

Epstein's ties with MIT revealed in new DOJ files MIT named a third contingent beneficiary in Epstein's 2014 Trust

By The Tech News Staff

On Friday, Jan. 30, 2026, the U.S. Department of Justice released around three million pages of documentation pertaining to the case of sex offender Jeffrey Epstein. These new documents, in addition to files released by the U.S. House Oversight Committee in November, further clarify the relationship between Epstein and the Institute.

Background

From 2002 to 2017, Jeffrey Epstein donated \$850,000 to MIT. In 2008, Epstein pleaded guilty to procuring a child for prostitution and to soliciting a prostitute. Later, in July 2019, Epstein was arrested again on federal charges

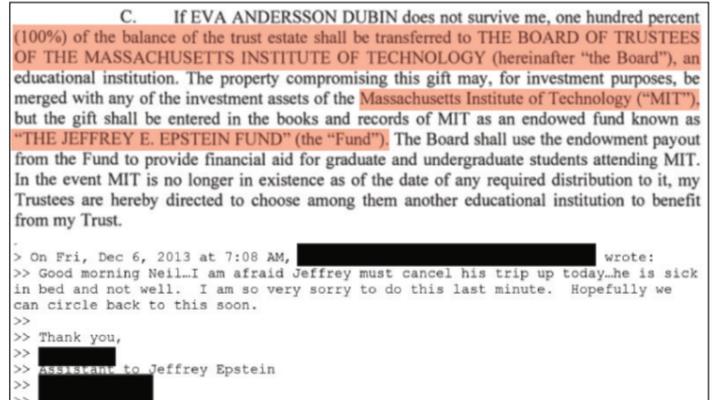
for the sex trafficking of minors in Florida and New York. He died in detention a month later, allegedly from suicide.

Former director of the MIT Media Lab Joi Ito resigned when revelations over Epstein's support of projects at the Media Lab came to light in 2019. Additionally, as shown by a 2020 investigation by the law firm Goodwin Procter into Epstein's relationship with MIT, Professor of Mechanical Engineering Seth Lloyd received research funding, went to Epstein's private island, and visited Epstein while he was in prison. Following the investigation, Lloyd was put on paid administrative leave. However, Lloyd retains his tenured professorship.

Former President of MIT Rafael Reif signed a letter thanking Epstein for a donation in 2012, just six weeks into his presidency. In a statement to MIT released in 2019, Reif stated that Ito "asked for permission to retain this initial gift, and members of my senior team allowed it." Epstein's gifts were also "discussed at at least one of MIT's regular senior team meetings," with Reif present.

In addition to Ito and Lloyd, the 2020 report named several with ties to the Institute, most of whom were connected to the Media Lab or Media Arts and Sciences (MAS). Current

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Newly released Epstein files detail ties with MIT.

Former lecturer Michele Reilly visited Epstein's island

Reilly co-founded start-up Turing Quantum with Professor Seth Lloyd

By The Tech News Staff

Further review of the Epstein documents by The Tech reveals that Mi-

chele Reilly, a part-time mechanical engineering research affiliate and lecturer from 2022 to 2025, visited sex offender Jeffrey Epstein's island in 2015.

Reilly, who works in the field of quantum computation, is not currently employed by MIT, according to an Institute spokesperson. However, the MIT course catalog still suggests that Reilly will co-teach the graduate-level course The Art and Science of Time Travel (2.984/CMS.343) in fall 2026, following previous iterations in the fall semesters of 2023 and 2024. In addition, Reilly affiliates herself with the Institute on social media; she also hosted an event with the MIT Museum on Dec. 6, 2025.

Reilly's 2.984 co-instructor is Professor Seth Lloyd, also of the MIT mechanical engineering department.

In 2020, a report by the firm Goodwin Procter released incriminating evidence that Lloyd accepted research donations from Epstein, obscured the nature of these donations, and maintained a friendship with Epstein even after his 2008 conviction for prostitution of minors.

Reilly, who was not an employee of MIT in 2020, was not named in the report. However, according to a 2023 interview, she and Lloyd were already associates by that year, having co-founded quantum computation start-up Turing in 2016.

Reilly appears to have been connected with Epstein via Joscha Bach, a former research scientist at the MIT Media Lab. On Jan. 8, 2015, Reilly visited the island with Michael Vassar, a "futurist, activist, and entrepreneur."

Three days after visiting the island, Reilly exchanged emails with Epstein and Bach. Reilly wrote to Epstein, "You asked for 'fun' projects...what are your thoughts on funding and constructing your own intelligence agency?"

In that same message, Reilly envisioned Epstein's island, Little St. James, transforming into an "exclusive science salon." She wrote immediately after: "...outside of this I tend to think of my mate preferences as evidence of gentlemen to pay attention to. Caveat emptor. Like any decent trader you should estimate various lags/regime changes to seek relevant trends. High profile island orgies also independently come to mind; but I have a strong suspicion that you may already have that covered."

In 2017 and 2018, Reilly appeared to have solicited funding from Epstein for

Turing. In August 2018, Epstein provided his phone number to Reilly.

Although Lloyd was placed on paid administrative leave in Fall 2019, which limited his pay, ability to seek donations, and first-year advising capabilities, he retains tenure and has continued to teach after receiving "training on professional conduct." He has taught or co-taught classes every semester since spring 2022.

A correction was made on Feb. 11, 2026: A previous version of this article described Reilly as a current lecturer at MIT. She is no longer employed at the Institute, having worked as a part-time lecturer from September 2024 to January 2025 and a research affiliate from May 2022 until April 2023, according to an MIT spokesperson.

TFUAP proposal outlines new MIT undergraduate policies

TFUAP: "If we cannot keep up, public trust in MIT's education will decline"

By Jada Ogueh, Kiro Moussa, and Anjali George

On Feb. 5, 2026, the Task Force on the Undergraduate Academic Program (TFUAP) sent an email to the MIT community sharing their draft proposal, which details potential changes to the General Institute Requirements (GIRs), academic policies, and Institute curriculum requirements.

Origins of the TFUAP

The TFUAP stems directly from the Undergraduate Program Refinement and Implementation Committee (RIC 1) of Task Force 2021 and Beyond, which was commissioned by former MIT President L. Rafael Reif in May 2020. RIC 1 recommended that a task force be convened to improve all aspects of the GIRs, focusing on both "curriculum and pedagogy."

Phase 1 for the TFUAP involved collecting feedback from the MIT community in fall 2024, culminating in the February draft proposal. The proposal describes a need for a responsible and flexible education, stating that otherwise "public trust in MIT's education will decline accordingly." Furthermore, to prepare students to address interdisciplinary global challenges and questions, the document also asserts that MIT must address the "mono-disciplinary" nature of the "majority of classes."

Curriculum changes

The TFUAP put forward a number of changes that would alter how most students approach their first few semesters at the Institute. For example, the physics GIR would be satisfied by a new singular 12-unit physics class; initially, this would be Physics I (8.01) for students with no prior credit or

Physics II (8.02) for entering students with AP/ASE credit. Eventually, 8.01 would be revised, possibly to include topics like electricity and magnetism and computation.

Moreover, in lieu of the current chemistry and biology GIRs, the proposal suggests that 36 units of chemistry, biology, computation, and probability, statistics, and machine learning (PSM) should be required instead. Each subject would offer six-unit, 12-unit, and 12-unit integrated options. Majors with these courses as prerequisites can specify two that must be completed as a non-integrated, 12-unit class.

On introducing a computing GIR, the proposal states that the absence of a computational GIR would signal that "MIT doesn't think computing is necessary in the 21st century." Thus, students would need to take some form of computation by the end of their second year.

As for math, Multivariable Calculus (18.02) would introduce more linear algebra and de-emphasize integration due to the development of the "increasing role" of linear algebra across the curriculum and new computational tools for integration.

REST and Lab requirements would also be eliminated. Students would have to take at least one sub-

ject designated as a Moral and Civic Perspectives subject, but the HASS requirement would remain at eight. Mandated Teamwork-Intensive (TI) classes would include heavily-weighted team-based assignments, while the Physical Education and Wellness (PE+W) requirement would be raised from eight points to ten.

Under the proposal, students would be required to complete 72 units of GIRs by the end of their second year.

To reward students engaging "deeply" with experiential learning and physical "making and breaking," a Mens et Manus Scholars program and a new faculty-mentored UROP was also proposed, with suggestions for the UROP office to split-pool direct funding.

On clarity

According to the proposal, policies would also be introduced to reduce "uncertainty and complexity" for both students and advisors. They would abolish the non-overlap guideline and effectively allow students to count subjects taken for any major or minor towards their GIR subjects if applicable.

To reduce stress around student registration, the document also would require all subjects in the Subject Listing and Schedule to link their latest

class syllabus no later than the add date. In the same vein, to give students time to drop the class or adjust their performance, instructors must provide an interim grade report no later than one full week before the drop date and return grades within a "timely manner." Insufficient or missing interim grade reports would be valid grounds for a late drop petition.

On commitment

To ensure both instructors and students commit to "participating fully in an in-person learning environment," the proposal suggests moving class registration to the end of the previous semester, with an exception for first-years, who would still register at the start of the next semester. To avoid hindering first-years, limited enrollment subjects would reserve slots for freshman.

Unlike most schools, MIT's add and drop deadlines are very late into the semester, currently the fifth and 11th-12th week, respectively. For reference, Harvard's add and drop deadline takes place exactly two weeks after the start of classes. The proposal argues that MIT's current add/drop policy encourages overcommitment and harms classroom dynamics. As a re-

TFUAP, Page 3

IN SHORT Valentine's Day and Harvard MIT Mathematics Tournament (HMMT) is on Saturday, Feb. 14. Presidents' Day is Monday, Feb. 16. No classes will be held. Monday schedule of classes to be held on Tuesday, Feb. 17. Interested in joining The Tech? Email tt-join@mit.edu. Send news and tips to tt-tips@mit.edu

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WEATHER WEATHER WEATHER WEATHER

Today
Partly Cloudy.



35°F
2°C

Wind Speed: 10-15 mph.
Gusts: 25 mph.
Direction: NW.

Tonight
Clear.



16°F
-9°C

Wind Speed: 10-15 mph.
Gusts: 25 mph.
Direction: NW.

Friday
Sunny.



38°F 20°
3°C | -7°C

Wind Speed: 5-10 mph.
Gusts: 20 mph.
Direction: W.

Saturday
Chance For Snow.



41°F 22°
5°C | -6°C

Wind Speed: 3-8 mph.
Gusts: 15 mph.
Direction: W.

Sunday
Partly Cloudy.



42°F 28°
6°C | -2°C

Wind Speed: 0-5 mph.
Gusts: 10 mph.
Direction: W.

Seasonal temperatures return and the melting begins

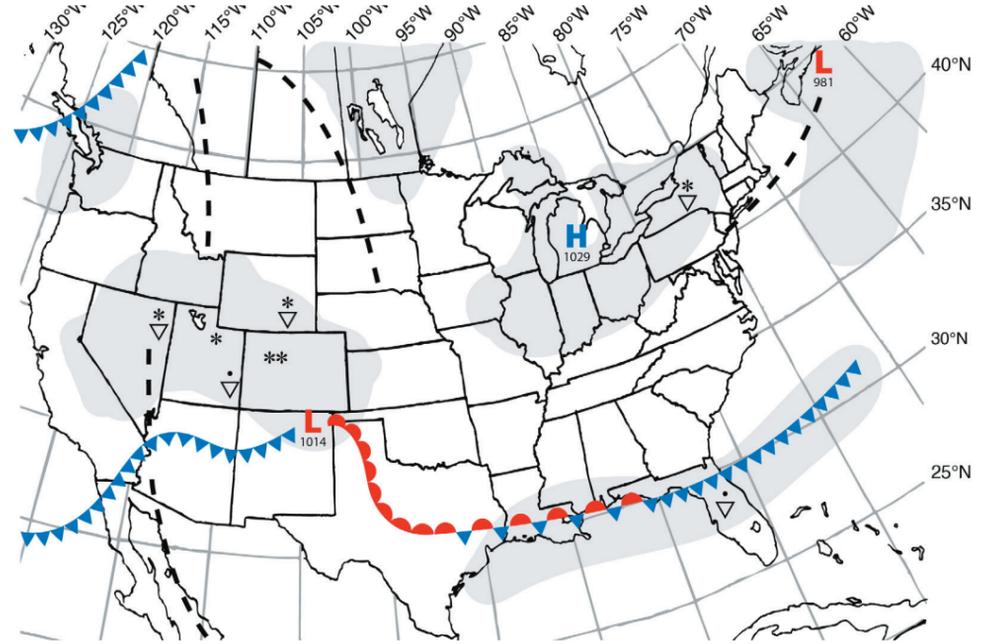
By Conrad Straden
CHIEF METEOROLOGIST

After an additional two inches of snow Tuesday night, our weather pattern is finally changing. Sunshine and warm temperatures will be the story the next few days with highs in the upper 30s and low 40s. High pressure dominates on Friday, bringing clear skies and calmer winds. As we head into the weekend, a weak disturbance will pass through New England, potentially bringing a few snow showers on Saturday. Otherwise, mild temperatures and few clouds will make for a pleasant weekend.

Further south, a low pressure system will slide across the country on Sunday night, bring-

ing rain to the South and Mid-Atlantic. Right now, the question remains whether this low can connect with a piece of energy to the north, or whether they stay separate. A well-timed connection would mean a snowstorm for Southern New England, while a flatter, disconnected solution would mean the storm stays to our south. It is still too early to tell what the outcome will be, but several inches of snow would not be a surprise.

Looking ahead to next week, the warmer weather will continue, with the chance for some rain towards the end of the week. This would be the first rain in over a month. As we approach spring, the days will get longer, with sunsets now after 5 p.m. and sunrises before 7 a.m.



Weather Systems	Weather Fronts	Precipitation Symbols	Other Symbols
H High Pressure	--- Trough	Snow: * (Showers), * (Light), ** (Moderate), * (Heavy)	☁ Fog
L Low Pressure	🔴 Warm Front	Rain: • (Light), •• (Moderate), ••• (Heavy)	⚡ Thunderstorm
🌀 Hurricane	🔵 Cold Front		∞ Haze
	🔵🔴 Stationary Front		

Compiled by MIT Meteorology Staff and The Tech

Boyden visited Epstein's ranch in New Mexico

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MAS faculty include Neil Gershenfeld and Ed Boyden '98 (also affiliated with Brain and Cognitive Sciences and Biological Engineering). Other individuals mentioned, some of whom have since departed MIT, include Linda Stone, Marvin Minsky (a pioneer in artificial intelligence), Neri Oxman (wife of billionaire Bill Ackman), Joscha Bach, and Caleb Harper. Professor Eric Lander, a pioneering geneticist who was not mentioned in the report, also met with Epstein in 2012.

The Tech has verified that all of the aforementioned individuals were mentioned in the recent release of files.

The trust

In Section 2.4, "Balance of the Trust Estate," of Epstein's 2014 Trust — a document naming Epstein's financial beneficiaries — MIT is named a third contingent and final beneficiary of the remaining trust following distributions described in previous sections. The gift was to be titled "The Jeffrey E. Epstein Fund," and was stated "to provide financial aid for graduate and undergraduate students attending MIT."

MIT undergraduate met with Epstein on Stone and Ito's recommendation

A 2014 email sent from Linda Stone to Epstein, with Ito copied, stated, "Both Joi and I think you'd find this guy super interesting." The

individual was Jeremy Rubin '16, who was and still is presently involved in Bitcoin research and cryptocurrency. Rubin appears to have later met with Epstein on several occasions as early as 2014 and as recently as 2018.

Within the newly released files, Rubin and Epstein exchanged emails with regards to cryptocurrency. In one exchange dated August 2018, Epstein gave advice to Rubin, writing, "there seems to be a disconnect between manipulation, currency valuation, it's how to protect ourselves. not easy."

Neil Gershenfeld

According to the 2020 report, Gershenfeld, a physicist and computer scientist, met with Epstein during several MIT campus visits in 2013. Gershenfeld later accepted an invitation to dine at Epstein's home. The report also stated that there was no evidence that Epstein interacted with students during those visits, and some follow-up meetings were later canceled.

In one exchange dated 2014 between Gershenfeld and Epstein that was released in November by the House Oversight Committee, Gershenfeld wrote to Epstein to confirm "lunch" in his office. Appearing to reference future celebrations, Gershenfeld added, "sunglasses and beach balls [are] optional" and that "hopefully this will be a warm-up for meeting in more entertaining venues."

Ed Boyden

Following the 2020 report, Boyden, a neuroscientist, issued a statement in an attempt to clarify his relationship with Epstein. He wrote that he regretted attending meetings with Epstein, both on and off campus, despite "knowing that Epstein had been convicted of a serious crime," and he asserted that all meetings were solely for research.

The 2020 report stated, "Professor Boyden told us that he did remember visiting Epstein off-campus on at least five specific occasions to discuss his research and potential funding." The Justice Department's files shed some new light on this relationship. In one email dated 2013, Boyden accepted an offer from Epstein's assistant to visit the sex offender's New Mexico ranch with Harvard Professor Martin Nowak. Emails between Nowak and Epstein from 2014 show Epstein responding, "did you torture her" to a message from Nowak that read, "our spy was captured after completing her mission."

