on Alison's life as an adult. Providing more context about Older Alison's life and relationships would have given Bockel the chance to act as the protagonist and showcase her talent. Instead, the younger versions of herself end up stealing most of the spotlight. It is only at the end of the musical, when Bockel sings "Telephone Wire," that she truly demonstrates her talent.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MARC J FRANKLIN

Caleb Levin, Odin Vega, and Lyla Randall in "Fun Home," directed by Logan Ellis at the Huntington Theatre Company.

Nick Duckart and Jennifer Ellis are fantastic as Alison's parents, Bruce and Helen. Duckart skillfully balances the charming, loveable father Alison wants and remembers along with the manipulative, self-loathing and abusive adult that he could be at the same time. By doing so, Duckart keeps both sides fully grounded in reality. Next to him is Ellis's quiet, calm Helen, playing the dutiful loving wife who holds the house together until she no longer can. The song "Days and Days" allows Helen to break the image of the perfect family she had fought so hard to maintain and wish for something better for her daughter.

Besides the authentic acting, Tanya Orellana's set design is also a highlight of the musical. The exposed orchestra keeps the music at the center of the performance, while the moving set pieces give the perfect atmosphere of the old historic house Bruce works to restore. The props are smart and eye-catching, with the larger ones, such as TVs or caskets, designed so the younger actors can jump out of them. The only set that is never developed is the car, portrayed only through Philip Rosenberg's lighting design. This choice is confusing in a few scenes towards the halfway mark, but it's justified because it makes a final moment even more heartwrenching.

Despite the theme of grief, this is also a story about freedom: Alison breaks free from the expectations and self-hatred that chained her father and chooses to embrace her identity. The Huntington Theatre's production creates a space where the audience can experience the joys of childhood and finding one's true self, as well as the admiration of one's parents along with the hurt and grief that come with losing them.

CONCERT REVIEW

The Handel and Haydn Society delivers a convincing version of Handel's 'Messiah'

Lauren Snouffer, Amery Amereau, and Ben Bliss return to H+H; Nicholas Newton makes his debut

★★★★½

Handel's Messiah, HWV 56

Handel and Haydn Society

Conducted by Jonathan Cohen

Featuring soprano Lauren Snouffer, mezzo-soprano Amery Amereau, tenor Ben Bliss, and bass-baritone Nicholas Newton

Boston Symphony Hall

Nov. 28–30, 2025

By Luke Kim
ARTS STAFF WRITER

This Thanksgiving break, the Handel and Haydn Society continued its annual tradition of performing Handel's *Messiah*, arguably the composer's most famous oratorio. It is an atypical oratorio because it does not have named characters [1], and the storyline is more devotional compared to Handel's other Old Testament-based oratorios such as *Saul*. Coincidentally, both oratorios have Charles Jennens as the librettist. The structure of Handel's *Messiah* follows the liturgical year: Advent and Christmas narrate Christ's birth; Lent to Pentecost recounts the Passion and Resurrection; and Part III turns toward eschatology.

The score calls for a small orchestra of strings, oboes, trumpets, timpani, and basso continuo. This production consisted only of 28 players and the conductor, which is smaller than the norm — possibly resembling what was available at the oratorio's original premiere. Though this choice is understandable, it likely does *not* reflect Handel's intentions with scale and the orchestration. *Messiah* was a popular oratorio from its premiere, and there is plentiful evidence suggesting that Handel envisaged a more expansive orchestral and vocal force; his version from 1754 added two horns, and performances organized by his colleagues in the 1780s advertised 250 — and even 800 — players, with the score adding trombones this time.

After a French overture, tenor Ben Bliss opened Part I by immediately captivating the audience with his bright projection in "Ev'ry valley shall be exalted," handling difficult melismas with ease. His vocal timbre was on the pointier side, but this detail did not take away from his performance. Meanwhile, mezzo-soprano Amery Amereau took the alto role with a voice that was firm but tender, shining in her aria "O thou that tellest good tidings to Zion." Nevertheless, I found the casting unconventional, as the alto role is more suited for a contralto [2] or a countertenor from its vocal ranges [3]. Despite Amereau's best efforts and great vocal expression, the part's awkward range posed challenges in volume and projection, most evidently in the soprano and alto duet towards the end of the first act.

The chorus was on top form, perfectly delivering the very difficult "He shall purify." Bass-baritone Nicholas Newton had electrifying energy, matching Bliss's volume and projection all around. Newton brought every unstable chromaticism (darkness) and major chord (light) to life in his aria "The people that walked in darkness." Soprano Lauren Snouffer appeared last among the soloists. A quick succession of her recits and arias, intermixed with the chorus, convincingly retold the story of Jesus's birth. One could only feel exaltation when the chorus sang "Glory to God at the highest!"

Part II depicts the Passion. The chorus shined the brightest in the first half of Part II, singing the first chorus and three back-to-back movements. The most impressive of these was "All we like sheep have gone astray," which starts innocuously, yet is technically difficult. The mood later shifted suddenly when the chorus sang "The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all," where sorrow and sacrifice pervades unexpectedly. The 10-minute alto aria "He was despised" revealed Amereau's impressive stamina and was her sonorous best.

PHOTO COURTESY OF H+H MARKETING

The Handel and Haydn Society performs Handel's "Messiah" at Boston Symphony Hall on Friday, Nov. 28, 2025.