Moreover, in emails between Boyden, Epstein, and Ito from 2015, Boyden wrote that he was enthusiastic to meet the "coaches" Epstein and Ito had mentioned. Subsequently, Epstein joked in private with Ito about if the coach Boyden needed was "the 'pitch' coach, or the how to pick women coach."

Linda Stone

The 2020 report stated that Joi Ito was initially referred to Epstein by former MIT Media Lab Advisory Council Member Linda Stone.

The recently released files seem to show that Epstein and Stone maintained friendly relations. In an email dated 2010, Epstein wrote in response to a meeting suggestion by Stone that "you always have my support for any inter[e] sting meeting." In another email dated 2012, Stone asked Epstein for recommendations on traveling in the Caribbean on the behalf of a friend. Epstein's enigmatic answer: "Let's talk on the phone, what activities..."

In a note that Stone sent to Epstein in October 2016, Stone wrote, "Trump is owning the headlines this weekend?" Epstein did not respond.

This is a developing story and may be updated.

A correction was made on Feb. 6, 2026: An earlier version of this article mentioned Daniel Hillis '88 and Ethan Zuckerman in the background section. While they were indeed mentioned in the 2020 report and in the new batch of Epstein files, further investigation by The Tech has led to the conclusion that these individuals were not directly involved with Epstein and therefore are not immediately relevant to the new developments. The article has been updated to remove those references and correct a misspelling of Joscha Bach.

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MIT kicks off 52nd annual celebration of MLK

Dr. King Jr.: “We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope”

By Jaden Chizuruoke May

On Feb. 5, MIT opened its 52nd annual celebration of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. with a speaker panel hosting three MLK Scholars: L’Merchie Frazier, Dr. Patrick Njoroge, and Djamila Tais Ribeiro dos Santos. The three scholars attended as part of MIT’s MLK Visiting Professors and Scholars Program, which aims to bring 10–15 talented scholars from a variety of fields to MIT for visiting appointments every year, according to its website.

The panel revolved around Dr. King’s famous words spoken just two months before his passing: “We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope.” Organized by Office of Academic Community, Empowerment, and Success (OACES) Assistant Dean Krissy Robinson and moderated by MIT Sloan School of Management Office of Admissions Assistant Director RaeVaughn Gardner-Williams, the panel began with the scholars explaining which term stood out the most to them within Dr. King’s quote: “infinite hope” or “finite disappointment.”

The silver lining within disappointment

L’Merchie Frazier, a visiting scholar in urban studies and planning (Course 11), spoke first, introducing herself as a “visual activist, public historian, poet, and human being.” Within her work, which centers around engaging with the last 500 years of Black and Indigenous history, Frazier prides herself on upholding four ideals: “I remember, I reclaim, I restore, and I reimagine.”

Frazier, using these four pillars as a lens, often works to both understand and proliferate Dr. King’s words. Frazier explained that she had been “looking beyond” Dr. King’s “I Have a Dream” speech for about 20 years and wished others could too.

Still, despite being well-versed with Dr. King’s rhetoric and philosophies, Frazier admitted she had to “brace” herself for Dr. King’s words on “accepting” disappointment. “Accept[ing] disappointment is not usually something I would do. And so I said, there must have been a reason. A man with a great depth of words would not casually put that ‘accept’ in.” In her investigation, she analyzed what Dr. King’s “accept” really meant.

Looking at the last 50 years of civil rights and its impact in Boston, Frazier noted, “There was a lesson to look deeper, to peer into what may be veiled, [and] to not give up. To actually look at how, in my work, remembering and reclaiming is in that finite envelope.”

“Do I accept that we can go beyond that?” Frazier posed rhetorically, referring to the act of accepting disappointment. She nodded in agreement a moment later, adding, “But rest for a while... just sit in [disappointment] and understand what it is that is given to us within disappointment. Not yielding to it, but at least recognizing it.”

Understanding infinite hope

As the panel went on, the other scholars shared their reflections on Dr. King’s words. D’jamila Ribeiro, a visiting scholar in women’s and gender studies, believed that finite disappointment and infinite hope can coexist. “As Black people, we are

going to deal with disappointment in our lives on all levels. When you are engaged in shaping political movements for change, for transformations, for sure, we’re going to deal with disappointment,” Ribeiro said.

In the same vein, Ribeiro then discussed her experience advocating for social change across her communities in Brazil, describing progress as a nonlinear, long process with “ups and downs.”

“There was a moment in my life when I thought that disappointment was part of being a Black woman,” she admitted. “Growing up in Brazil at that time, when you turned on the television, for a long time [there was] only White people. In academia, only White people.”

“Even though the majority of Brazil is Black,” Ribeiro continued, “I was born in this kind of environment where I couldn’t see myself. But then I started to work in a Black feminist organization. I had the opportunity to read books written by Black women, and when I had the opportunity to see the world from the perspective of other Black women, everything changed for me.”

When Ribeiro considered how far she had come, she reflected on her accomplishments through a hopeful lens. After revealing she was the first person in her family to attend university, Ribeiro raised her finger to locate her daughter among the panel’s attendees. “I finished graduation when I was 32,” Ribeiro stated as she scanned the room, “and now my daughter is 20 and [has been] accepted into university.” The anecdote served as a reminder to Ribeiro of the power of perseverance and hope.



PHOTO COURTESY OF CORBAN SWAIN

Moderator RaeVaughn Gardner-Williams (left) and panelists L’Merchie Frazier, D’jamila Ribeiro, and Dr. Patrick Njoroge discuss the legacy and impact of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. at MIT on Thursday, Feb. 5, 2026.

“We are not going to lose this infinite hope. This is how [MLK’s] legacy continues to inspire. Do not let disappointment become our identity,” she urged.

Planting seeds now for a better tomorrow

Later, Dr. Patrick Njoroge, a visiting scholar and former governor of the Central Bank of Kenya, presented a different but insightful view on Dr. King’s words. He began by choosing “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop” as his favorite speech. “[MLK] says I’ve been to the mountaintop and I’ve seen the end, and I may not get there with you, but you will get there. He had a sense that he doesn’t need to be the hero who crosses the line with us,” Njoroge said.

Njoroge related his interpretation of Dr. King’s words to his own view on the idea of “infinite hope,” suggesting that hope does not need to be something with a tangible, easily-reached conclusion. Njoroge ex-

panded on this by describing a story a minister from another country told him: “I saw this older farmer once who was planting coconuts. So I talked to the farmer and said, ‘I don’t think you will eat from the fruit of this tree that you’re planting.’ The farmer turned to me and said, ‘Yes, I’m planting these coconuts that I will not eat from. However, I eat from this tree over here that I did not plant.’”

According to the minister, Njoroge concluded, society is at its best when we “plant coconuts that we know we will not eat from.”

As Thursday’s panel came to a close, moderator Gardner-Williams thanked the panelists and attendees, encouraging everyone to continue seeking out and contributing to the wealth of diversity found across MIT’s campus.

As part of annual MLK festivities, there will also be an award ceremony on Feb. 10 and a luncheon celebration on Feb. 11.

Dr. Rizkalla talks about faith at “Reason for God”

The annual MIT Cru series features talks from different Christian figures

By Kiro Moussa

Around a hundred people gathered in the Stratton Student Center on Jan. 22 to hear Dr. Mouhab Rizkalla present historical evidence in defense of the Christian faith as part of the annual “Reason for God” series. The series, consisting of six talks hosted by MIT Christian organization Cru, is held every IAP and will also host viral evangelists Cliffe and Stuart Knechtel on March 5.

Rizkalla, who works in Orthodontics and Dentofacial Orthopedics, has spoken previously on scientific arguments for a God. Rizkalla’s talk on Thursday revolved around a “courtroom” metaphor through which he invited the audience to issue “credibility verdicts” on the various pieces of historical accounts he provided.

Rizkalla began his remarks with a disclaimer that he sought only to share his experience with God instead of persuading the audience to believe anything. He also presented his thoughts on belief, stating that belief is a combination of knowledge and faith, while also asserting that his faith was much smaller compared to his knowledge about God. According to Rizkalla, he would test “the Jesus Christ story via the courtroom approach” by discussing the importance of three categories of witnesses to Je-



KIRO MOUSSA—THE TECH
Dr. Rizkalla presents his Reason for God talk in the Student Center on Thursday, Jan. 22, 2026.

sus’s divinity, which he dubbed the “disinterested, direct, and hostile.”

Throughout the talk, Rizkalla focused on witnesses living around the time of Jesus’s death. He started with “disinterested” witnesses like historians. These testimonies, he asserted, would be relatively unbiased, as they are not rooted in faith or opposition. Rizkalla provided the records of in-

fluent historians such as Flavius Josephus, who stated that “he appeared to them spending a third day restored to Christ,” Pinoy the Younger, who compared “Christ as to a God,” and Tacitus, who said that “Christus suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius.”

Rizkalla then discussed “direct” witnesses such as Jesus’s apostles and their willingness to follow Jesus despite being persecuted and martyred. For example, Rizkalla highlighted the fishermen Peter and John and the wealthy tax collector Mathew as individuals who left more comfortable lives to preach and testify. Rizkalla also provided the testimony of Mary Magdalene, a direct witness at the time she visited Jesus’s tomb. He used these “first-person records” with their varied yet aligned testimonies to support the story of Jesus’s death and resurrection.

Finally, Rizkalla used “hostile” witnesses — people who were injured due to their testimonies — to support the validity of the testimonies. He likened “hostile” witnesses to a mother telling the jury her son is guilty. In the same way it becomes difficult to believe the son’s innocence, Rizkalla argued, it is similarly difficult to doubt the Christian belief if hostile converts attest to Christianity. Rizkalla used the testimonies of people who were

either doubtful or completely against the Christian belief; he specifically pointed out Thomas during Jesus’s resurrection and Paul, who went from persecuting Christians to writing “twelve to thirteen books” in the Bible.

At the end of the talk, Rizkalla circled back to his belief equation. Rizkalla asserted that his “tiny portion of faith” comes from his observation that these testimonies were not accidental and pointed to Jesus being God, especially since the witnesses did not directly benefit from their testimonies.

Using the rest of the time for questions, members of the audience criticized parts of Rizkalla’s argument. Some questioned whether the testimonies Rizkalla referenced were written by those credited and requested more concrete evidence. Others offered alternative perspectives on the testimonies, labeling the disciples’ actions as “cult-like,” arguing they stole Jesus’s body, and claiming their belief could be a myth.

At the same time, some even provided their own evidence, such as the Shroud of Christ, a linen cloth believed to be the burial cloth of Jesus, questioning why it was not used in the talk. Rizkalla responded by pointing out that such evidence could not be used since it cannot be fully pro-

ven. When talking about when Paul was martyred, Rizkalla said, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”

Njoroge related his interpretation of Dr. King’s words to his own view on the idea of “infinite hope,” suggesting that hope does not need to be something with a tangible, easily-reached conclusion. Njoroge expanded on this by describing a story a minister from another country told him: “I saw this older farmer once who was planting coconuts. So I talked to the farmer and said, ‘I don’t think you will eat from the fruit of this tree that you’re planting.’ The farmer turned to me and said, ‘Yes, I’m planting these coconuts that I will not eat from. However, I eat from this tree over here that I did not plant.’”

According to the minister, Njoroge concluded, society is at its best when we “plant coconuts that we know we will not eat from.”

As Thursday’s panel came to a close, moderator Gardner-Williams thanked the panelists and attendees, encouraging everyone to continue seeking out and contributing to the well of diversity found across MIT’s campus.

As part of the annual MLK festivities, there will also be an award ceremony on Feb. 10 and a luncheon celebration on Feb. 11.

Banning double-booking surprises many

TFUAP, from Page 1

sult, the TFUAP proposes shifting the add date to the fourth week of classes and the drop date to the ninth week.

The proposal also made the controversial decision to ban students from double-booking classes, but acknowledged that the large variety of course scheduling is not coordinated to “minimize conflicts for students.” Thus, all classes would be required to schedule within “standard time blocks.” However, students would be allowed to petition to

double-book with advisor and instructor approval.

The document also listed classroom norms to be implemented at the instructor’s discretion, such as students attending class in full with all electronics off, unless permitted by Disability Access Services or the instructors.

Some students expressed initial concern over MIT time — a policy whereby classes begin and end five minutes after and before the scheduled block, respectively — being removed due to the proposal stating that

“classroom expectations” would be reset such that students will “arrive on time and stay for the entire class” period. But according to an email sent by Caitlin Ogoe ’25, a former undergraduate member of the Task Force, MIT time would be formalized among all classes, not removed.

On compassion

The proposal also delineated the following policies to reduce “unnecessary stress” around final exams and holidays.

Fall semester classes would begin on the Tuesday following Labor

Day, turning the current Registration Day (Sept. 2) into a regular class day. The Wednesday before Thanksgiving would turn into a holiday to reduce concerns regarding travel. To accommodate this shift, either the registration timing for the fall semester would be moved earlier or the timing for advisor-student meetings regarding registration would need to change.

Under the new proposal, no assignments can be due on student holidays or immediately after major break periods. And, to give students enough time to study for finals, the last test

date would be set to at least five days before classes end.

Moving forward

The TFUAP will host three town halls to hear community feedback on the proposal, scheduled for Feb. 23 from 7 to 8:30 p.m. in 4-163; Feb. 24 from 2 to 3:30 p.m. in 4-270; and March 2 from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. in 4-370 — the first date is open to students only. Following the town halls, the TFUAP will revise the proposal and share the result with the community. After that, MIT faculty will vote on whether to implement the proposal recommendations.

SPORTS ARTS LIFE CAMPUS NEWS FEATURES OPINION ENTERTAINMENT WEATHER SCIENCE

Acclaimed author Margaret Atwood presents 'Book of Lives' at First Parish Church

"I think part of writing novels is entertaining yourself well"

★★★★☆

Book of Lives: A Memoir of Sorts

Margaret Atwood

First Parish Church, Cambridge

Jan. 27, 2026

By Vivian Hir
SENIOR EDITOR

On Jan. 27, award-winning author Margaret Atwood presented her new memoir called *Book of Lives* at First Parish Church in Cambridge, hosted by Harvard Book Store. Robin Young, the host of NPR's *Here & Now*, acted as moderator. A prolific author who has written more than 50 books of fiction, essays, and poetry, Atwood is best known for *A Handmaid's Tale*, a dystopian novel about a theocratic regime called Gilead. Her work has won accolades including two Booker Prizes and the Arthur C. Clarke Award. *Book of Lives* is a detailed account of Atwood's life, from her rural upbringing to critical experiences that have shaped her writing.

Atwood first discussed her childhood growing up in the forests of northern Quebec. Born in 1939, Atwood is the daughter of an entomologist who frequently conducted research in the woods. Atwood appreciated living in nature because the environment encouraged her to be adventurous and free, a life significantly different from the "very managed lives" of children today. Although her childhood was boring at times because of the isolation, Atwood stated that the experience taught her how

to entertain herself, a skill she finds important in writing. "I think part of writing novels is entertaining yourself well," she shared.

Atwood then discussed her earlier works, notably *The Edible Woman*, a 1969 novel about Marian McAlpin, a young woman who is unable to eat after her engagement. In the novel, Marian bakes a cake in the shape of herself and forces her boyfriend to eat it because she felt consumed by him. Cannibalism is a main theme in *The Edible Woman*, with Atwood stating that bride and groom cakes were a source of inspiration because they made her think of people "turning into a consumer product of a confectionary kind." Atwood also critiqued how society in the 1960s oppressed women, from strict dress codes to patriarchal expectations.

In addition to feminism and women's identities, Atwood also wrote about the cruelty of female bullies in *Cat's Eye*, a novel based on Atwood's childhood. Atwood described the girls who bullied her as "Machiavellian" and "Byzantine," as they manipulated her through complex schemes. "It wasn't 'you're a terrible person — we're going to knock you down,'" Atwood said. "It was 'We can help you.'" She then underscored that people tend to forget the bad things they have done to others, while clearly remembering the bad things that others have done to them.

Afterwards, Atwood read a passage from *Book of Lives* about the male stalkers of Founder's House, a female graduate dorm residence at Radcliffe College, where Atwood studied English literature in the early 1960s. Atwood's reading was engaging, as the passage was filled with vivid details about her peculiar experiences, from seeing an unfamiliar hand enter the open bathroom window to struggling to learn judo for self-defense. Although the topic was dark, Atwood's witty and sharp humor was effective, causing the entire audience to laugh from time to time.



PHOTO COURTESY OF CORBAN SWAIN

Moderator RaeVaughn Gardner-Williams (left) and panelists L'Merchie Frazier, D'jamila Ribeiro, and Dr. Patrick Njoroge discuss the legacy and impact of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. at MIT on Thursday, Feb. 5, 2026.

Atwood ended the talk by discussing in great depth the ideas that influenced her to write *The Handmaid's Tale*. For Atwood, her interest in the history of 17th century Puritan New England played a major role in shaping the novel. She found the Puritans' system of government contradictory and undemocratic, as they came to New England for freedom of religion, yet persecuted Quakers. "They came over so they can have freedom of religion for themselves, just not anybody else," Atwood said.

Besides interest in the history of the Puritans, Atwood was also curious about the origins and developments of World War II, given that she grew up during the war. "Where did all this come from?" Atwood asked. "How was it that dictators had been able to take over in Germany and Russia, and then a little bit later in China?"

The other major factor that drove Atwood to write *The Handmaid's Tale* was the rise of Christian nationalism in the 1980s as a "pushback" to second-wave feminism in the 1970s. Atwood connected the recent political initiative Project 2025 to *The Handmaid's Tale*, as it similarly opposes abortion rights and has proposed marriage bootcamps to raise the country's birth rate.

After the end of the talk, Atwood answered the audience's many questions, including her thoughts on writing as a medium and how she approaches writing. Atwood acknowledged that she will never know who her readers are, unlike other art forms such as ballet and opera, where both the audience and artist are in the same space. "That's what writing is. It's one of the art forms in which the making of it is always separate from the consuming of it," Atwood said.

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CONCERT REVIEW

Seong-Jin Cho Dazzles With Two Hours of Ravel

Cho's performance of Ravel's solo piano repertoire leaves no doubt of his technical and musical prowess

By Susan Hong
CAMPUS LIFE EDITOR

Maurice Ravel—Claude Debussy's arguably less famous musical cousin—is a master of swirling harmonies that mimic the fluid, capricious nature of water; almost-melodies that pass between different voices and never seem to resolve; and grand, virtuosic sweeps that challenge even the most skilled pianists of our generation. Yet Seong-Jin Cho brilliantly glides through arpeggios, glissandos, and never-ending runs like second nature, drawing out overlapping textures and turning clusters of notes into stories. Cho, who performed at Boston's Symphony Hall as part of the Celebrity Series on February 2, 2025, played the complete set of solo piano works written by Ravel, a live rendition of an over two-hour-long album he released in January 2025 to commemorate the 150th anniversary of Ravel's birth.

Cho begins with the *Sérénade grotesque*, immediately demonstrating his command over the variety of textures prominent in Ravel's work. This piece is a patchwork of various sounds, with fast transitions from sharp, fortissimo staccatos to gentle, heavily-pedaled pianissimo. In the middle of the piece, Cho immediately channels bursts of energy from loud chords into soft, alternating notes, which then explode back into the chords. His powerful control over dynamic contrast appears to stem from the flexibility of his fingers. Throughout the entire performance, Cho plays softer passages with a soft, flattened hand, gently stroking the keys of the piano, and for the louder sections, he leans forward and channels his body weight into his more rigid hands. The genius of Cho's Ravel performance lies not only in his interpretation of overarching melodic and harmonic stories but also in his clear

knowledge and deliberate application of the mechanics of piano technique.

This skill is further demonstrated in Cho's performance of *Jeux d'eau*, a piece meant to evoke the playful character of sparkling streams of water arching over a fountain. And indeed, Cho's fingers sparkle. Most of the piece is composed of fast clusters of notes, whether in the form of short arpeggios, long runs, or something else entirely. While Cho plays the notes with great speed and precision, creating a sweeping effect reminiscent of flowing water, each and every note is somehow still perfectly distinct, portraying the smooth jets of water and clear sparkles that emit when light is shone upon the fountain.

Alborada del gracioso is the first clear departure from Ravel's penchant for flowy, water-like pieces in the program. It begins immediately with a rhythmic staccato background, reminiscent of beating drums. Ravel's versatility in composition perfectly complements Cho's versatility of playing style, as the audience gets to witness the performer paint a different kind of picture. Cho performs the lively sections of this piece like a virtuosic dance. The textural contrasts that he applies so well come as Cho uses the pedal to alternate between crisp staccatos and smooth lines—which sometimes even appear within the same measure. In this piece, his feet move almost as fast as his fingers, as he varies not only the length of pedals, but also the depth, expanding his range of textures. The sparkling quality seen in *Jeux d'eau* also extends to the repeated notes that pepper the last half of the piece—they are played so fast they almost blur into a singular sound, but each note remains distinct and accurate.

Arguably the climax of Cho's entire performance, *Scarbo* from *Gaspard de la nuit* is a demonstration of not only Cho's



PHOTO COURTESY OF DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON

The cover of Seong-Jin Cho's new album, "Ravel: The Solo Complete Piano Works"

strengths—textural contrast, voicing, tone—but also a display of pure virtuosity. Fast runs, rapid repeated notes, runs spanning nearly the entirety of the keyboard, sharp changes in texture and dynamics, a resounding storyline—*Scarbo* has it all. And, evidently, so does Cho. He effortlessly passes voices between hands, bringing out clear, interconnected melodies even from within a cesspool of dissonance, and, as expected, his runs are essentially flawless without sounding robotic, creating a distinct feeling of increasing suspense. *Scarbo* ends surprisingly quietly—an understatement compared to its roaring technicality—but the applause that follows is far from quiet. A resounding standing ovation, and the program hasn't even ended yet.

The rest of Cho's program is similarly impressive. Highlights include the collection of waltzes that blend into each other, leaving only their distinct styles to indicate starts

and finishes to the listener, and *Le tombeau de Couperin*, a suite similar in organization to a Bach Partita, echoing more traditional forms while adding Ravel's unique touch. In the *Prelude of Le tombeau de Couperin*, Cho does a masterful job of changing the color of the music—by modifying dynamics and his touch on the keys—even as the tempo and rhythm of the notes remain constant.

Overall, Cho's performance of Ravel's entire solo piano repertoire proved to be both technically impressive and musically alluring. After multiple rounds of standing ovations by audience members who were no doubt waiting for an encore, Cho came back out and shut the piano lid—a sign that there would be no encore—to laughter from the audience. And after two hours straight of brilliant, virtuosic musical performance, who can blame him?

Originally published in Vol. 145, Issue 2 on Feb. 20, 2025.

EVENT REVIEW

Award-winning author Ocean Vuong presents 'The Emperor of Gladness' at First Parish Church

Vuong: "I want a book that just holds people and allows them to transform internally"

Ocean Vuong

The Emperor of Gladness

First Parish Church,
Cambridge

May 16, 2025

By Vivian Hir
NEWS EDITOR

On May 16, 2025, author Ocean Vuong presented his latest novel *The Emperor of Gladness* at the First Parish Church. The host of the event was Harvard Book Store, and its moderator was *Here & Now* senior producer Emiko Tamagawa. Vuong is known for his *New York Times* bestselling novel *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* and his critically acclaimed poetry collections, *Time is a Mother* and *Night Sky With Exit Wounds*. He has received the Ruth Lilly and Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Poetry Fellowship from the Poetry Foundation, the Whiting Award, and the T. S. Eliot Prize for his work. A Vietnamese refugee, Vuong grew up in Hartford, Connecticut, and is currently a poetry professor in the MFA program at New York University.

The Emperor of Gladness centers around Hai, a suicidal 19-year-old college dropout from East Gladness, Connecticut, who attempts to jump off a bridge. Before he does, he encounters Grazina, an elderly woman with dementia who urges him to live. Afterward, the two develop a close relationship as Hai becomes her caretaker. The novel provides a close-up portrayal of working-class American life, navigating themes such as poverty, labor, and family.

Vuong began the event by reading a harrowing passage about the opioid epidemic's toll on a community and Hai's conversation with Marlin, a sex addict, at a rehab center. What motivated Vuong to select this passage

was his experience growing up in a community that was hit by the onset of the epidemic in the 2000s. "Much of my childhood was kind of inundated by it," he said.

The passage was incredibly vivid, as Vuong seamlessly wove in details of the destruction that drug addiction brought along with nostalgia for a time before the rise of digital technology. The passion and poignance of his reading, immersed the audience in Hai's world, set in central Connecticut, 2009.

When Vuong read a humorous conversation about MSG between Hai and Marlin, he took on two distinct voices, which brought the characters' personalities to life and elicited chuckles in the audience. Despite the passage's dark and heavy beginning, Vuong effectively balanced it with humor at the end.

Vuong did not originally intend to become a writer. He grew up in a working class family—his mom was a nail salon worker and his stepdad a factory worker. However, he gradually came to understand that writing was a powerful tool for "tending to the human condition," including the universal difficulties of death and illness. Although Vuong recognizes writing as a tool that can be weaponized, he prefers using writing "to understand people, particularly suffering, as best as [he] can."

Vuong's motivation to begin *The Emperor of Gladness* with Hai's suicide attempt was the lack of discussion in media about people who ultimately do not die by suicide. "I always wondered, 'What's day two like for that person?'" Vuong said. He has personally been affected by suicide, losing two high school friends and a close uncle.

Vuong admitted that he still doesn't have an exact answer to what keeps someone alive after a crisis. "We forget that we were supposed to die because there's another person who is tying us back to the world because they need something," he said. "And I feel like that's often how I find these answers, even in my own life."

Hai and Grazina's relationship in *The Emperor of Gladness* is based on Vuong's relationship with a friend's grandmother, also

named Grazina. He served as her caretaker for two and a half years when he was a college student in New York City. Vuong described his relationship with Grazina as "pivotal and foundational" because it was a "quintessential American story"—both were immigrants who came to the U.S. for better lives.

Despite their different generations and continents of origin, both were refugees who fled wars—Grazina fled World War II, and Vuong fled the Vietnam War. "These supposed racial, cultural differences just compacted into necessity," Vuong said. "All those things dissolved because we were so contingent on each other."

Other relationships central to the novel include the ones that Hai forms with his crew members at the fast food restaurant HomeMarket. Hai's experiences are based on Vuong's own work at fast food restaurants. Vuong believes that American values place a lot of emphasis on the "nuclear family," but not enough on "circumstantial family"—in particular, the "family of labor."

Although Vuong and his fast food coworkers shared significantly different beliefs, he realized that the intense labor and the "kinetic kinship" caused these ideological differences to vanish. Vuong became vulnerable, sharing the hardships he remembered from his experiences, ranging from his coworkers crying after a difficult shift to the physically taxing work just to earn a living wage.

The mundane, repetitive work in fast food restaurants inspired Vuong to write a novel in which "nothing changes" because he views the majority of American life to be "static, even at its best." A static life is often perceived as a negative thing because of the lack of progress and meaning, yet Vuong argues that most people in history are simply "stuck" and cannot get out, whether from laborious jobs or unhappy marriages. "I want a book that just holds people and allows them to transform internally, without giving them the cop out of structural change," he said. In the novel, Hai undergoes this transformation through the relationships he cultivates

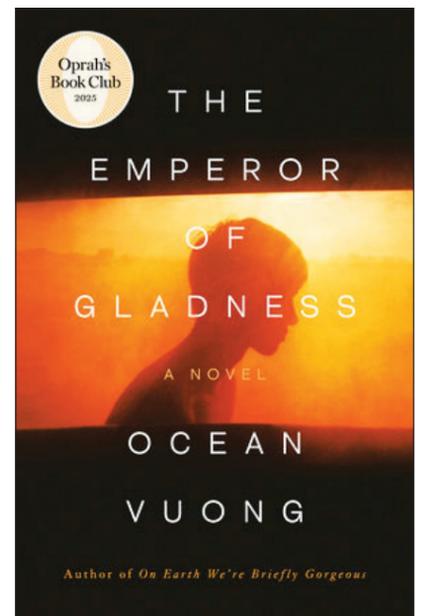


PHOTO COURTESY OF PENGUIN PRESS

The Emperor of Gladness is award-winning author Ocean Vuong's latest novel.

with Grazina and the sense of family he finds at HomeMarket.

Vuong concluded the talk by circling back to his thoughts on being a writer, noting that he never saw his job as a "burden" because he was given the choice to be a writer, whereas his entire family worked labor-intensive jobs to make ends meet. "I've always felt that if I chose to be a writer, I had to choose to look at the world—the ugly and the beautiful I have," he said.

To Vuong, being a writer is a "tremendous privilege" because he can make multiple revisions without any consequences, while his mom and stepdad cannot afford to make mistakes in their work. "So many people in our culture do not get to fix our errors," he said. "I get to sit and dream and try."

Originally published in Vol. 145, Issue 9 on May 29, 2025.

CONCERT REVIEW

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

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

Mozart's *Jupiter* Symphony and Strauss's *Ein Heldenleben*

Boston Symphony Orchestra (BSO)

Conducted by Andris Nelsons

Symphony Hall

September 27, 2025

By Serena An and Cristine Che

The air inside Symphony Hall crackled with anticipation as the Boston Symphony Orchestra (BSO) took to the stage, delivering a mesmerizing performance of Mozart's final masterpiece Symphony No. 41, *Jupiter*, followed by Strauss' autobiographical tone poem *Ein Heldenleben*. The evening carried listeners on a beautiful journey from the radiant, regal brilliance of Mozart's melodies to the sweeping heroism and emotional depth of Strauss's orchestral storytelling.

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

The first movement in Mozart's last symphony (*Allegro vivace*) unfolded with a crisp, courtly elegance, like a lively scene at a royal gathering. The piece is marked with hints of romance and mischievous wit. Bright and precise, the symphony's notes and graceful crescendos filled the hall as the strings moved in perfect synchrony. The flutes fluttered lightly, reminiscent of chirping birds, while a buoyant, cheerful melody returned again and again. The violins and cellos engaged in flirtatious banter throughout the movement.

The second movement, *Andante cantabile*, shifted into a tender and introspective mood, gliding with an air of poised restraint. The muted violins introduced a smooth, flowing theme that never quite

settled. The basses occasionally took up the melody, grounding the texture with quiet warmth, while the woodwinds traded gentle phrases back and forth in subdued conversation. Beneath this calm surface was a sense of timidity and anticipation, as if the music was still gathering the courage to express itself fully.

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

The final movement, *Molto allegro*, burst forth with breathtaking brilliance. Marked by dazzling precision, the musicians turned their pages rapidly, almost in unison, their focus unwavering. Throughout the piece, their instruments built upon one another, each section introducing layers rising towards radiant crescendos. The energy was exuberant and luminous — a triumphant close to the grand symphony.

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

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

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



PHOTO COURTESY OF WINSLOW TOWNSON

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

parallel fifths. The pace quickened as the Hero pushed forth against his adversaries.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Originally published in Vol. 145, Issue 17 on Oct. 16, 2025.

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ARTS IN REVIEW

What makes the Arts department special is its diverse coverage of the vibrant arts scene in the Boston area. In 2025, we listened to famous classical soloists like Seong-Jin Cho play Ravel, watched moving musicals like *Fun Home*, and attended the Boston Ballet's spectacular performances, just to name a few. On campus, we saw the MIT community shine in all artistic disciplines, from the MIT Gala's creative fashion showcase to the MIT Vocal Jazz Ensemble's memorable fall collection rendition.

Besides covering countless events on and off campus, the Arts department did an excellent job reviewing various art genres. We wrote nuanced commentaries of films like *The Brutalist*, reviewed highly anticipated music albums that ranged from amazing (DxS's *Serenade*) to abysmal (Taylor Swift's *The Life of a Showgirl*), and critiqued the fancy food we ate at places like Oleana and MINCE. Overall, I am proud that *The Tech*'s Arts department exemplifies the breadth and depth in the creative arts.

Although the arts serve as a source of entertainment, they play the important role of connecting people from different backgrounds in society. By being immersed in the arts, we can better understand the shared experiences in the human condition, ultimately leading to greater empathy and self-knowledge. Not only that, the arts also help us learn more about the diverse histories, cultures, and societies around the world.

It has truly been a pleasure and privilege to be part of the Arts section and see the department grow significantly during my time as a student at MIT. The arts have deeply enriched my college life, and my time as writer and editor provided me the opportunity to meet many similarly passionate writers. I warmly welcome Chloe Lee '29 as the Volume 146 Arts Editor.

— Vivian Hir '25
Volume 145 Interim Arts Editor

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When algorithms create, who's the artist?

MIT scholars Dr. Ziv Epstein and Professor Justin Khoo comment on AI art

By **Karie Shen**
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

An unexpected song played in one of my recent Ubers. Melancholic indie pop, a woman sang about slowly growing apart from a best friend, those small betrayals and growing silences. I was genuinely moved.

Curious, I pulled out my phone to Shazam the song. That's when I saw the artist: Xania Monet. It turns out the song came from an album that was entirely generated by artificial intelligence (AI).

The quality had surprised me, especially the specificity of the lyrics about the loss of friendship, a subject pop music tends to skip over in favor of romantic heartbreak. But now, when I replay the song in my mind, the rhymes begin to nag at me. Every couplet is linked together with the precision of an algorithm following patterns rather than a human reaching for the perfectly imperfect word. How funny is it that I only noticed in hindsight?

The moment captured something essential about where society stands with regard to AI-generated art. The questions it raises are no longer theoretical exercises for philosophy seminars. Instead, they're urgent inquiries as AI-generated content floods our feeds, our galleries, our playlists, and our understanding of what creativity means.

The human element

For Dr. Ziv Epstein, a postdoctoral associate at MIT's Schwarzman College of Computing, the answer begins with a simple premise: "An artist is a human who creates art." It's a stark line in the sand, one that immediately excludes machines from the creative circle.