The second half of Part II is a back and forth between arias and choruses. Snouffer, Bliss, and Newton all remained consistent, carrying on with their commanding voices from Part I. Bliss's pointier voice served him well in "Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron," flawlessly capturing the atmosphere of what was his most passionate aria. The chorus had its best moments in this part with their precisely coordinated performance of "Let us break their bonds asunder." The famous "Hallelujah" chorus was enjoyable; as a nice touch, the soloists also joined in.

Part III — the shortest of the three, at around 30 minutes — covers the glorification of Christ and the resurrection of Jesus. It features the impressive and famous bass aria "The trumpet shall sound," which also has a trumpet solo. [4] Newton and trumpeter Steven Marquardt, in perfect balance, delivered the aria with finesse. Snouffer's aria "I know that my redeemer liveth" was also very touching, with well-noted ascending figures when she sang, "For now is Christ risen." The final chorus, with the full orchestra tutti, closed the oratorio with acclamation.

Overall, the performance was convincing and executed nicely. H+H's effort to recreate Handel's premiere was very successful, which drew a well-deserved enthusiastic reaction from the audience.

Footnotes:

[1] This was to protect Handel himself against the charge of blasphemy.

[2] Handel clearly intended this role for a contralto. Not only was Susannah Maria Cibber a well-known contralto, but some alto parts were also transcribed lower to accommodate for her vocal range.

[3] Since Amereau had performed this role with H+H for the 2022–23 season, this casting was clearly intentional.

[4] This trumpet solo is quite difficult for the valveless natural trumpet. Future transcriptions (e.g. Mozart's) considerably simplified or omitted the trumpet parts as it was considered a lost art by the 1780s.

When the image is not the disease

List Visual Arts Center exhibits a magnifying glass to the metaphors of multiple sclerosis

By Veronika Moroz
SCIENCE EDITOR

Inside the Hayden Gallery at the MIT List Visual Arts Center, a fragmented diaspora of LEGO robots is creaking in unison. Each robot carries an iPhone, waving the phone back and forth to increment the step count on a health-tracking app.

When companies started providing cheaper insurance to those who walk a certain number of steps, some people with chronic illnesses turned to assembling robots like these to afford the care they need. The robots, collectively entitled *Lego Pedometer Cheating Machines* (2019), are a part of *Flare-Up*, an exhibit at the List by artistic duo Simon Goldin and Jakob Senneby (Goldin+Senneby) that explores the divide between the precise facts of medicine and the spiraling reality of human illness. Open at the List until March 15, 2026, *Flare-Up* pulls from a range of modern and historical portrayals of sickness to describe Senneby's experiences as a patient suffering from multiple sclerosis (MS), a neurodegenerative disease.

VERONIKA MOROZ—THE TECH

Jakob Senneby (left) and Simon Goldin (right), deliver a performative lecture on opening night of Flare-Up.

White spots

On Jan. 20, 2000, a singular picture changed Jakob Senneby's life.

The picture – a Machine Resonance Imaging (MRI) scan of Senneby's brain – featured white spots characteristic of MS. It was enough for his doctor to diagnose him with the disease.

Senneby quit his job a few months later and enrolled in art school, where he partnered with classmate Simon Goldin to form Goldin+Senneby. As Senneby's conditioned progressed, their practice shifted to focus more on his feeling of living in "two incompatible realms: that of medicine, where bodies were measured and manipulated with incredible precision, and that of [Senneby's] own experience, where numbers refuse to add up and limbs fail to process commands."

Historically, doctors have characterized MS by the lesions it leaves on the nervous system, which show up as white spots in MRI scans. When the first MS treatment, Betaseron, was undergoing clinical trials in 1993, scientists chose to measure the drug's success by counting the lesions. The white spots became what scholars refer to as a "surrogate endpoint," said Thea Applebaum Licht, a PhD student at MIT who studies the history and economy of the U.S. pharmaceutical industry.

Patients taking Betaseron during the 1993 clinical trial developed fewer and smaller spots than patients treated with a placebo. The FDA "accepted the image as the disease, and approved the drug to treat it," Senneby said.

15 years later, leading MS researcher George Ebers organized a follow-up study on the original patients, but couldn't find evidence that the MRI scans predicted disability progression. Betaseron continued to be sold as an MS treatment, and is now 10 times more expensive than it was in 1993.

"Drugs are developed on a lot of endpoints that are of mixed quality, and you need to keep validating them," Licht explained. Subsequent studies have found some correlation between brain lesions and disease severity, but researchers are still debating the extent to which MRI images should influence treatment.

Though he was initially told to take Betaseron, Senneby's doctors later switched his prescription to newer drugs. With each new medication came new scans. "Increasingly, my feeling was that all the doctors could find were the spots they had out to see: the image of their own diagnosis," he said.

Making images of their own

Senneby's MS has taken away his cognitive capacity to speak freely and coherently, but creating art with Goldin has allowed him to continue sharing his ideas. *Flare-Up* is the artists' latest attempt to expose viewers to the suffering missing from clinical descriptions of MS.

Their *Swallowimage* series (2025) explores the emotional risk of starting a new treatment. The name is a direct translation of *Schluckbildchen*, the German word for tiny portraits of saints that 18th- to 20th-century religious pilgrims would swallow in hopes of curing their illnesses.

Each piece in *Swallowimage* consists of a historic oil painting of health, death, or sickness, the canvas reversed and inoculated with the fungus *Isaria sinclairii* — the source of an active ingredient in the MS drug Gilenya. Though *Isaria sinclairii* is mythologized as an elixir of eternal youth in traditional Chinese medicine, it's a deadly parasite to cicadas, eating away until it blooms out of its host's head.