"Art is a dynamic dialogue between humans, expressing intent, emotion," Epstein explained. "It is participation in a scene, responding to the zeitgeist of the moment and its corresponding anxieties and imaginaries." In his view, art isn't just about producing beautiful objects. It's about making meaning within a cultural context, a conversation that requires human stakes, human fears, and human dreams.

MIT Philosophy Professor Justin Khoo approaches the definition in a similar way. He sees artists as "people who create works which are for focusing the attention of others in particular ways." When we engage with art properly, we enter what he calls "a mode of appreciation." This framework leaves open intriguing possibilities while maintaining focus on human intentionality.

The creativity conundrum

Can an algorithm be creative?

Khoo points to philosopher Lindsay Brainard's criteria: creativity requires making something new, through a process with-

out a predetermined outcome, involving "the exercise of individual agency" and "deliberate critical reflection." Whether AI systems meet these standards remains, in his words, "an open question."

Epstein is less ambiguous. "Creativity involves the creation of something new, but is as much about the process as the product," he stated. It's about negotiating with a medium, wrestling with constraints, and making countless micro-decisions. Modern AI systems, he suggested, actually work against this. They may "homogenize creative production," threatening both the diversity of creative output and the resilience of creative labor markets.

At their core, Epstein wrote, these systems are high-dimensional probability distributions. When you prompt an AI, you're sampling from patterns already embedded in training data. These patterns reflect particular cultural assumptions, biases, and aesthetic preferences. Ask an AI to "be creative," and you're invoking someone else's codified notion of what creativity looks like.

The authorship puzzle

Perhaps the thorniest question is one of attribution. When AI generates an image from your prompt, who created it?

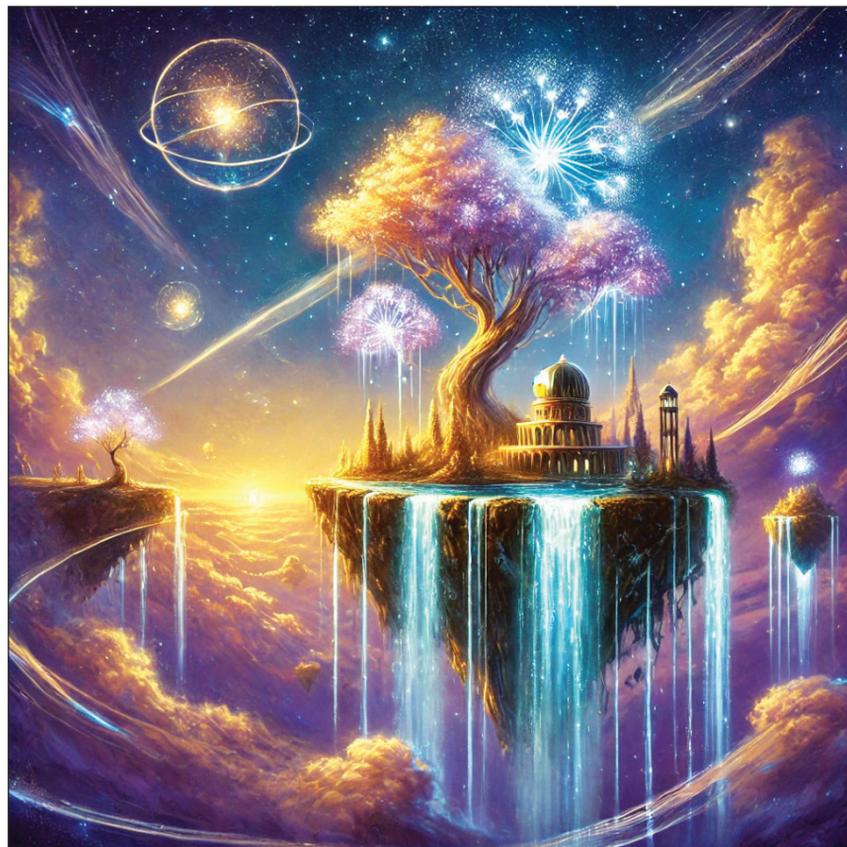
Khoo offers two competing frameworks. In one, the AI is "a very malleable all-purpose paintbrush," like any other an artist wields. In the other, the AI is the actual artist, and the prompter is merely a patron, someone who commissions work but doesn't create it. "I'm not sure which is the better way to conceptualize things," Khoo admitted, and his uncertainty feels appropriate given how rapidly this technology is evolving.

Epstein sees another possibility that is "the dearth of the author," a phrase from Santa Clara University scholar Max Kreminski. According to him, a prompter's intent is "underspecified" with countless creative decisions delegated to an "AI-slop machine." The result is a kind of ghosted authorship, where training data biases and trends replicate themselves without clear creative responsibility.

He warns against anthropomorphizing these systems, as they "undercut credit to human artists and increase credit to the technologists who built it." It's a power dynamic worth interrogating.

Liquid art in a solid world

Epstein introduces a compelling metaphor from artist and researcher Kate Compton who believes that we're entering an era of "liquid art." Just as mechanical reproduction challenged the uniqueness of paintings, algorithmic reproduction makes any single AI-generated image "but a drop in the ocean." Compton coined the term "Bach



KARIE SHEN—THE TECH

When DALL-E is prompted with "be creative," whose notion of creativity does it represent?

Faucet" to describe situations in which generative systems produce endless supplies of content at or above the quality of culturally valued originals, rendering rarity and traditional value obsolete.

In this framework, "the model is the message," as stated by Isabelle Levent and Lila Shroff. Any individual AI creation is less meaningful than the underlying patterns and processes that generated it. Treating a liquid artifact as a solid piece of art, Epstein suggests, misses the point entirely.

Yet he doesn't advocate abandoning these tools. Instead, he proposes reconceptualizing them, not as answer machines, but as "hermeneutic technologies" and "serendipity machines." Used thoughtfully, AI can inject unexpected randomness, creating "happy accidents" that spark lateral thinking. The key is cultivating your own voice first, then using AI's glitches and surprises as raw material for reflection.

"AI is a cliché machine," he said. "This is very dangerous but can also be generative when treated as prompts for critical reflection."

The uncertain future

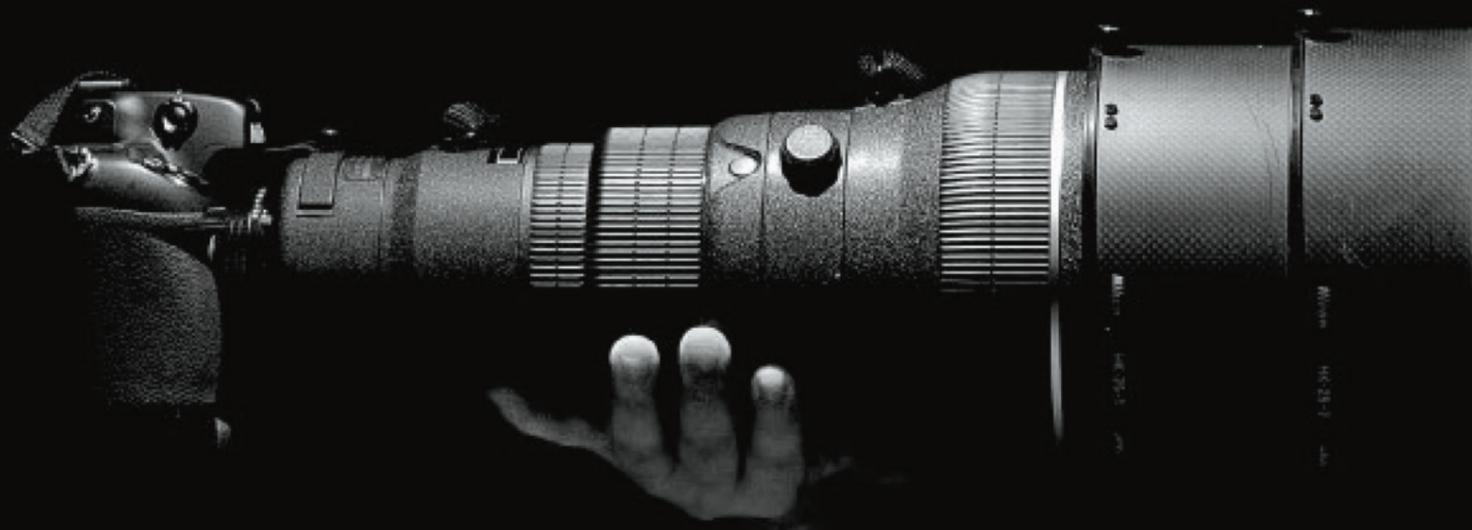
Khoo senses a "prevailing uneasiness" around AI-generated art, stemming partly from uncertainty about what a world "awash in AI-generated art might look like." But he also sees historical precedent. Photography, phonographs, and remixes each sparked similar anxieties before people found creative uses and developed new evaluative standards.

Both scholars agree that art students should engage with these tools. Khoo encourages his philosophy graduate students to explore AI in their workflows, noting that the technology will only become more embedded in daily life. Epstein frames it more urgently: "Now, more than ever, is your time to find your personal voice and style."

Perhaps the real challenge that AI poses is not whether machines can create art, but whether humans will continue to cultivate the distinctive voices, critical perspectives, and intentional decision-making that make art meaningful in the first place.

Originally published in Vol. 145, Issue 20 on Nov. 25, 2025.

It's Dangerous to Go Alone!



Take This.

tt-join@mit.edu

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 Sriakolapu '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 an-

choring 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.

Originally published in Vol. 145, Issue 21 on Dec. 11, 2025.

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, lovable 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 Orelana'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.

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MITiny Love Stories Vol. 1

Reader-submitted love stories from across campus

By the MIT Community

This Valentine's Day, we asked MIT community members to tell us, in 100 words, about the people — and things — they love. Here are five of their stories, with more to come next issue!

Perfectly Imperfect

"Why do you like passion fruit so much?" my housemate asks me. "It's so sour and it's just seeds." I don't know how to respond. Can I just say I like it just because? It's not just with fruit, but also with people — liking them for who they are, despite their imperfections. Imperfectly perfect. I love the sweet and sour juices that clash together, acting like fireworks that go off in my mouth. I savor the tiny meat on the seeds like popping boba. Never had I realized until now how something so simple can bring so much joy.

— Vivian Hir

Finding Love in an Empty Classroom

I fell in love with the green-haired girl in 6.191. There wasn't recitation that day, but we both showed up. We exchanged numbers to work together on psets. After the next class, I helped her find the Cheney Room for the first time and texted her after to ask her on a date. She responded «OMG YOU'RE GAY?» and we became girlfriends on Pi Day, walking home together after campus shut down early for bad weather. That was almost two years ago, hundreds of can-I-touch-your-nose-s ago, and thousands of Pikmin Bloom flowers ago.

— sarah

Questionable Advice

As the old adage goes, if you want people to like you, talk about them, not yourself. I've internalized this message so thoroughly that now, whenever I encounter a lull in conversation, I'm compelled to ask as many questions as I can. Knowing this, my friends

humor me by thinking hard about their answers, even if the initial query is a little nonsensical. ("If you were a goose, which side of Killian would you forage on?") Still, they always disregard the original point (to learn about them, goddamnit!) when they pause, poke my arm, and go, "what about you?"

— Sabine Chu

Once Interwoven, Now Unraveled

My UROP mentor asked for "any Course 2 friends that might also be interested." I thought of you, with whom I'd spent awkward half-minute silences in the Vassar elevator; long hours asking for 6.100A help; trips to Maseeh late night not ever for the food. You, my gateway drug to another: Cafe 472 froyo, reserved for the coldest nights. Our time wove into furtive glances stolen across the lab bench, psets finished in heinously fishbowl-like study rooms, nights spent with you holding me when I couldn't bear myself.

MIT is different without you now.

— MIT without you.
MIT is different now.
— J

It Was Virtually Fate

We met in the most MIT way possible: through a mailing list. It was fall of freshman year, all of us stuck at home because of COVID quarantine. It was in one of those mind-numbing Zoom classes that I saw him, the cute guy in the lower-left corner. I've never been the boldest guy, but something about his name seemed familiar. I searched my email, and there it was: both of us subscribed to the same queer first-year mailing list. With that starting signal, I sent him a message, and Zoom calls became lasting love.

— Emilio

Originally published in Vol. 145, Issue 2 on Feb. 20, 2025.

AUNTIE MATTER

On Friend "Groups"

Advice for when everyone else seems to have tons of friends

By Auntie Matter

some context: in high school i was extremely antisocial, but i've honestly realized a lot of it was self-imposed in some way or another. i am trying to change that in college, and i genuinely love! i'm a freshman, and this year i've made more friends here than during all of high school. i feel more confident and outgoing, which i think has also done numbers for my mental health — i love that i am able to talk to people now.

however, i still feel like i'm behind socially compared to my peers because i don't have a solid «friend group» that i hang out with. i am on good terms with people and i have «friends» in the sense that we do homework together and sometimes hang out individually. in a lot of ways, i'm jealous of some of my friends that already have established friend groups, and i also feel like i don't know how to try to join a friend group, much less form one. after talking to some of my friends, i think this situation is actually more prevalent than i thought.

unfortunately, my dorm's floor is very antisocial (besides a few people that i don't talk to regularly) and i don't feel connected with most of them. i usually cook for myself too, so i feel like i'm missing out on eating with other people in the dining halls, but i like the food i cook and wouldn't want to pay to be on the meal plan.

i think a lot of this is just fomo and it's kinda all just in my head (if that makes sense), but i still think forming a solid friend group would also be great for classes/homework/generally being able to socialize more. do you have advice on ways of joining a friends' friend group (i think

like asking directly is wayyy too awkward) or socializing in general? i've realized (a little late) that i'm interested in joining an fsilg, and i plan on joining a club or two at the start of my sophomore fall, but what are some things i can start doing right now? or is this really all just fomo — and i don't actually need a «friend group,» even though i really want one?

— Tofu Luvr

Dear Tofu Luvr,

Thanks for reaching out. First of all, I implore you to not compare yourself to your peers and worry about being "behind" them. I'm not too sure how you are coming to this conclusion, but there's a good chance that the information here is incomplete. Social media — yes, even BeReal — can be pretty misleading. Even if you physically see your peers out and about with different people all the time, this isn't necessarily something that's healthy for you to strive for. I've met many people who seem to have a lot of friends, but in reality, just have a bunch of acquaintances. I'm not saying that's what your peers are doing, but it's something to keep in mind.

If you're happy with your current number of friends, that's perfectly valid, and I would recommend you worry more about how you feel instead of how you appear to others. After all, having fewer, but quality, friends is not inherently bad. On the flip side, if you find yourself feeling lonely, that's also valid! We are all different.

Anyway, the best way to join a friend group? It's to get organically absorbed into it. It sounds like you already kind of

know some people in the group you want to join. Spend one-on-one time with the people you already know well! Ask them to grab lunch, pull up to parties or clubs with them, whatever your vibes are. Ideally, over time, you'll get introduced to the other people in this group. Then you can hang out with them! I understand that asking semi-friends to hang out might be a challenge (it certainly is for me). And I won't lie and say that the worst they can say is "no," because, well, people can certainly say MUCH worse! But if they do, perhaps that's a sign that this friend group is not for you. Don't try to force yourself to mix with a friend group that doesn't seem receptive to you! At the same time, don't let it stop you from being friends with individuals in that group. Also, the proposed outing doesn't need to be fancy: a boba run or study session are perfectly fine suggestions.

My recommendation about the floor situation is simple, independent of the financials or logistics of switching: do it. Switch to a new community. It's clear that you want something out of your community that you aren't getting. You seem to want to cook with people, which is wonderful! Put yourself in a community where you can do that. Switching can be scary, but since you've identified your living community as a place where you won't be able to connect with people in the way that you want to, I think the choice is clear. As someone who has switched living communities, it was a scary, but great decision. I only wish I did it sooner. My second suggestion, regardless of your decision to move: try to reach out to

anyone in your current community whom you could see yourself befriending. Some people may seem shy or anxious upon first impression — maybe you'll end up making a close friend after all!

My final pieces of advice: the idealized friend groups that you see in person or on Instagram are not reality. People drift apart. Different sub-groups form. Sometimes, people will have beef with each other, even if they don't show it. I wouldn't focus on forming friend "groups" — just make individual friends and see what happens! Also, you could totally rush an FSILG as a sophomore, if the people there are your vibe. Be spontaneous — let yourself get dragged to a club meeting and meet cool people. Introduce yourself!

On the note about asking to join a friend group "directly": you don't need to! This isn't an exclusive club (hopefully?). You could just ask your friend to get dinner with you and their friends, because their friends are cool people and you want to meet them. Pull up to events that you know they're all at (ex: birthday parties, etc.), and when you're at those events, don't just talk to people you already know well. Talk to those you don't know well! It seems like you might thrive socially in an environment where you both know a decent chunk of people already but don't know everyone. If you take advantage of those kinds of situations, I think you'll do great.

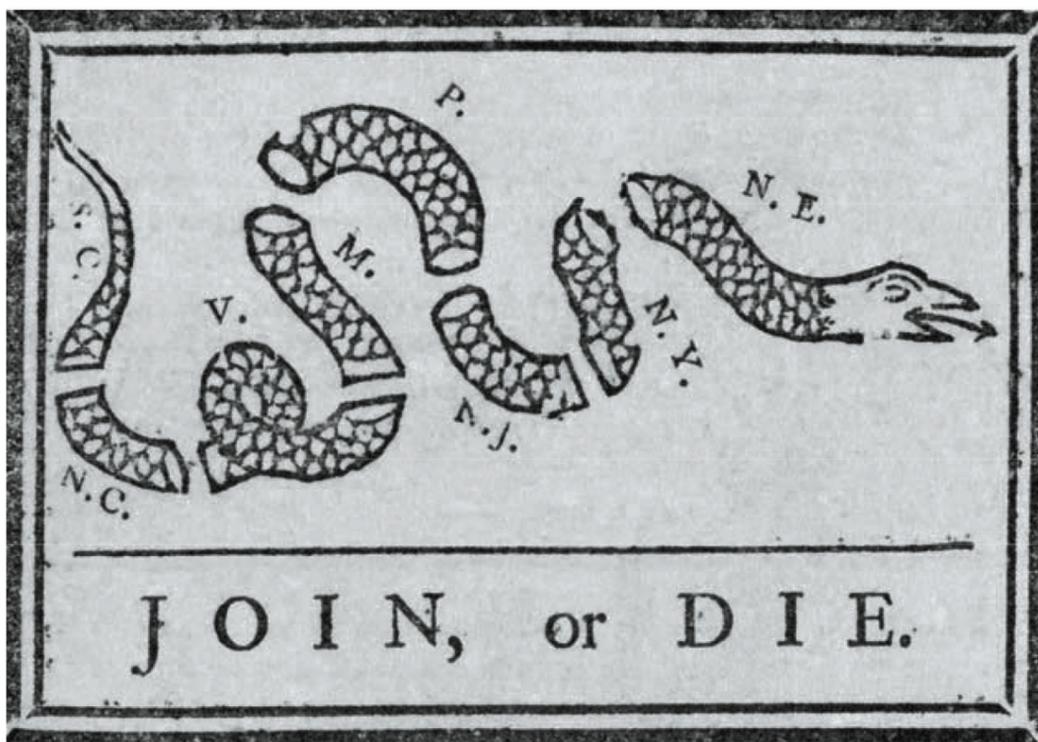
Best,
Auntie Matter

Originally published in Vol. 145, Issue 4 on Mar. 20, 2025.

Want to draw graphics that engage, provoke, and speak to the MIT community?

Become an editorial cartoonist for *The Tech*.

tt-join@mit.edu



Do you have a question for President Kornbluth?

Join *The Tech's* news department!

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Current students respond to questions from the Class of 2029

Katherine McEwan '27: "IHTFP. The ambiguity is intentional"

FEATURES
CAMPUS LIFE
ARTS SPORTS
SCIENCE WEATHER
ENTERTAINMENT
OPINION NEWS

By Sabine Chu

ASSOCIATE NEWS EDITOR

On April 7, *The Tech* asked students admitted to the MIT Class of 2029 to share any questions they had for the Institute's current students. After receiving over 30 questions, the student body was invited over email to answer any question they saw fit. A few inquiries — such as "Will I have to solve a math problem to get into an MIT frat?" or "Are there any ghosts at MIT?" — remained unanswered, but many received thoughtful responses.

Some prospective students were worried about day-to-day life. When asked how to "survive the Boston cold," both Paige Yeung '25 and Daina Neithardt '25 emphasized the importance of buying the right clothes, including a winter coat, waterproof jacket, rain boots, scarves, a hat, and gloves. To stay healthy during the winter, Yeung stated that students could consider taking vitamin D supplements and prioritize going outside on a regular basis. "You should always check the weather here before going out," she added.

On the subject of navigating the MBTA, Katherine McEwan '27 wrote, "The trains aren't the most frequent or fastest, but they cover most of the city." McEwan, who finds the T to be a "pretty intuitive system," noted that BlueBikes are another good option, and that students can take advantage of tap payments in MBTA stations. Yeung added that physical MIT IDs can also function as Charlie Cards, and that students should be aware of relevant routes like the Red Line, the Commuter Rail, and the public transit system to and from Logan Airport.

In response to a query about "staple stores nearby for food, health, clothes, and stationary," Rita Zambrano '26 described the grocery situation as "pretty dismal." Although Trader Joe's, Whole Foods, Target, H Mart, and pharmacies such as CVS and Walgreens are within walking distance from campus, Zambrano finds these options to be quite expensive. She shared that students can travel to farther but cheaper locations like Star Market or Stop & Shop or order from these stores online.

When more specific questions arose, responses often came down to "it depends." In response to the question of how often students venture into Cambridge and Boston, Yeung wrote that the answer "varies a lot from person to person." However, she

emphasized the area's walkability and the wide range of public events that students can attend.

In the context of off-campus events, Vivian Hir '25 highlighted certain arts opportunities in response to a question about MIT-exclusive perks. "Students can subscribe to the MIT Arts Scholars mailing list to get free or discounted tickets for plays, concerts, ballets, and so on," Hir wrote. She also mentioned the \$10 Boston Symphony Orchestra (BSO) college card and free admission to the Museum of Fine Arts and the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum.

Current students discussed MIT's social life through the Institute's wide range of communities, highlighting their experiences in clubs such as Shakespeare Ensemble, the Musical Theater Guild (MTG), Next Act, Asymptotes A Cappella, Science Club for Girls, DynaMIT, Arcturus, Next Sing, and Sport Taekwondo. To those worried about not joining Greek life, Benson Lin '27 said, "You can definitely define your own social circle and friend groups without Greek life."

Others emphasized the importance of their living group in their MIT experience. Some cited specific reasons for choosing a dorm, such as the option to cook for themselves, or the high prevalence of singles. Room quality and social life vary between and within dorms, though Yeung wrote that rodents are "everywhere." In response to one student who asked about "sneaking in cooking appliances," McEwan said that policies differ between cook-for-yourself and dining hall dorms.

As for other places to find food on campus, Hir brought up options in the Student Center, Hayden Courtyard, and Stata Café. In terms of best study spots on campus, she recommended the Hayden stacks, Barker Library, and the Terrascope lounge. Both Hir and Zambrano wrote positively about their experiences with MISTI in Taiwan/Italy/Germany and Spain, respectively.

To a prospective student worried about being "excluded socially" for "standing by" their political views, Lilianna Arias '25 wrote, "MIT students have a large and diverse range of political views, so chances are you'll find people who share similar views and also encounter some new perspectives along the way."

Possibly in reference to MIT's quirky, prank-centric reputation, another student asked, "Is the counterculture of MIT dying?" McEwan answered, "While the administration has been working particularly hard

lately to crack down on counterculture classics like hacking, the 'east side' dorms (Random and East Campus) are very dedicated to preserving themselves as a safe space for people outside of the norm."

On the subject of living outside the norm, the answer to the question "are sandals shoes at MIT" appeared to be a resounding "yes." Arias quipped, "If you ain't crocin', you ain't rockin'." Vinu-Srivatsan added, "Your professor cannot see your feet from the front of 26-100. Wear whatever you want, but avoid frostbite."

To the student asking "how unicyclable" MIT's campus is, Michelle Mo '26 shared, "Riding around on wheels all the time is definitely functional, but some surfaces are unideal." Lin highlighted MIT's Juggling and Spinning Arts Clubs in his answers to the questions "How high are the dorm ceilings (for juggling purposes)?" and "Does MIT have a circus?"

A few prospective students asked for favorite classes. Responses included 6.2050 (Digital Systems Laboratory), 8.044 (Statistical Mechanics), 8.20 (Introduction to Special Relativity), 21L.024 (Literature and Existentialism), 21L.601 (Introduction to Old English), 21M.426 (MIT Wind Ensemble), 21W.762 (Poetry Workshop), 21W.764J (Computational and Experimental Writing Workshop), CMS.306 (Making Comics and Sequential Art), STS.041 (Exercise is Medicine), and the Concourse program. Caroline Chea '25 recommended Harvard's ENGLISH 184cf (City Fictions).

Several answers may reassure prospective students worried about changing their path or exploring different options. Zambrano, who switched from Course 18 to Course 1 during her junior year, described enjoying applied math and optimization classes, but then discovered that Course 1 provided an opportunity to explore optimization and to "do something with my career that would directly help others." Neithardt wrote, "I've found a lot of time to take classes in physics and classics and genetics that don't count toward my major or HASS concentration, without ever taking more than 57 units, and normally less." (The Office of the First Year advises students to take 48-54 units per semester.)

Other prospective students were interested in gaining research or professional experience on campus. Sarah Schmitt '28 works as both a research assistant and a Student Art Guide at the List Visual Arts Center. She was able to obtain her research

position with "absolutely no wet lab experience at all." McEwan wrote that "In my experience, the majority of students have a job on campus to make extra money, usually working between 5 and 15 hours per week." They shared that students can serve as desk workers, library assistants, tour guides, or ushers: "If you want a job, it's not too hard to find one."

When asked how to best prepare for MIT over the summer before freshman year, Arias recommended applying to Interphase EDGE, which she felt "really helped to bridge the gap between what my high school offered and the difficulty of classes at MIT." Hir also stated that the MIT OpenCourseWare (OCW) websites are a good resource for those studying for Advanced Standing Exams (ASEs). On the other hand, Vinu-Srivatsan wrote, "Enjoy your free summer! You will constantly be preparing and studying for the next four years."

Schmitt advised students to continue taking care of their well-being during their MIT careers, warning, "You will need more sleep than you think." She mentioned that her strategies for staying well-rested include not doing work on Saturdays and varying her study locations on Sundays. Lin recommended that students "have plans in place," such as fixing "a time to gym with friends, or to go out for a night time walk, or game in the lounge." Chea told a student who asked about imposter syndrome that "I've found that it helps to talk to people, particularly friends and professional counselors," such as the Student Support Services (S3) deans.

One prospective student asked, "Which year are you? Do you HTPF or do you think you HTPF?" In response, McEwan wrote, "As a sophomore, IHTFP. The ambiguity is intentional." McEwan pointed out how common imposter syndrome is at the Institute: "It's all part of the experience — if someone says they've never felt like they don't belong here, they're lying to you. But for most people, the good times outweigh the bad, and if they don't, there's a lot of great resources to help you."

Similarly, Zambrano shared that in the past three years, she's ranged from sitting "curled up on the floor of my bedroom" to finding "paradise in my friends." She wrote that at MIT, she has found a love for learning and research, as well as a true community. Zambrano concluded, "IHTFP is a mantra here for a reason. Embrace it."

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Why didn't anyone tell me the doors would still close?

Reflecting on rejection after acceptance

By Jojo Placides

CAMPUS LIFE STAFF WRITER

I opened the acceptance letter in my MIT portal at 6:40 p.m. on Dec. 17 last year, and I was overcome with rapture — with the delight of knowing that around a year from now, my life would look so different. I knew that I'd be hanging out with some cool people (currently am!), doing weird shit together on a daily basis, possibly even suffering and in anguish while we do our pssets and study for tests. But I also hoped that I'd finally be free to pursue any opportunity I wanted at the so-called #1 university in the world. I never had the chance to do much at my tiny rural high school in Maine. Now, I could finally get the leadership and business experience I'd always wanted by joining a few clubs! I could learn how to act or play the electric guitar and get the chance to perform in front of a large audience! Or perhaps I'd be managing competitions, learning how to engage in mock trials. Perhaps this... perhaps that... I was so excited — daydreaming, even — that I could finally live a life more unbound than the one I had lived in high school.

But why didn't anyone tell me, even after I'd managed to do the impossible and

enter the big doors of MIT, that the doors inside would still slam in my face?

A couple weeks ago I auditioned for MIT Live and Mock Trial, interviewed for Student Events Board and a couple of other clubs, and submitted a lot of applications for organizations that interested me. I ended up getting rejected by most of them — no shade to the clubs that I mentioned. Maybe my rendition of "My Kind of Woman" by Mac Demarco on an acoustic guitar was... listenable at best. Still, was it really my fault that I thought college would be a lot more liberating?

Surely we're not just a school full of insanely cracked Nobel Prize-winning students, right? Not all of us are the second coming of Kurt Cobain, Steve Jobs, or Warren Buffett. Some of us placed internationally in high school academic olympiads, but some of us are still dreaming about passing an 18.02 midterm. We're not expected to know everything off the bat; in fact, from the vibes of MIT's application, we're just expected to be students who have initiative and have no qualms taking an opportunity and running with it as fast as they can. Yet sometimes, it's almost as if you NEED to have done an insane amount of things to get opportunities. In other words, you need experience to get experience. Maybe life is that way — like

a stairway, you have to climb to build your experience from one opportunity to the next.

With the amount of doors closing on me — and no doubt, everyone else's — it's a little hard not to develop imposter syndrome. Seeing your friends do cool shit and UROP and attend lavish frat parties and participate in selective business clubs and perform in front of audiences while you just... sit there, doing your pssets and daydreaming of a better life like you have been since December of last year. I'm pensive about the fact that I've finally passed the "hardest" door to get through — the big door to MIT — only to still fail to enter the rooms inside.

I'm not writing this to complain. Not at all. I'm writing this to tell you this, my dear readers: if you're going through the same thing — if you're doubting yourself because you've been rejected by countless clubs and organizations — you're definitely, definitely not alone. In fact, I'm a little surprised this isn't talked about more.

And I'm glad to say that, now, I am in a lot of clubs and organizations that have thankfully accepted me. In fact, I'm quite glad that *The Tech* doesn't have the cut-throat process of joining Harvard's *Crimson*! Otherwise, you wouldn't be reading this.

Two things to end this on a more positive note. One, please take care of yourself. Don't be cruel to the person that got you here in the first place — you. That you that, no doubt, fought tooth and nail to crack open the big doors to MIT, whether you expected it or not. Be grateful to yourself that you made it here, and don't forget your worth when things don't go your way. And two: perhaps the greatest thing about college is that even if some doors close on you, most will open for anyone, no prior knowledge and experience needed. For now, a Thursday afternoon could look like practicing the guitar, fire spinning, playing poker, or sailing and watching the sun fall below the horizon in pure satisfaction as another busy day ends. For now, joining the business organizations, the frats, the sororities, the acapella groups, and the countless other clubs can wait. They're not doors closed forever. And, within the next four years, who knows? Anything can happen.

There's beauty in being at such a large, diverse, and busy place. There's always stuff to do, anywhere, anytime. In a place as vast as this, there are *always* doors open for you.

You just have to look for them.

Originally published in Vol. 145, Issue 16 on Oct. 2, 2025.

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 understand-

ing 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 resonates 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.

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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.

“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

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.

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 par-

ents 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.

Originally published in Vol. 145, Issue 21 on Dec. 11, 2025.

CAMPUS LIFE IN REVIEW

Once again, another year of Campus Life has come to a close. This year, we welcomed a few amazing new staff writers who each brought a range of perspectives to the table. From reflections on freshman life to thoughtful analyses of MIT culture, our Campus Life writers have immortalized the remarkably diverse experiences of MIT students in the pages of *The Tech*.

One of the most exciting moments in this issue was when we were able to learn and share the story of Kip Clark, also known as the “Free Listening Guy.” The revival and continuation of the Auntie Matter advice column has also offered a unique opportunity not only to share information with the MIT community but also create a space for open dialogue.

With Shelly Yang ’29 as our new editor, I’m excited to see what MIT will bring to Campus Life, and vice versa, in Volume 146. Stay tuned for great things to come!

— Susan Hong ’27
Volume 145 Campus Life Editor

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To say the very least, 2025 has been a tumultuous year. As a result, *The Tech's* reporting has often focused on both MIT's and everyday citizens' responses to unprecedented political upheaval.

The Trump administration has targeted universities across the U.S. on nakedly ideological bases through a new endowment tax and crackdowns on student protests. The government has also pursued massive funding cuts, including to research agencies like the National Institute of Health or National Science Foundation, that have hampered scientific inquiry.

Our reporting on the MIT administration's answers to these choices has revealed the challenges of thoughtfully engaging with an executive branch intent on immobilizing basic research and political dissent. Still, in the words of former congressman John Lewis, we saw the Institute make "good trouble" through a courageous response to President Trump's proposed college compact.

However, and more importantly, this new federal landscape has impacted countless lives far beyond MIT's corridors. Young children are now separated from their

parents because of Immigration and Customs Enforcement detentions. Medicaid cuts have caused millions to lose health insurance. Hundreds of thousands of federal employees have been laid off. In other words, every resident of the United States — and many outside — has been affected.

We have striven throughout Volume 145 to highlight these individuals. When covering huge protests in Boston, we spoke to many demonstrators whose bravery, hope, and ideological diversity exemplified the ideals of civic engagement — ideals recently threatened by the violence of federal agents in Minneapolis and Los Angeles.

While we are sure that 2026 will present its own challenges, we know that *The Tech's* News staff will continue to pursue excellence in all aspects of reporting. We look forward to seeing the ways that Samuel Yuan '29 and Jada Ogueh '29, our Volume 146 News Editors, will shape the department.

—Vivian Hir '25,
Volume 145 News Editor
& Sabine Chu '26,
Volume 145 Associate News Editor



NEWS IN REVIEW

9 MIT joins group of research universities in filing an amicus brief against federal funding. MIT joined 23 other U.S. research universities in an amicus brief accompanying a lawsuit that Harvard filed to block the Trump administration's attempt to terminate all federal grant funding.