This dichotomy of *Isaria sinclairii* reflects patients' lack of control over the possible outcomes of a new treatment. "It is often said that you become what you eat," the artists wrote. "But as you swallow the pill, you are unsure if you are becoming more like the fungi of eternal youth, or indeed, the cicada whose head is about to sprout."

The artists' blockchain-based artwork, *Spot Price* (2023), gives viewers an expensive look at the scans that have defined Senneby's illness. In order for it to be visible, each scan needs to be minted for $7,000 to $10,000, an amount that is "pegged to the monthly cost of certain medications I've been on," Senneby said.

"Given the inexorable rise in prices and the decisive role of the white spots in validating drugs, the spots pictured in *Spot Price* (2023) may be the Seller's most valuable asset," the caption stated.

At the exhibit's opening lecture, the artists distributed their own swallow images, which were chocolates imprinted with a QR code linking to *Spot Price*. Unlike Senneby, whose deteriorating health forces him to pay thousands of dollars for drugs that provide little long-term improvement, the audience was given a choice: investigate the QR code, or, like the religious pilgrims, swallow blindly.

"Epilogue," Goldin announced. "Eat your image, before your image eats you."

What is multiple sclerosis (MS)?

Multiple sclerosis (MS) is a neurodegenerative disease that occurs when cells from the body's immune system enter the brain and attack the protective coating on cells called neurons. As the coating, called myelin, gets damaged, neurons in the area die and lesions form. These lesions are what doctors identify as white spots in magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scans.

MS comes in multiple forms, including Relapsing-Remitting MS, in which myelin damage is temporary and occurs in short bursts that people refer to as "flare-ups." However, many patients accumulate damaged brain tissue, causing both cognitive and physical decline.

According to Xochitl Luna '22, an MS researcher and neuroscience PhD student at the Whitehead Institute, most current MS treatments are anti-inflammatory drugs "designed to tell the immune system to just calm down and stop attacking the body." This includes Betaseron, Tysabri, and Gilenya, each of which Senneby has been prescribed over the course of his illness. While over twenty drugs are available today to help with improving attack recovery, slowing the onset of the disease, or managing symptoms, none of them offer a cure.

Because the drugs work by weakening the entire immune system, "a lot of the treatments make MS patients immunosuppressed," Luna said. "The folks that I know in my life with MS, some of them will wear a mask everywhere because it's worth it to be able to have a treatment, but the risk of getting sick is just too high."

Paper folding blends math, art, and science at OrigaMIT 2025

Highlights of the convention included special guests, classes, and intricate origami

By Elizabeth Li

On Saturday, Nov. 15, the 2025 Annual OrigaMIT convention took place at the Stratton Student Center. For a modest entry fee of five dollars, the OrigaMIT convention lets MIT students access a wealth of origami displays, featuring works from both the permanent MIT Origami Club collection and new designs, including figural sculptures, mechanical contraptions, and origami artworks with personal significance, by visiting guests. One piece was an engagement gift folded by Annie Pidel made from letters designed by Taichiro Hasegawa.

The convention also featured an assortment of classes for every level and every folding style. Many speakers presented their own original designs, such as Neel Dalela's graph plots of linear, quadratic, and cubic functions to Eric Joisel's lifelike rat. Experiencing all of these classes may only be possible with space-time manipulation.

While the convention has been a MIT tradition since its inception in 2011, many of the attendees were not affiliated with MIT. Though most came from the greater Boston area, a few flew in for the event. For many, OrigaMIT is not only an event to learn about origami, but also an opportunity to meet new people.

Guest speaker shares process

Another exciting part of the convention is the special guests. American origami artist John Montroll gave a brief overview of his design process. He invented the Dog and Insect bases, while also pioneering the single-square, no cuts, no glue approach that is canon today.

For Montroll, the nuance of origami design comes from working around reasonable limitations. "You can do anything if you can cut or glue multiple sheets of paper together, which is not as interesting," Montroll said.

Montroll also aims to be concise and efficient in his designs. From a grasshopper in 27 steps to a horse in 21 steps to an elephant in 38 steps, many of his works achieve the level of form and detail often only seen in designs with around 100 steps. Montroll believes that his pursuit of minimal elegance makes his approach unique.

Many of Montroll's designs are built on an origami base, which is a standard, structural skeleton on which details and features can be added. He uses geometry and algebra to design where each crease goes, and in practice, finds the smallest amount of folds that achieves each length. In his spare time, he designed a computer program called Pearl that produces the shortest sequence of folds to estimate irrational lengths with high precision, simplifying necessary steps.

Although math is relevant in Montroll's designs, equations are not as essential as the special way of thinking about how to

Origami, Page 14

PHOTO PROVIDED BY ELIZABETH LI

A selection of works by Michael Nguyen.

MIT Science Bowl turns ten

Seventh annual high school invitational draws 48 teams from across the country

By Daina August

When the MIT Science Bowl Club was founded in 2015, the Middle School Regional competition that they hosted was the first fully student-run National Science Bowl tournament. Teams of middle schoolers gathered at MIT to play rounds of fast-paced science trivia and potentially win a free trip to Washington D.C. for the National Finals. Four years later, the club hosted one of the first-ever invitational Science Bowl tournaments — unofficial tournaments that are run by students in preparation for the official Regional and National Science Bowl competitions. While MIT remains the only student-run Regional host today, recent years have seen an explosion of invitational tournaments, from in-person competitions hosted by other universities to fully online tournaments organized by high schoolers. MIT continues to be at the forefront of these tournaments' operation, even as the network of passionate Science Bowl alumni grows around the country.