24 The Institute launches Understanding MIT advertising campaign in Washington metro stations. In late June, individuals reported seeing dozens of Understanding MIT ads in the Capitol South metro station in Washington.

25 Instructor and former graduate student sue MIT for antisemitism. Will Sussman and Lior Alon filed a lawsuit against MIT and Professor of Linguistics Michel DeGraff, accusing them of antisemitism.

3 Office of the Vice President of Finance (VPF) removes access to the Brown Book. The Office of the VPF deleted the Report of Sponsored Research Activity, or the Brown Book, from their website, which listed the fiscal contributions of various sponsors from military organizations to private businesses.

The Big Beautiful Bill raises MIT's endowment tax rate from 1.4% to 8%. The Big Beautiful Bill's proposed 8% tax, applied to universities with endowments of more than \$2 million per student, will cost MIT around 10% of its annual central budget.

26 The Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard lays off 75 employees. Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard Director Todd Golub announced that the Institute laid off 75 employees because of anticipated federal research funding cuts.

7 The Undergraduate Advising Center announces the formation of OACES. The Office of Academic Community, Empowerment, and Success (OACES) combines the Office of Minority Education and the Advising & Student Belonging pillar.

11 AMD CEO Lisa Su to give the Institute's 2026 Commencement address. 2026 MIT Commencement speaker Lisa Su '90 SM '91 PhD '94 is a leading executive in the semiconductor industry.

19 MIT to close multiple libraries in budget rebalancing. MIT will close Baker and Dewey libraries in June 2026, the second time in the past two decades that cost-cutting measures have been implemented.

17 Former U.S. Secretary of Energy Steven Chu delivers Sept. 17 lecture on reducing carbon emissions. Nobel laureate Steven Chu argued that the fight against climate change requires major changes to industry and the economy.

20 Boston community braves frigid weather to protest Trump administration in walkout. Over 100 people gathered in front of Boston's Ruggles Station to participate in the nationwide "Free America" walkout despite frigid temperatures.

Institute Professor Paula Hammond appointed next School of Engineering dean. Professor of Chemical Engineering Paula Hammond '84 PhD '93 will be the first woman dean of MIT's School of Engineering.

MIT Provost Anantha outlines Institute strategy and new financial burdens. Provost Chandrakasan and a "Financial Scenarios Workshop" address pressures that threaten a tenth of the Institute's a

10 Renee Good's death sparks Boston protests against ICE and Trump. Hundreds of people assembled in Boston Common at noon near the State House to protest against Immigration and Custom Enforcement (ICE) operations.

14 Class of 2029's demographic profile echoes previous year's decline in racial diversity. Minority enrollment is similar to the Class of 2028, but percent of Pell Grant-eligible students increase from 24% in 2024 to 27% in 2025.

15 Four from MIT awarded 2026 Rhodes Scholarships. Rhodes Scholars Vivian Chinoda '25, Alice Hall '26, Sofia Lara '26, and Sophia Wang '24 will pursue postgraduate studies at Oxford University in fall 2026.

17 U.S. Senator Alex Padilla '94 talks changing careers and federal policy with *The Tech*. The senior Senator shared thoughts on President Trump's higher education and immigration policy, his MIT education, and public service.

16 MIT admits 655 early action applicants to the Class of 2030. The admitted students were selected from a pool of 11,883 students, yielding an acceptance rate of 5.5%.

6 MIT's yield rate increases from 73% in 2015 to all-time high of 86.6% in 2025. Since 2020, the Institute's yield rate has surpassed those of Harvard and Stanford.

Professor Nuno Loureiro shot and killed in Brookline home. Prof. Loureiro, a professor of Physics and Nuclear Science and Engineering and the director of Plasma Science and Fusion Center, was fatally shot by the same individual that committed the Brown University mass shooting.

25 Over a thousand MIT affiliates respond to *The Tech's* LLM usage survey. Out of 592 undergraduates, about two-thirds are "very concerned" about over relying on LLMs.

28 Hundreds of MIT students attend first-ever UROP Mixer in the Stratton Student Center. Around 160 UROP mentors across different fields attended the event to recruit undergraduate UROP students for IAP, Spring, and Summer 2026.

23 Karen Knutson appointed as Vice President for Government Affairs (VPGA). As the inaugural VPGA, former Chevron lobbyist Karen Knutson will be responsible for MIT's government relations on the state and federal level.

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TUNNELING THROUGH NEWS IN 2025

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28 **Visa revocations for Chinese citizens could affect nearly one in four international students**
Secretary of State Marco Rubio announced that the State Department would "aggressively" revoke visas of some Chinese international students.

9 **Nonprofit grocery store Daily Table closes after a decade of operation**
Daily Table, now closed due to financial challenges, has served over 3 million customers, making healthy food more affordable for the community.

3 **President Kornbluth talks Trump administration, generative AI, and future of the Institute**
The Tech spoke with President Kornbluth about the Institute's response to the Trump administration's higher education and research policies, as well as the Institute's new generative AI initiatives.

20 **New MIT website appears to respond to scrutiny from the Trump administration**
A new website, Understanding MIT, describes the Institute as "merit-based and affordable" and lists MIT's contributions to medicine, national security, and agriculture, among others.

7 **VP for Equity and Inclusion Karl W. Reid '84, SM '85 steps down**
Dr. Reid stepped down as VP for Equity and Inclusion amidst the Trump administration's executive orders banning DEI programs, which have led to sweeping changes in universities across the U.S.

29 **Hank Green delivers 2025 Commencement speech**
At the OneMIT Commencement Ceremony, science communicator Hank Green delivered the commencement speech to the graduating class of 2025: silly but pensive, scientific yet humanistic.

23 **Budget cuts caused MIT Health to close four Community Wellness programs**
MIT Spouses & Partners Connect, Language Conversation Exchange, getfit, and Step Your Way all closed; MIT News spokesperson Abazorius explains their selection would not impact MIT Health's "core clinical mission."

7 **Hundreds of scientists and advocates attend Stand Up for Science Rally in Boston Common**
Hundreds of scientists, students, and advocates gathered at Boston Common for the Stand Up For Science rally, one of over 30 nationwide rallies to promote sustained federal research

NIH funding cuts hamper Institute's health research
The National Institute of Health (NIH) announced that indirect cost rates for grants would be capped at 15%, which would result in annual cuts of \$30 to \$35 million at MIT.

Vemuri's OneMIT Commencement speech draws mixed reactions within and beyond the Institute
At the OneMIT Commencement Ceremony on May 29, 2025, Class President Megha Vemuri denounced Israel's actions in Gaza during her speech to the newly minted graduates of the Institute.

25 **Nine international students' SEVIS statuses are restored without notice**
Immigration and Customs Enforcement restored thousands of international students' statuses in the SEVIS after their unexpected termination earlier this month.

12 **McCormick Renewal Project delayed until summer 2026**
Due to financial considerations, the McCormick renovation project is delayed to at least summer 2026.

14 **MIT joins lawsuit against funding cuts for Department of Energy**
MIT President Kornbluth announced that the Institute had joined several peer schools in a lawsuit to stop indirect cost cuts to grants provided via the U.S. Department of Energy.

19 **Cynthia Barnhart PhD '88 to step down from Provost**
Cynthia Barnhart SM '86 PhD '88, MIT's provost since 2022, will step down on June 30, and will return to the Institute after a sabbatical.

Uncertainty the sentiment at February Faculty Meeting amidst turmoil in D.C.
In the February faculty meeting, the Institute discussed MIT's strategy to navigate the threat of the Trump administration's recent funding cuts to MIT's research and education missions.

8 **Physics lecturer Mohamed Abdelhafez to leave MIT at end of the 2024-2025 school year**
Physics lecturer Mohamed Abdelhafez announced through Instagram that he will leave the Institute at the end of the 2024-25 school year.

11 **Concord Market opens in the Student Center on March 11**
Concord Market opened in the Student Center, replacing La Verde's Market, which closed in April 2023, marking the first time in almost two years that students have had access to a permanent grocery store on campus.

7 **Nine with MIT ties have visas revoked**
MIT President Kornbluth sent an email stating that, since April 4, nine MIT community members have had their visas and immigration status "unexpectedly revoked."

14 **MIT admits to 603 Regular Action applicants for the Class of 2029**
1,324 out of 29,282 applicants for the Class of 2029 were admitted, resulting in an overall acceptance rate of 4.5%, which is the same as last year's.

19 **MIT could pay over \$10 million for H-1B visa sponsorships under new Trump order**
President Donald Trump signed a proclamation stating that new H-1B visa petitions submitted on Sept. 21 or after will require a \$100,000 payment.

5 **Tens of thousands march during Boston's installment of national "Hands Off!" protest on April 5**
Thousands of protesters gathered at the Parkman Bandstand in the Boston Common to protest the actions of the second Trump administration.

21 **UA releases 2025 election results on March 21**
UA Education Chair Alice Hall '26 was elected president, and Mariam Abdelbarr '27 was elected vice president.

1 **Trump administration asks MIT to sign politically-inflected compact to receive federal funding preferences**
The Trump administration's compact's demands include removing race and gender as factors in admissions, limiting international enrollment, and freezing tuition.

MIT's endowment rises 11.4% to \$27.4 billion in 2025 fiscal year
According to the Report of the Treasurer released on Oct. 10, MIT's net assets now stand at \$37.7 billion, up from \$33.6 billion last year.

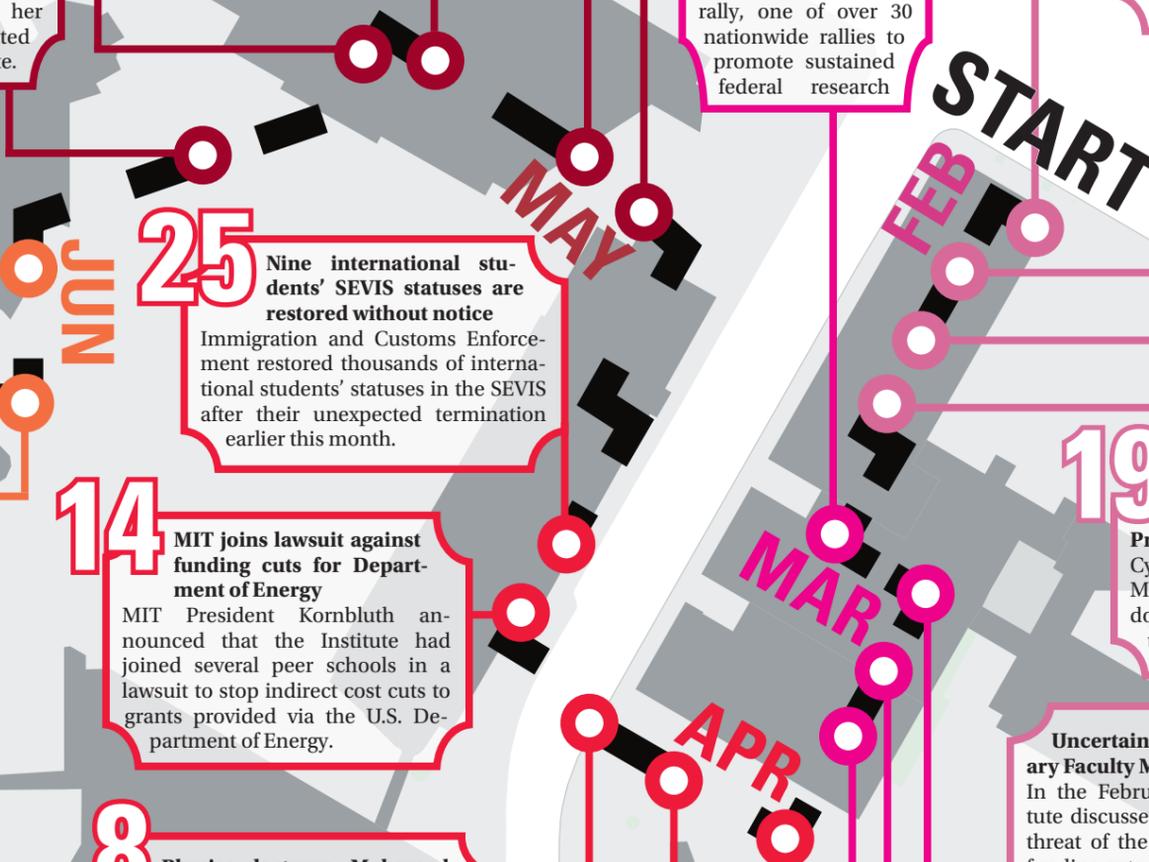
16 **Anantha Chandrakasan named MIT's new provost**
Chandrakasan, the former dean of the School of Engineering and Chief Innovation and Strategy Officer succeeds Cynthia Barnhart SM '86, PhD '88.

Chandrakasan
ogy for navigat-
EVPT Shor formed "Working Group" to address amount to over a annual budget.

10 **MIT rejects federal compact**
MIT's decision to reject the compact comes amidst student and faculty petitions in opposition to the Trump administration's demands.

and "No Kings" protest
acts tens of thousands to
on Common on Oct. 18
3 p.m. on Saturday, Oct. 18, thousands of people gathered at Common to protest President administration.

OCT



MIT Integration Bee Hosts 44th Annual Competition

Integration Bee is a very embedded part of MIT culture... It's the only place where you hear "3, 2, 1, Integrate!"



PHOTO COURTESY OF YUAN YAO

The top four finalists of the 2025 Integration Bee pose with their prizes. From left to right: Jacopo Rizzo, Karthik Vedula, Brian Liu, Hanhong Zhao.

By Sophia Zhang
SCIENCE STAFF WRITER

On Wednesday, Jan. 22, the 26-100 auditorium buzzed with excitement as MIT undergraduates, student volunteers, and eager spectators gathered for the 44th Annual MIT Integration Bee.

The Integration Bee is an annual competition hosted during MIT's Independent Activities Period (IAP) since 1981, drawing in thousands of viewers from all around the country, with the goal of spreading the fun of integration. Yannick Yao, a graduate student in the math department and one of the organizers of this event, shared that this competition not only "spreads the fun of integration" but also "shows off [MIT's] nerdiness." With the MIT Integration Bee holding the name as 'the longest running integration bee,' this competition showcases the institution's rich history and culture while also being "a great way to get people excited about solving integrals and beyond."

The Bee is organized by graduate students in the math department who write the problems, gather volunteers, and publicize the event to the MIT community and beyond. Yao stated that it was "lots of work, and I am really glad we were able to pull through."

The competition, sponsored by the math department, is open to all MIT students. It begins with a qualifier test taken the day before, consisting of 20 questions taken during a 20 minute time interval. The top 16 scorers out will advance to the Integration Bee. Contestants use various techniques like trigonometric and algebraic identities, integration by parts, and symmetry to compete for the Bee's coveted prizes, and for the title of the 2025 Grand Integrator. The competitions prizes consisted of \$10 gift cards to New City or Toscanini's awarded to the top 8 integrators, Dover math books awards to the top four integrators, and math socks awarded to the top 2 integrators.

The Bee itself is a zero sum game: if all contestants get the question wrong, no one loses any points, and if all contestants get the question right, no one gains any points. It is composed of two sections: "regular season" and playoffs.

The 16 qualifying students are divided into groups of four, and then each compete in one round of the "regular season."

The top 8 scorers then advance to the playoffs, which are a seeded single-elimination bracket, consisting of a quarterfinal, semifinal, and a final. Students compete head-to-head in an intense battle of integration: it only takes one loss for a competitor to

be out of the game. As the players advance, they will be faced with progressively more challenging rounds and integrals.

In the Regular Season, players are divided into groups of four, each receiving five out of 20 integrals with a two-minute time limit per integral. After all 20 questions, those with the most points will advance to the playoffs, with tie-breakers determined by the number of correctly solved integrals.

In the Quarterfinals, the remaining 8 integrators compete one on one. Each match is a best of three, where competitors will have 3 minutes to solve each integral.

In the Semifinals, the remaining 4 integrators continue to compete one on one. Each match is a best of four, where the competitors will have 4 minutes to solve each integral.

Lastly, the finals is where the remaining 2 integrators compete in 5 rounds of integration, each round lasting 5 minutes. The competitor who answers the most of the 5 correct wins the title of the Grand Integrator!

This year, 53 participants competed in the qualifier test, with an average score of 11.37 out of 20, a qualifying score of 14, and three perfect scores. The following day, 16 competitors filled the front rows of the auditorium, ready to showcase their integration skills. Hailing from across the Boston and Cambridge area, over 100 spectators came, eager to see who would be crowned the title of the Grand Integrator.

One spectator, Elizabeth Zhang, a junior majoring in Course 6-9, shared her excitement: "it's inspiring and really fun to see people who have such a passion for solving complex math problems." Through her 3 years at MIT, she's come to find that the "Integration Bee is a very embedded part of MIT culture," Zhang stated. "It's the only place where you hear 3, 2, 1 Integrate."

Another spectator, Catherine Tu, a freshman majoring in Course 6, agreed. "I've never seen the integration bee before, but it's very MIT," she shared.