By students, for students

The first Science Bowl competition at MIT was directed in 2016 by Kathleen Schwind MCP '19, who wanted to create a space to "celebrate others who weren't celebrated before" and give a chance for local students to compete at a Regional competition. Schwind had founded the California Central Coast Regional two years prior, so when her friends Kevin Sutherland PhD '19, Angela Xi, and Songela Chen '19 discovered that Massachusetts lacked a Middle School Regional, Schwind was a natural choice for the role of director. As for assembling a staff team, there were already many interested students at MIT — a school that attracts a large fraction of the thousands of Science Bowl competitors every year. When Schwind and her friends walked down the Infinite, they "tracked down anyone with a Science Bowl shirt" and asked if they would like to join the staff team, Schwind recalls. Through these efforts, MIT Science Bowl became both fully student-run and a way for alumni to stay connected with the communities they found in middle and high school.

When Schwind graduated, directorial leadership of MIT Science Bowl passed down to Phi Adajar '27 PhD, a Science Bowl alumnus who founded a team at their high school. Adajar and their executive team knew that the 2019-2020 school year would present new difficulties, as with any transition period. Having had experience as chair of MIT's Educational Studies Program (ESP), Adajar was well acquainted with the process of reserving rooms and managing large-scale events, but the introduction of buzzers and other variables in the mix would be a challenge. As luck would have it, the National Science Bowl had just announced a pilot program that year in which unreleased Regional questions could be given to groups looking to run their own tournaments. Realizing that this program could be an opportunity for the new executive team to practice before the official Regional competition, Adajar requested a set, and the MIT Science Bowl Invitational was born.

When the world shut down due to COVID-19 restrictions a few weeks later, the team was faced with an even larger question. At its core, Science Bowl is a head-to-head and face-to-face competition, yet in-person matches are impossible in lockdown conditions. As weeks turned to months, Adajar and their team started planning for a possible online tournament, reaching out to the creator of an online buzzing system. In an effort spearheaded by Joshua Park '22, the team recruited volunteers to write a custom question set for the 2020 tournament, starting a tradition of student-written questions for student-run tournaments.

Today, the Middle School Regional competition is still going strong, and the most recent high school invitational was larger than ever, featuring 48 teams from 21 states. Per registration data, about half the teams lived within driving range, while the other half traveled from as far away as California and Washington. The writing team now has around 30 people from MIT and other universities, who write a total of over 1,000 draft questions every year.

Both Adajar and Schwind are incredibly proud of how much the organization has grown. For Adajar, this growth is the goal of the tournament in the first place, to "let [students] have fun with [STEM] and…see where it goes."

For Schwind, the size of today's MIT Science Bowl "blows [her] mind," and she loves hearing stories of generations of alumni coming back.

A new generation

For current MIT Science Bowl directors Gideon Tzafriri '26 and Anurag Sodhi '28, their continued involvement with Science Bowl in college was a no-brainer. Both Tzafriri and Sodhi began competing in middle school and stuck with the activity throughout high school, ultimately becoming captains of their respective teams and placing highly at the National tournament. Likewise, both have a personal connection to MIT Science Bowl, having competed at the Invitational for multiple years in high school. For Tzafriri, a Boston-area local, getting involved with MIT Science Bowl's leadership was also a full-circle moment — ten years ago, he was one of those middle schoolers competing at MIT's first Regional tournament.

Tzafriri and Sodhi are also the first set of MIT Science Bowl directors to have competed in the post-pandemic Science Bowl landscape. Over the pandemic, one way that the Science Bowl community survived was via large online invitationals inspired by MIT's tournament that were organized by high schoolers on Discord, a popular instant messaging and voice call app. Tzafriri and Sodhi ran some of those very first Discord tournaments. By the time they graduated high school, this style of tournament had become so popular that there was often an online invitational tournament every few weeks during the school year outside of Regionals season. Tzafriri, now familiar with these larger field sizes and greater opportunities to practice, has been attempting to "expand the [MIT Invitational] competition" from 36 teams to 48 teams and increase the number of teams who qualify for the double-elimination playoff tournament from the morning round-robin competition. Of course, this has not been without its challenges. Even though MIT Science Bowl has what Sodhi describes as "the things that most [high schooler-run] Science Bowl tournaments just fight to reach" — a large potential staff pool, a large potential writer pool, brand recognition — an expanded tournament still means more rooms to reserve, more tasks to juggle, and more questions to write. However, this challenge is exactly why Tzafriri and Sodhi continue to be involved in Science Bowl — it's just "the natural thing" to do, said Tzafriri.

Looking back at his time in high school, Sodhi considers his experience competing in MIT Science Bowl some of "the most fun [he's] ever had." One of his main objectives is to nourish that sense of fun for both current competitors and other alumni alike, ensuring that the Regional and Invitational "get better and better every year."

In September, MIT virtually hosted the first ever collegiate Science Bowl tournament, a chance for graduated players to return and play some rounds with old friends. The tournament used a draft question set that would later become this year's Invitational. For Tzafriri and Sodhi, this small tournament was a way to get feedback on questions and ensure that the content adheres to strict quality control standards, which MIT Invitational has come to be known for.

The people behind the curtain

While the directors are the primary shapers of the organization's direction, MIT Science Bowl's accomplishments would be impossible without the rest of the staff. Like this year's directors, many of the volunteers are also Science Bowl alumni, drawn to MIT's tournament as a chance to reunite with old friends and give back to the community. Before the opening ceremony, over a hundred volunteers shuffled into the headquarters to check in, grab supplies, coordinate the lunchtime delivery of 200 pizzas, and catch up with old friends. Some traveled from out of state. Many stayed up late the previous night to make sure every detail was accounted for: the executive officer team and writing leads self-reported an average of under four hours of sleep per person.

Once everyone found their room assignments, the remaining volunteers on standby pulled up scoring spreadsheets so they could follow along with the action, keep an eye on their old school's teams, and speculate on the winners of the tournament. Conversation during the lunch break was filled with highlights from the morning: dominant teams posting victory margins of more than 200 points; one player's calculations burning through a notebook's worth of scratch paper in a single game; two teams near-perfectly splitting the maximum amount of points achievable.

This camaraderie is what has enabled MIT Science Bowl to persist and grow for as long as it has. At MIT, Science Bowl is more than a tournament — it's a place for friends to come back to year after year.

OrigaMIT 2025

Origami, from Page 13

transform a square sheet of paper into a desired image. "When you're folding, you're experiencing something that you couldn't otherwise," he said. "It's magic."

Origami as a rich art

While many lean into the mathematical and algorithmic construction of origami, others see these scientific tools as a springboard to artistic expression. Berlin-based communication designer and origami artist Michael Nguyen visited Boston for the first time this year to share his figural works.

Nguyen recalls being first introduced to origami in middle school. "How do you make something so intricate and complex from a simple piece of paper without cutting or tearing it? It was mind boggling," he said.

It was much later in his life during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 that Nguyen rediscovered origami by challenging himself to fold more complicated models. With his experience with figure drawing classes and his background in graphics design, photography, videography, and animation, Nguyen approached origami from a sculptural perspective.

"I was always intrigued by the human form. It's interesting because in complex origami, people are hesitant to attempt human art design," Nguyen said. "It's really easy to mess up and for the proportions to get uncanny."

Nguyen believes that shaping paper into humanoid figures can convey stories distinctively rich in emotion, culture, mythology, and faith, from the hunched back of defensiveness to the upright posture of confidence to the fluid movement of flamboyance. "For me, I like creating drama and poetry," he said.

One of Nguyen's most recent designs was made in collaboration with former Origami Club president Brandon Wong '25. As Christians, they chose to depict a scene from the life of Jesus known as *Agony in the Garden*. For Nguyen, the powerful contrast between the reassuring strength of spirituality and the anguish or acceptance of humanity is what makes this work multi-faceted and more layered than a piece of paper. In regards to his philosophy on the subject matter and technique, Nguyen said, "I like to push boundaries and figure out what I can create to get people talking, even if it is something controversial that makes people think, 'Is this origami?'"

Finally, Nguyen talked about his experience at OrigaMIT. Having been invited by Wong on Discord out of the blue, Nguyen thought, "Why not? It doesn't happen everyday when you get to go to MIT of all places to teach and meet a lot of really smart people."

Regardless of whether you are an origami enthusiast or a lifelong professional, the OrigaMIT convention, with its wealth of available activities, was an exceptional way to spend a Saturday.

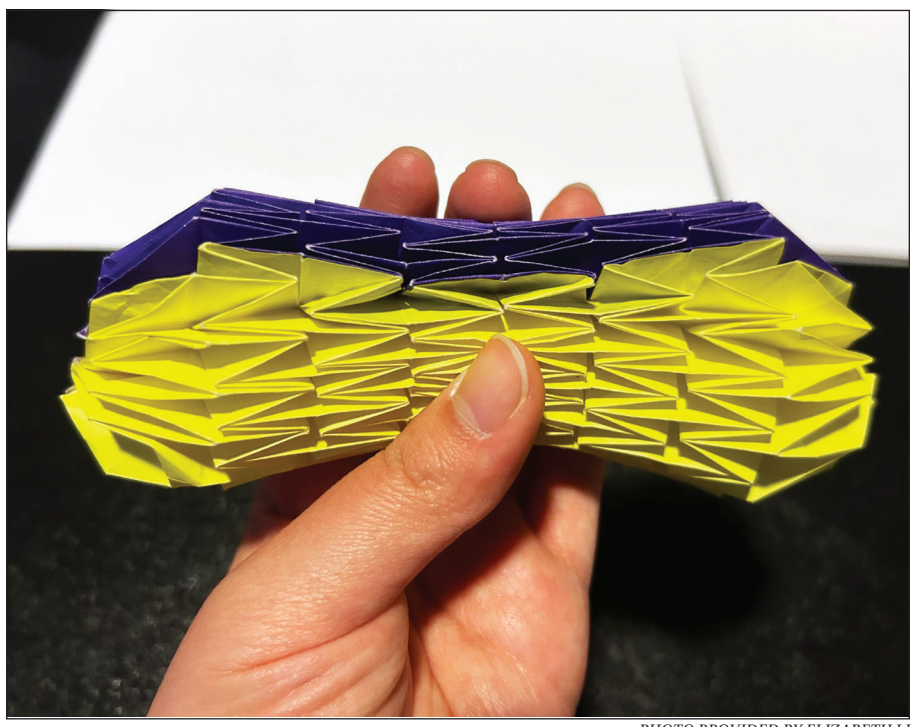


PHOTO PROVIDED BY ELIZABETH LI

The origami magic ball uses pleats to create a dynamic structure.