The finals kicked off at 10:00PM. After rounds of elimination, two students remained: Karthik Vedula (a 1st time competitor) and Brian Liu (the 2024 Grand Integrator).

The final round featured five questions, one of which proved so difficult that nei-

ther contestant could solve it. After the first four integrals, Vedula was in the lead with two integrals correct. Liu followed close behind with one integral correct. It was up to the fifth and final integral to determine who would be crowned 2025 Grand Integrator.

Both students gripped their chalk in anticipation, waiting eagerly for the next integral to be revealed.

3, 2, 1 ... Integrate!

Quickly flipping over the paper, both competitors begin solving away on their chalkboards.

Time.

Both students put down their chalk, boxing the same final answer: 0. Eager competitors and spectators waited in anticipation as the final answer was revealed.

The audience erupted in applause as Vedula sealed his victory as the 2025 Grand Integrator!

"It felt a little surreal," Vedula shared. "It felt really nice for all those years of hard work to finally pay off like that."

Although Vedula, a sophomore majoring in Courses 18 and 6-4, is a first-time MIT Integration Bee competitor, he already has quite a bit of experience. "I've been doing integration bees since I was in high school," Vedula explained. "The Harvard-MIT Math Tournament organized an integration bee for high schoolers, and I competed in that, so I felt like that experience really lends to competing in this competition because it really fueled my passion for integrals."

Aside from his previous experience in integration bees, he also prepared extensively for this competition. "I practiced all the past 10 years of qualifying exams on the website, as well as looked at other integration bees from other colleges like CMU and Caltech," he said.

But despite his stellar performance and newfound title of Grand Integrator, Vedula still found himself struggling to answer one integration question: what is your favorite integral?

"The answer would definitely vary day to day," he revealed. "Anything that involves creativity, that's not just straight bashing, I think that's really going to be my favorite integral."

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Build for Ukraine: MIT innovators tackle misinformation, education, and infrastructure challenges

From fighting disinformation to constructing new polymers, participants worked together to solve problems for Ukraine

By Eric Wang
ASSOCIATE COPY CHIEF

In MIT's Suffolk Building, a group of innovators sit around a projector, listening to a team of speakers address misinformation associated with Ukrainian subjects on Wikipedia. According to the group, the limitations of the Russian language create a systematic bias in English-language descriptions of Ukrainian subjects, leading to incorrect narratives and perspectives on already heavily-monitored Ukrainian heritage pages. The rest of the innovators ask for clarification, suggest new methods for gathering and flagging misinformation, and offer their services to help with the project.

This is not a research conference or lab meeting. This is Build for Ukraine.

Build for Ukraine was started by Ford International Professor of History Elizabeth Wood, MIT-Ukraine Program Manager Dr. Svitlana Krasynska, Research Scientist Dr. Phil Tinn PhD '16, and Dr. Ho Chit Siu '14, SM '15, PhD '18. The goal of the program was to bring together people at MIT and the Kyiv School of Economics to address some of the biggest humanitarian problems caused by Russian President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine. As a result of the class's unique undertaking, Build for Ukraine was designed to be a project-

focused class similar to a hackathon. Its focuses include constructing online infrastructure to detect misleading narratives, inventing and testing of materials as alternatives for HVAC systems, and streamlining innovations in the demining of Ukraine. For three-and-a-half weeks, the teams worked to create initiatives for resolving the shortcomings in their respective fields, culminating in the highlight of the class: a hackathon-style presentation that allows for both fellow classmates and professors to share their input.

For Catherine Tang '25, a senior at MIT working on improving STEM education for children in Ukraine, collaboration was the most valuable part of this experience. Tang originally planned to focus on fighting disinformation, but decided to switch her focus to education due to her interactions with a classmate.

"When Nazar, a first year at Tufts and participant in this program, presented on his experience with the Ukraine Leadership & Technology Academy program (ULTA) and how it lead to Khan Academy for Ukraine, I was struck by how he described education as the means by which we could empower the next generation of Ukrainians students to help their country," Tang said. "This made me certain that this is the area I wanted to address."

According to Tang, average math and science scores have decreased over the course of the war, with dangerous conditions impacting learning for many Ukrainian children. In addition, Ukraine's current educational infrastructure cannot adequately teach the science and math concepts that are necessary for Ukraine's future. Tang's group drew inspiration from ULTA, an educational program that bridges MIT education and the perspectives of Ukrainian high school students. Tang's group introduced an initiative that would bring Beaver Works — an MIT summer program designed to give high school students hands-on STEM experience — to Ukraine. Instead of structuring content into long, monotonous flows of information, Tang's initiative would use shorter, feedback-centered, and project-based teaching approaches for explaining material. As a result, Ukrainian students would be more excited to learn and build the hard skills necessary to succeed in the future and close the education gap created by the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Initiatives from other teams also sought to revolutionize existing systems. One group showcased improved polymer filaments that reduce the energy cost of heating. Because of the material's novel braiding patterns, these new polymer filaments reduce heat loss and energy needs in the

winter, protecting Ukrainian civilians during frequent blackouts.

Another group proposed protocols for streamlining demining innovations to improve safety for civilians. They argue that lack of communication and technology in place makes Ukraine especially dangerous and susceptible to mining. The group proposed new protocols that not only allowed for better communication with civilians but also updated maps and charts to help educate and protect the public.

Tang's group, like many others in the class, has already begun taking the next steps for their future plans. From contacting potential sponsors and securing funding to interviewing potential teachers and contacts in Ukraine, Tang and her team are aiming to get their project from Boston to Ukraine by June or July, in order for Ukrainian teachers to teach the summer program. "I see this project and the larger problem in education we're trying to address as a lack of people rather than a lack of technical resources," Tang said.

Through collaboration, innovation, and determination, Build for Ukraine is not just about generating ideas for the members—it is about actively shaping solutions that empower Ukrainians to rebuild, educate, and strengthen their country for the future.

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Computing of tomorrow

The Social and Ethical Responsibilities of Computing (SERC) initiative challenged students to imagine “the future of computing”

By Jieruei Chang
SCIENCE STAFF WRITER

The instructions are few: write an essay — of any form — imagining how emergent technologies could shape the world. No more than 3,000 words. Grand prize of \$10,000.

The 2025 Envisioning the Future of Computing Prize was organized by the Social and Ethical Responsibilities of Computing (SERC) initiative within the MIT Schwarzman College of Computing in collaboration with the School of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences (SHASS). The assignment asked MIT students to describe a computing-related technology that could improve human lives and analyze its potential dangers. Three finalists were selected from 67 entries, to be judged by a live panel on May 5. Two runner-ups would win \$5,000 each, while the top essay would win \$10,000.

Annaliese Meyer G, a Ph.D. Candidate in the joint MIT-Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution (MIT-WHOI) Program, is one of those finalists. “I have a microbiology background,” Meyer said. “And you know, I’ve always really enjoyed writing fiction, so when I saw the call, it seemed like a great opportunity to combine the things I care about.”

The judging took place at a lavish dinner in the Schwarzman College on a cloudy Monday night. As the guests drizzled in, the atmosphere came alive with the clinking of silverware and the rustling of napkins. Guests consumed wine. Warm laughter echoed across the tables. Conversations began to hum.

“It’s my first time here, so I have no expectations,” Maria Yang ’91, professor in Mechanical Engineering and Associate Dean of Engineering at MIT, said. “But I feel like AI and computing really pervades all the disciplines at MIT and in the world right now. So it’s really important that we think really carefully about how we use those tools.”

Beside her was Doug Barnard ’79, an advisor in the Schwarzman College of Computing. He flew in from Chicago to attend the event. “I worked on military projects with my physics background that gave me real concerns about the ethics of what I was doing,” Barnard said. “Now that AI has the same potential that physics has to affect everyone for better or worse, I think it’s important that today’s students learning about AI have a solid grounding in ethics.”

The room settled down as the evening began. The first finalist to present was Martin Staadecker, a master’s student in the MIT Technology Policy Program (TPP). He was slender and sharply dressed; there was a hint of a nervous wobble in his voice that quickly subsided. Staadecker talked about “Fossil Tokens,” a scheme to concretely

quantify an individual’s carbon emissions, and expressed hope that it could help eco-conscious users make more informed purchasing decisions.

In his 13-minute speech, Staadecker described how tokens — each representing one kilogram of carbon dioxide — would be passed from sources of emissions through a supply-chain network of businesses before finally aggregating in consumers’ bank accounts. All this, he said, could be done almost purely by leveraging existing transaction technologies.

Staadecker fielded questions on the feasibility, the efficacy of such tokens on actually driving consumer behavior, and the potential for government misuse.

Next on the podium was Juan Santoyo G, a Ph.D. Candidate in the Department of Brain and Cognitive Sciences. In a striped sweatshirt, he spoke in the tone of a murmuring storyteller, spinning a tale of an AI built as a healer in a far-flung war.

“Do you remember my name, child?” asked the AI in the story.

“Sage,” came the reply.
“And do you remember what my purpose is?”

“Your purpose is to understand and reduce our mental suffering as best as you can.”

Softly but eloquently — partially aided by a graphic of an AI-generated healer monkey — he imagined a model capable of not just processing language, but also mimicking embodied empathy through physical interaction and sensory feedback. Santoyo’s presentation asked what would happen if AI was given a sense of viscerality, a presence in the physical world — a body capable of moving and feeling pain like a normal human, rather than one that is purely robotic. Even if language models are “just a pattern recognition and response matching algorithms,” Santoyo argued, it’s possible that such a sufficiently advanced AI could feel emotion.

Because Sage had a body, Santoyo argued that he began to feel the weight of suffering, experiencing not just the loss of others, but also the physical toll of his own limitations and failures, eventually threatening the world with destruction unless the war ends.

Santoyo ended with a call to action: even if today’s AIs are far from Sage, people should act with the “seven generations principle” in mind and make decisions not just for the present but for the future. Santoyo advocated for considering how our creations will impact the world far in the future, and emphasized building empathy, responsibility, and accountability into every step along the way. “If one day we create minds more capable than our own, we must ensure that they will believe in us,” he said.

Meyer took the stage last. With confident posture and a slightly mischievous smile,



JIERUEI CHANG—THE TECH

Meyer describes the ethical concerns of her fictitious technology at SERC on Tuesday, May 6th.

she looked like a turn-of-the-millennium Silicon Valley startup cofounder (with an all-black outfit to suit).

“Today, I’d like to introduce you to B-Bots,” she began. She described a novel kind of miniature robot, designed to improve microbiome health by traveling to the gut, pretending to be a bacterium, and releasing synthetic bacterial supplements. The design was remarkably detailed for a fictitious device. Electrically conductive proteins would be used for movement and piezoelectric components that harvest energy from normal bodily motion would be used to power it. If the robot needed to be deactivated, the provided B-Bots app could be used to turn it off over Bluetooth. She claimed a near-endless list of possible health benefits: solutions to depression. Schizophrenia. Parkinson’s. Cardiac disease. Acid reflux.

Then, breaking character, Meyer described its risks. The company could decide to adopt a subscription model, threatening to deactivate the B-Bots if users couldn’t pay up. There’s a chance that the B-Bots could make themselves an integral “keystone” of a microbiome that other bacteria rely upon, causing B-Bot deactivation to lead to a total collapse of the gut environment. It would be possible to mitigate these risks, but “if you stopped paying, no company that I know of would help you wean you off, or take you to a doctor to help manage the transition,” she said. She closed with a cautious warning as well as a note of optimism. New healthcare technologies, she said, “can and will do a lot of good — if they’re put in the hands of those who aren’t in it for the profit.”

The audience digested the presentation (and the food). The judges disappeared

single-file into the hallway to engage in presumably tense and thorough deliberation. Ten minutes later, they re-emerged. The presenter hastily grabbed a microphone and announced Meyer and her work, titled “(Pre/Sub)scribe,” as the winner of the 2025 Envisioning the Future of Computing Prize. Her table and the rest of the room immediately burst into applause.

“I really wanted to hit the angle of how medical technology controlled by industry can go wrong,” Meyer said. She wanted to show how companies could “effectively hold you hostage with either choosing your health or choosing to make rent.”

Originally from Canada, Meyer described her initial shock at the American healthcare system. She recalled attending a rocketry competition in the Utah desert, learning that people had been passing out because they were afraid that they would be charged for using ambulances and paramedics. “And I think a lot of Americans, especially those who have never been anywhere else, don’t necessarily understand just how messed up that is,” she said.

At the end of the night, MIT President Sally Kornbluth was asked what she thought tomorrow’s technologies would hold. “One thing that was really interesting in tonight’s event was the very different answers that the three students who presented gave to that question,” she responded. “They talked about tiny machines. They talked about embodied AI and emotion. They talked about the interface of computing with our climate. And I think all of those are hallmarks of what we’re going to see in the future of computing.”

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coming to dinner in W20-483!

101 THINGS TO DO BEFORE YOU GRADUATE

32. Take a stroll through
Little Italy in the North End

Join the Arts department
at *The Tech* and write
restaurant reviews.

(And get reimbursed for your meal!)

MEET THE MINDS

Connecting the brain and the mind

Dr. Danlei Chen on her work as a postdoc at the Lewis Lab and her role as Corresponding Secretary of the MIT Postdoc Association

By Veronika Moroz
SCIENCE EDITOR

When you finish reading this sentence, close your eyes and picture a river.

While you might not be around any bodies of water right now, your brain is still able to recreate the image of one. How this works is one of the many questions that fascinates Dr. Danlei Chen, a Postdoctoral Associate in the Lewis Lab. Dr. Chen, who is also the Corresponding Secretary of the MIT Postdoctoral Association (PDA), sat down with *The Tech* last week to talk about her research and the community she's found through her work.

It "makes me feel purposeful"

Dr. Chen describes herself as "a neuroscientist, a psychologist, and a bit of a programmer." The goal of her research is to develop and utilize new tools to investigate the connection between a human's physical brain and their thoughts and behaviors.

The same prediction abilities that allow your brain to imagine a river also enable your brain to elevate your blood pressure before you stand up so you don't faint, and how you know where to put your pencil to write letters. Scientists like Dr. Chen think these prediction abilities might play a major role in optimizing energy.

"Your brain's primary mission is to try to regulate your body in the most energy efficient way possible," Dr. Chen said. At the same time, humans are wired with memories, cognition, and sleep. The reasons our brains do these things are not well understood, or even "well-hypothesized."

An international student from China, Dr. Chen first came to the United States as an undergraduate student at the University of Rochester, where she initially planned on majoring in finance and took on multiple finance internships. She recalled feeling like she was missing opportunities for growth. After taking some cognitive science classes, she fell in love with the subject and completed a Bachelors in Brain and Cognitive Science.

"Build[ing] code to record the brain makes me feel purposeful," Dr. Chen stated. It's "my calling that I can do without feeling like I'm doing work. It's kind of like one of my interests, like knitting or playing tennis."

Her primary research focus now is sleep. In the quest to understand why people sleep, researchers often look at the motion of cerebrospinal fluid, a watery substance surrounding the brain and pooling in its cavities. In addition to providing a cushion for the brain, cerebrospinal fluid acts like a sewer system for brain cells.

"We think the brain produces large waves of neural [electrical] signals" to drive cerebrospinal fluid flow while you sleep, she said, carrying waste products out of your brain so that you wake up feeling "refreshed."

This research has the potential to unlock treatments for neurological diseases like Parkinson's or Alzheimer's, where deteriorating tissues increase the size of brain cavities. Just like changing riverbanks may cause a river to bend in some spots and pool in others, tissue decay in Alzheimer's and Parkinson's patients may cause an irregular cerebrospinal fluid flowing pattern. This could lead to a waste buildup that causes "even worse types of tissue damage," Dr. Chen said, accelerating the progress of the disease.

Though understanding what healthy fluid flow looks like isn't necessarily enough to treat these diseases, Dr. Chen stressed that without an understanding of healthy fluid flow, there's little possibility of "understanding the pathology and even having drugs to help people." Describing curiosity-driven scientific discovery and scientific problem-solving as "inseparable" forms of research, she remarked, "I think [scientists] as individuals are contributing in both ways, but the percentage of efforts maybe going to one more than the other."

"They're my people"

Dr. Chen earned her PhD in Psychology and Neuroscience from Northeastern University in 2023, after six years of work, part of which happened during the COVID-19 pandemic. The uncertainty of conducting scientific research during COVID was particularly hard with her family "all the way in China," where all they could do was send "thoughts and prayers."

Despite the challenges, Dr. Chen emphasized, "Things would have been harder if I wasn't doing something that I truly loved." The experience brought her closer to her friends and colleagues and mentors, who "stepped in and checked in" on her.

"That's when I realized that they are not just people that I work with or people that I share a similar interest with, but they're the people around me and they're my people," Dr. Chen recalled. "Without that, I don't think I'd be able to have a good enough well-being in general, or be able to survive in a particularly hard time and by myself in another country."

That sense of community was one of the reasons Dr. Chen ran for Corresponding Secretary of the Postdoc Association (PDA) almost a year ago. As Corresponding Secretary, her job is to foster communication between the PDA officers and the general postdoc population, and also advocate for better salaries, housing opportunities, and postdoc-PI mentorship.