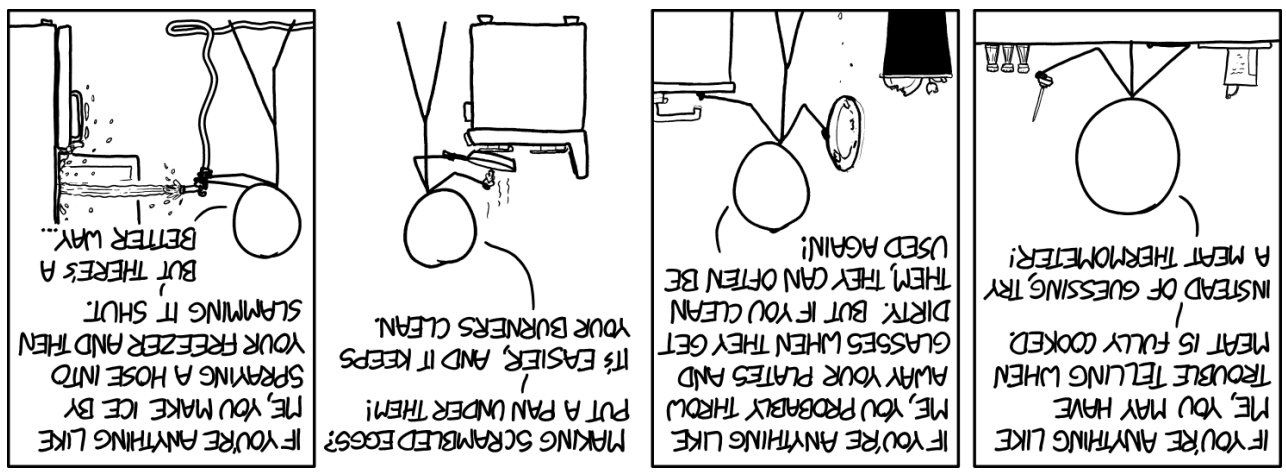
PHOTO PROVIDED BY ELIZABETH LI

A selection of works by John Montroll.

That cat has some serious periodic components

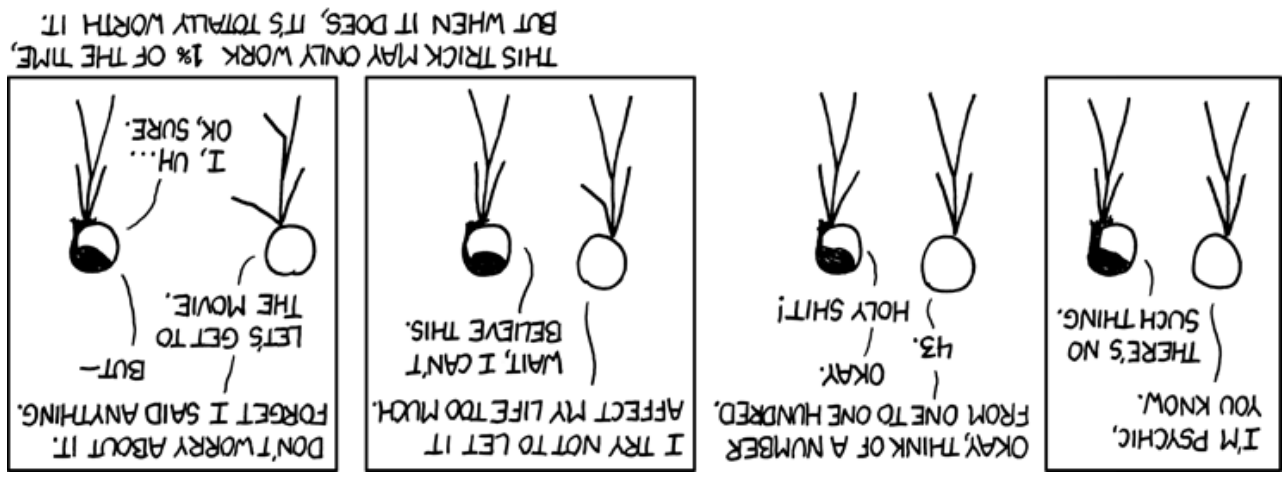
[26] Fourier

Household tip: Tired of buying so much toilet paper? Try unspooling the paper from the roll before using it. A single roll can last for multiple days that way, and it's much easier on your plumbing.



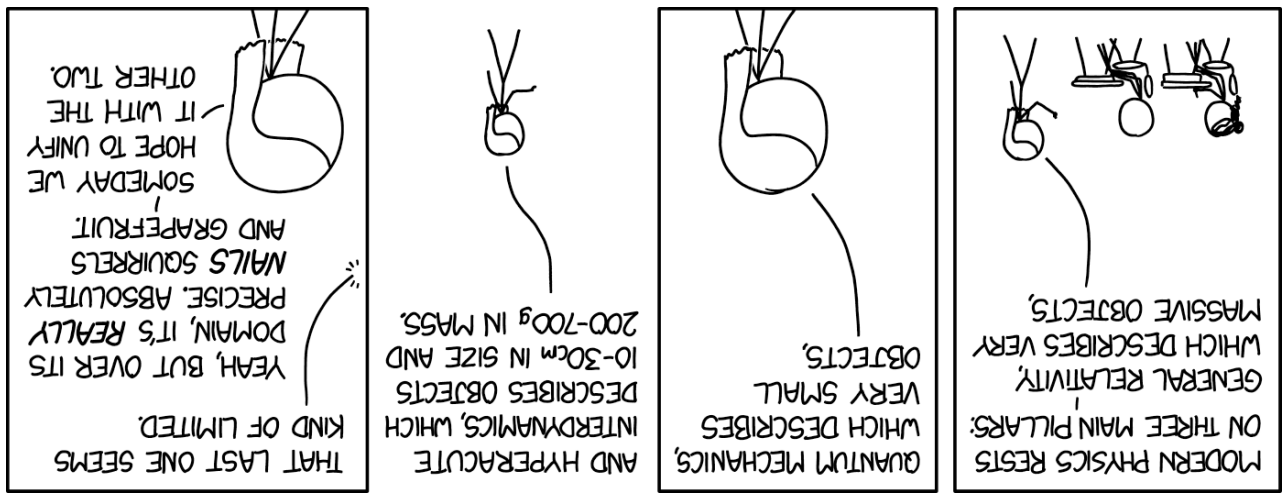
[1567] Kitchen Tips

You can do a lot better than 1% if you start keeping track of the patterns in what numbers people pick.



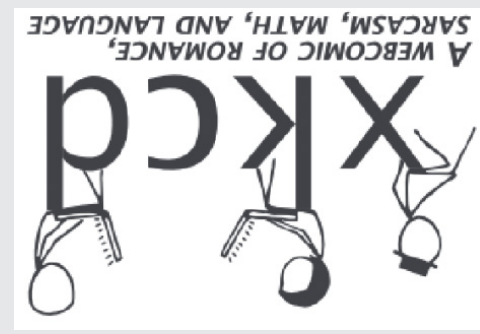
[628] Psychic

Our models fall apart where the three theories overlap; we're unable to predict what happens when a nanometer-sized squirrel eats a grapefruit with the mass of the sun.



[3178] Hyperacute Interdynamics

by Randall Munroe



Multiple libraries to close in budget rebalancing

Barker and Dewey to close in June amidst MIT's $300M annual budget shortfall

By Rohan Dhillon

On Nov. 19, President Sally Kornbluth announced that MIT would pull three levers to correct mounting financial pressures: increasing revenue, reducing costs, and "rebalancing."

According to Institute spokesperson Kimberly Allen, MIT's budget shortfall is estimated to be $300 million a year, mostly due to an increased tax on investment returns and national cuts to scientific research. Allen also explained that MIT cannot use its endowment to cushion these effects because "the endowment already supports approximately 40% of [the] annual campus budget." Furthermore, 80% of the endowment has already been earmarked for specific purposes determined by donors.

Though Allen could not comment on specific cuts facing specific departments, she noted that the new budget framework will not necessarily apply to every administrative and academic unit. Rather, they will only apply when General Institute Budget (GIB) allocations are involved, which are largely unrestricted, annual subsidies that come from MIT's central budget. Most, though not all, departments have GIB allocations and will thus be affected. Allen was adamant that "the budget framework will preserve MIT's support for student financial aid programs."

MIT's capital plan — an umbrella term for the Institute's new construction projects, dorm renovations, and other infrastructure efforts — will likely be "constrained" in the coming years; however, progress will continue on projects already under construction or involving essential infrastructure, in addition to areas where donors have already provided MIT with significant funding. Allen mentioned that MIT expects to "continue focus[ing] on aging undergraduate dorms in need of essential infrastructure improvements."

Effects on libraries

MIT Libraries' announcement marks the second time in the past two decades that cost-cutting measures have been implemented; the last time was in 2009 amidst the 2008 financial crisis. On Nov. 19, MIT administrators informed MIT Libraries staff that the Dewey and Barker libraries will be shut down in June 2026. MIT will also take steps to "wind down" the Wunsch Conservation Lab, a library that implements and teaches collection conservation techniques. According to MIT Libraries, this closure would cause a loss of access to the library stacks and require conservation efforts to be outsourced; patrons will only be able to request individual items.

Staffing of the Rotch Library will be reduced in June 2027 when the School of Architecture and Planning (SA+P) moves to the Metropolitan Warehouse, which is currently under redevelopment. Currently, a joint task force of SA+P faculty and MIT Libraries staff is planning Rotch's future in light of reduced staffing.

In a comment to *The Tech*, MIT Libraries Access Services Associate Kendall Dawson stated that she believes that MIT is planning to eliminate 16 library positions, which would require 12 current employees to be fired. Overall, administrators tasked MIT Libraries with cutting their budget by 5%, or around $1.6 million annually. Senior personnel at MIT Libraries "leaned hard on cutting positions and people's jobs" because of their view that MIT Libraries is a "digital first" organization.

Campus response

The response from staff at MIT Libraries has been vocal. Dawson believes that the closures "go against the spirit of MIT's mission of open learning" and is disappointed that "these decisions are made by senior leadership who never bother to set foot into the locations they are closing." Even though she works at Rotch five days a week year-round, Dawson stated that she has "not seen a single member of the senior leadership team in Rotch for nearly three years." As a union officer, Dawson feels that her union has not received adequate responses — from either administrators or MIT Labor Relations — that address concerns about the compliance of these layoffs with MIT's union contracts.

VIVIAN HIR—THE TECH

The Barker Library reading room on Tuesday, Dec. 2, 2025.

Diego Temkin '26, former Undergraduate Representative of the Faculty Committee on the Library System and a technology staff member for *The Tech*, was "incredibly disappointed to find out about the cuts." Temkin reported that their frustration mostly came from the "absolute lack of care or kindness" that accompanied the delivery of the news, rather than the cuts themselves. Temkin believes that the announcements should have come after consultation and forewarning.

Beyond budget cuts, MIT will attempt to increase revenue by "finding new ways, largely through Open Learning, Professional Education and MIT Sloan [School of Management]" to engage additional learners, though the specifics are unknown. The Institute will also exit administrative and academic leases in Kendall Square and implement a "freeze to merit salary increases for faculty and staff members who earn more than $85,000."

Academic misconduct cases double in five years

Rise likely from online classes in the pandemic and more LLM usage in education

By Vivian Hir
NEWS EDITOR

According to the Committee on Discipline (COD) annual reports, academic misconduct cases have significantly increased since the COVID-19 pandemic. However, this number sharply decreased in the past year from a peak of 184 cases in 2023–2024 to 121 in 2024–2025, comprising a 34.2% decline. This trend was also reflected in the number of faculty letters to file, which are warnings from instructors regarding cases of academic misconduct in their courses.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic (from 2012 to 2020), academic misconduct cases peaked at 60 annually. From 2019–2020 to 2020–2021, however, the number of cases more than doubled from 54 to 129, further increasing to 160 in 2021–2022. Although cases dropped to 135 in 2022–2023, in the following year, the number climbed to 184, the highest in the past decade.

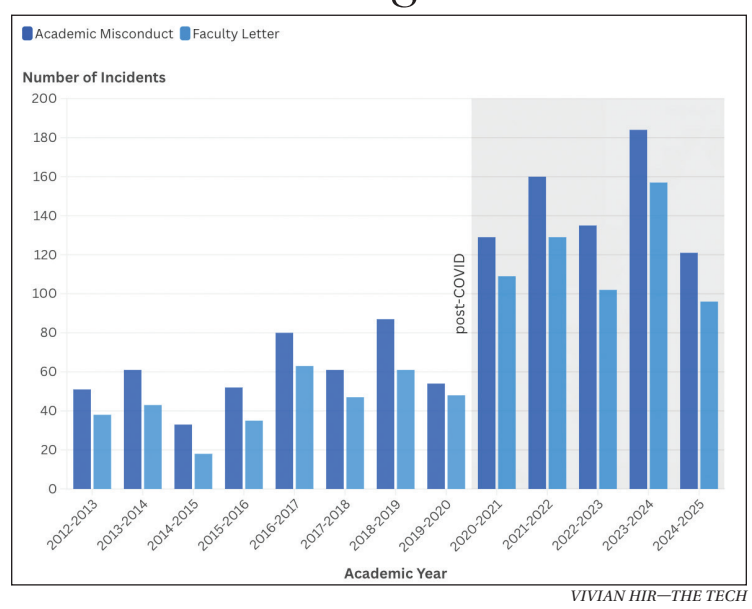
According to the MIT Mind and Hand Book, academic misconduct includes cheating, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, and other instances of academic dishonesty. If an instructor believes that a student has committed academic misconduct, they can address the violation through three options: academic action within class, a faculty letter to file, or a COD complaint.

An academic action is a consequence suitable for the violation, such as a failing grade or resubmission of the assignment for a lower grade. Faculty letters to file require a student to respond within three days and is the least serious sanction. On the other hand, a COD complaint is a formal report alleging that a student has violated MIT policy. An instructor can choose more than one option out of the three, such as an academic action within class and a faculty letter to file.

The observed increase in academic misconduct cases is not unique to MIT. Multiple universities have seen higher instances of academic misconduct cases since the pandemic. In a 2021 NPR article, reports of academic misconduct increased significantly during the pandemic, from an increase of over 50% at the Ohio State University to an increase of more than 100% at the University of Georgia. Reasons for higher reports of misconduct included unauthorized collaboration through channels like group chats and access to unauthorized resources like the internet during an exam.

More recently, however, the rise in LLM usage has led to a major increase in cheating across all academic disciplines, from writing essays for humanities classes to generating code for programming classes. Meanwhile, professors across the country are having difficulty detecting AI usage in assignments.

Mathew Shepard, the Senior Associate Dean for the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards (OSCCS), believes that the noticeable increase in academic misconduct cases during and after the pandemic may come from "lingering pandemic-related issues," including take-home exams and online collaboration. Shepard also stated that the use of LLM tools like ChatGPT has led to "new avenues for policy violations." However, he believes their rise has caused faculty to have "heightened awareness of academic integrity concerns," which may have resulted in higher reporting rates.



VIVIAN HIR—THE TECH

Academic misconduct cases increased since the COVID-19 pandemic, with a sharp drop from the 2023-2024 to 2024-2025 academic year.

Shepard underscored that MIT's academic integrity policies do not allow the "unauthorized or inappropriate use of generative AI," citing that such violations can fall under the definition of cheating because of an "unfair advantage" when completing assignments. He emphasized that if an instructor prohibits the use of generative AI on an assignment, using such tools might be considered academic misconduct. "We encourage students to ask for clear guidance from their instructors before using these tools," Shepard said.

PHOTO PROVIDED BY LATYR NIANG

CONRAD STRADEN – THE TECH

The northern lights as seen from the Green Building on Wednesday, Nov. 12, 2025.