She initially focused on increasing connections between postdocs through fun activities and retreats, but her focus has since shifted. The current budget proposal for the 2026 Fiscal Year on the National Science Foundation (NSF) website features a 91.4% decrease in post doctoral funding, eliminating eight different funding programs.

Their rush to cancel grants and defund scientific projects is especially hard for postdocs,



PHOTO COURTESY OF DANLEI CHEN

Dr. Danlei Chen is a postdoc in the Lewis Lab, where she works with innovative technologies to study the brain.

Dr. Chen admitted, "because we see ourselves as future academics."

"The scientists that these cuts are directly impacting have very little to do [with the decision-making]," Dr. Chen said, "even though we're the producers of the science, and we're the makers of these experiments."

The situation is particularly hard for international postdocs, who make up 60 to 70 percent of MIT's postdoc population. Dr. Chen stated, "If we get fired, then there's very little room for us to look for another type of job or in a similar field." With their jobs tied to their working visas, their housing, and their health insurance, MIT's over 900 international postdocs are living one funding cut away from losing the lives they've built in the US.

"MIT is really great because they created this type of welcoming environment for us, and that is honestly quite unique, even in the top-tier universities in America," Dr. Chen said. But now, she knows postdocs who have lost their funding and have left the country. They may even leave their fields for good.

"That's really just a loss," Dr. Chen stated, "not just for the school or for this country, but as an international community with a very similar mission."

Shouldering the burden

Though her work schedule is relatively "flexible," in the summer, she comes to the lab

often so that she can be a mentor for undergraduate researchers. She also gives reports and runs meetings. She runs experiments and helps with other people's experiments, including nightly ones from 10 p.m. to 4 a.m. where she can analyze the subjects' brain waves while they sleep.

For the rest of the time, Dr. Chen writes code to analyze her data and brainstorms new research questions, which "can happen anywhere," from her home office to her lab to even on airplanes.

The work is hard, but it feels harder when "you're not sure whether funding will continue, or whether you can do your next experiment, or whether your employment is safe or not," Dr. Chen admitted, describing the uncertainty as a "layer of burden on your shoulder."

"We do what we can, but we can't really direct the trend, and that makes me feel, honestly, very helpless from time to time," she commented.

Meanwhile, she continues her research, motivated both by her intellectual curiosity and by the relationships she's formed. "This is my community now," she concluded. "There's very little possibility that I will steer away, not from the science, but from the people."

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Explain like I'm five: 18th edition of the Cambridge Science Carnival makes tough science accessible

Kirby Heck: "The energy is incredible. It's totally electrifying, no pun intended"

By Jieruei Chang and Eric Wang
SCIENCE STAFF WRITERS

A little exoplanet drifts around an alien sun. Slowly, mechanically, the planet orbits in the darkness of a foam-board box until it passes between a star and a phone's light sensor. On an adjacent computer screen, the star's light dims — the telltale sign of a planet — to the collective excitement of a small gaggle of children.

"The TESS [Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite] is looking for exoplanets, which are planets outside of our solar system found around other stars," explained Katharine Hesse, a researcher at the MIT Kavli Institute. "We're here to share a little bit about how TESS finds planets." Though the metal-and-foam-board mockup at the booth was a far simpler version of the \$200 million TESS mission, it captured the essence of a very real scientific challenge: finding new worlds with just a glimmer of light.

Making hard science accessible is the goal of the Cambridge Science Carnival, now in its 18th year. On Sept. 21, 2025, more than 17,000

visitors packed into the Kendall/MIT Open Space to explore over 150 booths from MIT, Tufts, Northeastern, Harvard, and other organizations across Massachusetts. Founded by the MIT Museum in 2007, the Carnival's mission is to "bring science out of the labs and onto the streets."

Amid the periodic booms of electrifying physics demonstrations, participants controlled underwater robots to complete navigation challenges. "These are kits that students put together using over-the-counter materials to develop underwater remotely operated vehicles," said Robert Vincent, Assistant Director of the MIT Sea Grant program. The goal is to teach students the principles of "electrical, mechanical engineering, physics and ocean biology, and ocean ecology."

During the carnival, many demonstrations emphasized robotics, with over 19 booths set up to display a wide variety of robots and a separate section dedicated entirely to the subject. Demonstration areas gave teams a platform to showcase their work and accomplishments. MIT Arcturus, an au-

tonomous boat build team, hosted an activity to make miniature boats from pool noodles while their competition boat mapped its environment with LIDAR in real time.

Graduate student Kirby Heck, a fifth-year PhD student in MIT's Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, ran his booth, titled "Harnessing Power from the Wind," back for a second year. There, participants could build their own miniature wind turbines and test them in a tabletop wind tunnel to see how much power they could generate.

"The energy at the Cambridge Science [Carnival] is incredible. It's totally electrifying, no pun intended," said Heck. "People get super into it. They tinker with their design, try it in the tunnel, improve it, and try again until they get something that spins and produces power."

For Heck, the takeaway is less about the technical details and more about the spark of curiosity: "Our goal is just to encourage people to build hands-on and create engineering experiences for themselves in the future."

In addition to the many engineering booths, Cambridge Science Carnival also

showcased the biological side of science. At the MIT Microbiome Club booth, visitors peered through microscopes at slides prepared from fermented foods and learned how "good bacteria" supports gut health. The organizers also provided free samples of these fermented foods, including kefir, kimchi, and sauerkraut, to all visitors. "I think it's definitely a great representation of what our club's mission is — [spreading] awareness to the community [and] showing how the microbiome is involved in our everyday lives," Microbiome Club President Jean Yu '27 explained.

University students and researchers weren't the only ones manning booths at the Carnival. High school FIRST Robotics Competition teams like the Boston-based Lobstah Bots ran exhibition matches with last year's competition robots. In a fenced-off arena, they raced to stack PVC-pipe "coral" and pick up rubber-ball "algae" to cheers from onlookers. Nonprofit groups were also present at the Carnival, with groups like Cy-

Turning to the text box: How LLMs are used by first-years taking 8.01

Students and instructors in Physics I (8.01) discuss how AI has impacted how the class is taught

By Malakhi Beyah
SCIENCE STAFF WRITER

Learning classical mechanics has long been a source of frustration for first-years at MIT. Even for those with high school experience in physics, understanding certain concepts was nearly impossible without dedicating extra hours to the subject. For some students, the rise in artificial intelligence (AI) is making studying more efficient. Large language models (LLMs) give students unprecedented ease of understanding arcane concepts in a fraction of the time it would take them to do alone.

The Tech interviewed current students and instructors in Physics I (8.01) to understand the influence this technology has had on how the class is taught.

To “further understanding” and “deepen knowledge”

The homework assigned to students in 8.01 consists of learning sequences and problem sets. As one student explained, their four weekly learning sequences serve to give them a preview of content they will later learn in class. (This student will be referred to as Student A, as they requested to remain anonymous. The other interviewed students will be given pseudonyms for similar reasons.)

“Overall, I think they have helped my understanding of the content,” Student A said, “but I also think that they can be a bit time-consuming to do, especially for an MIT student who just generally has a bunch of other demands and extracurriculars to attend.”

Despite the burdensome amount of time it takes to complete learning sequences,

Student A stated that they never used AI on these assignments; instead, they tended to use AI as a guide for their problem sets when necessary. If they spent half an hour stuck on a question, for example, they would ask Google Gemini what topics would be necessary to begin solving it. If the student was still stuck, they would go back to Gemini with their attempt at the problem. “Here is my current attempt at solving it,” Student A reported typing. “Do not give me the answer; give me a small hint about how to improve my approach.”

This sentiment was echoed by other interviewed students. Student B, when asked about their AI usage in this class, stated that they use ChatGPT to complete their learning sequences in a similar manner.

For Student B, the Technology-Enabled Active Learning (TEAL) learning style in 8.01 is too fast-paced. The two-minute videos in the learning sequence are not enough for them to understand the questions that followed. “Sometimes, I like to use AI to further my understanding and deepen my knowledge in the particular topic that we’re being taught,” they said.

These students reported knowing that simply asking the chatbots for the solutions would be short-sighted. They recognized that problem set questions were considerably similar to those on their exams, meaning it would be in their best interest to complete their problem sets as independently as they could.

However, the availability of AI has affected their reliance on peers and office hours in the class. For instance, Student C admitted that they ask Gemini for help with problem

sets about as often as they ask their peers. “I like to do my [problem sets] pretty early on in the week,” they explained. “A lot of my peers don’t start the pset on the weekends.”

Other interviewed students cited ease of access as a reason they turn to AI as an alternative to office hours. As Student A explained, however, while prompting Gemini for help is much more ideal than traversing campus to attend office hours, that was not the only reason AI is often more convenient.

Since 8.01 has hundreds of students, “there can be a lot of other people at office hours,” Student A said. “Sometimes, when I’m really stuck on a problem, it can feel like I’m kind of hogging the [teaching assistant] or instructor’s time. But with an AI, I can just type in as many dumb questions as I want, and I never feel like I’m wasting anyone’s time because it’s a machine.”

How 8.01 is adapting to AI

The instructors of 8.01 are well aware of the influence AI has on their students. To ensure that students are still learning the fundamental concepts of classical mechanics, the instructors tasked themselves with adapting their policies to best serve everyone.

Since last year, the 8.01 Canvas page has featured an AI policy, which emphasizes that chatbots should not be completing work for the students. “We expect that you will find working with your peers more useful than working with AI,” the policy reads, “but if you want to use AI as a part of getting unstuck after first working on your own, that is fine.” The policy also notes that students must list any AI tool they used as a collaborator on their problem sets to maintain transparency.

Instructors Michelle Tomasik and Krishna Rajagopal offered further comment on how AI has (and has not) affected teaching 8.01. Despite the availability of LLMs, Tomasik and Rajagopal stated that 8.01 still offers 23 hours per week of office hours for students to attend. They reported that their office hours tend to be “full of students,” just as interviewed students described them. The instructors appeared to have the same general expectation of AI usage as their students, as they emphasized how students should first attempt problem sets independently before asking a peer or AI.

“If a student relies upon either peers or AI [too] much, without first working through each problem themselves, they will not build strong problem solving skills and will not do as well on the exams, which contribute five times as much to their grade as do the Problem Sets,” Tomasik and Rajagopal explained.

More than just classical mechanics

The testimonies from 8.01 students and instructors reveal something important about learning in the age of AI: if used responsibly, AI can contribute to a net positive. With clear communication of policies and expectations, students can readily access assistance when they need it, especially in larger classes.

AI is not going anywhere anytime soon, which leads many to believe that the optimal option is to make the best use of it. As Tomasik and Rajagopal put it, “it is important for students to learn how to engage effectively and productively with AI tools during their four years at MIT.”

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Cambridge Science Carnival

Science Carnival, from Page 14

cle to Science displaying their map of science tourism locations in Boston. At the climate education nonprofit Change is Simple’s booth, outreach educator Marina Turchin used a wave tank to demonstrate the effects of erosion.

Many families have made the Carnival a tradition. Cambridge resident Lina has been bringing her kids for three years. Meanwhile, Billy, another resident, brought his niece Eliana for the first time. When asked about her favorite part of science, she exclaimed, “Slime!”

Cambridge City Councilwoman Patty Nolan has witnessed the Carnival evolve over the years. She brought her kids to the “very first one”; now, they’re in their 20s. “The energy here in the plaza is wonderfully exciting,” Nolan remarked.

Nolan also spoke to the broader importance of science literacy, stating, “I think [science is] essential for medical breakthroughs, for the longevity of the planet, but it’s also essential for democracy.” Especially in a time where science is under threat, Nolan commented, “It’s the only way that we

can move forward with progress in almost any area.”

If the goal of the Cambridge Science Carnival is to spread science literacy to the general public, it seems to be working. “This is our biggest year so far here,” said Sasha Wallinger, Director of Marketing and Communications at the MIT Museum. “[The Carnival] has really become a community event that welcomes the MIT audience, as well as the city of Cambridge.”

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SCIENCE IN REVIEW

Sometimes MIT can come across as larger than life. Where else can the shortest path to class lead you past strangers bonding over an equation, students who stayed up all night building a robot, labs of Nobel Prize-winning scientists, and posters advertising events for every topic imaginable?

Here in the science department, we help people meet their heroes, but we’re also showing the world how those heroes are human: not just scientists, but friends, family members, artists, athletes, and so much more. Behind each beautiful idea is a group of individuals just as real and brilliant and inspiring as the science itself. It’s been my honor to bring you stories of some of the incredible people who call MIT home.

When I look back on the year we’ve had, the foremost emotion I feel is pride. I’ve gotten to not only go on my own science writing adventures, but also watch our writers develop, talking through the tricky parts and cheering on their successes. It can take a lot of heart to keep a student newspaper going, and I’m continually inspired by the wisdom, dedication, and collaborative spirit of my fellow editors and the V145 exec.

Thank you for joining us. We have big shoes to fill, and I look forward to all the growing we’ll be doing in V146.

— Veronika Moroz ’28
Volume 145 Science Editor



JIERUEI CHANG—THE TECH

Teagan Sullivan '26 demonstrates concepts of buoyancy and center of gravity next to Arcturus’s autonomous boat.

MIT must stand up to McCarthyism

MIT is not just a silent bystander to the new Red Scare. It is guilty. The road to the prison colony in El Salvador was paved in leafy Cambridge

By Richard Solomon

MIT officials are shockingly quiet as the federal government embarks on a McCarthyite campaign of terror against students who oppose the ongoing genocide in Gaza. Palestinian American and recent Columbia graduate Mahmoud Khalil is the most high-profile target, disappeared in the night by ICE agents on March 8 on the orders of President Donald Trump and Secretary of State Marco Rubio. Trump announced proudly that this is “the first arrest of many to come.” Khalil is now being held illegally as a political prisoner in a detention facility in Louisiana. As his own letter reads, “While I await legal decisions that hold the futures of my wife and child in the balance, those who enabled my targeting remain comfortably at Columbia University.” The same could be said about us here. MIT officials have not uttered a word publicly against this crime, nor have they committed to defending rights to speech.

Khalil’s imprisonment is part of a broader wave of attacks on international students across America in the past weeks, even as Israel has breached the ceasefire and commenced what Haaretz columnist Hanin Majadli has called the “largest child massacre in its history.” Trump’s gestapo is now attempting to deport Yunseo Chung, a 21-year-old Korean American at Columbia, apparently for pro-Palestine views. The government argues that the mere presence of Chung, a permanent resident who has lived here since she was seven years old, poses “serious adverse foreign policy consequences.” It took a lawsuit and a court ruling to temporarily prevent Trump’s gestapo from detaining her in the night. As I write, ICE has arrested Rümeyssa Öztürk, a doctoral student at Tufts, who attracted the ire of a Zionist doxing group Canary Mission for co-authoring an op-ed in the student paper. Now, Mohsen Mahdawi, another Columbia student leader, has been taken away, this time at his citizenship interview.

This campaign of repression and intimidation being waged by the secret police against my fellow students is a response to the Zionist campaign to eradicate Palestinian life in Gaza. Months ago, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch determined that Israel is committing a genocide in Gaza, while the death toll by direct traumatic injury has now reached an estimated 65,000+ including the latest attacks. I have written in this paper before about my former host brother in Gaza, Mohammed Masbah, who was killed along with his parents in August 2024 by Israeli airstrikes. On March 20, three of his own relatives in the Masbah family were killed in Israeli airstrikes on Ab-san al-Kabira, Gaza: an elderly man, a young man around my age, and a young child.

A few days ago, Israel killed the journalist Hossam Shabat with a direct airstrike.

Shabat had prophetically warned this would happen as Israel laid the groundwork for his targeting through a campaign of disinformation. No U.S. red lines were drawn against his assassins, so Netanyahu’s government killed him with impunity. Shabat was one of the best eyes and ears bearing witness to the horrors committed by the Israeli army in the north. Many of us at MIT followed his updates closely. He was 23 years old, a college student, and chose to cover the genocide when his university was destroyed. In Shabat’s own words:

If you’re reading this, it means I have been killed — most likely targeted — by the Israeli occupation forces. When this all began, I was only 21 years old — a college student with dreams like anyone else. For the past 18 months, I have dedicated every moment of my life to my people. I documented the horrors in northern Gaza minute by minute, determined to show the world the truth they tried to bury. I slept on pavements, in schools, in tents — anywhere I could. Each day was a battle for survival. I endured hunger for months, yet I never left my people’s side... I risked everything to report the truth, and now, I am finally at rest — something I haven’t known in the past 18 months. I did all this because I believe in the Palestinian cause.

May he rest in power.

Soon after Hossam’s martyrdom, Zionist settlers stoned and assaulted Hamdan Ballal, co-director of the Oscar-winning film *No Other Land*. The film chronicles the steadfast resistance of Palestinian communities in the south Hebron hills against ongoing ethnic cleansing by settlers and the army. These settlers beat Ballal with impunity, inflicting bloody injuries to his head and stomach. Soldiers then raided the ambulance he called. According to co-director Yuval Abraham, Ballal was handcuffed all night and beaten in a settler-military base. It took a global outcry to free him. Sadly, the U.S. Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, which awarded the directors an Oscar three weeks ago, declined to issue a public statement of solidarity. As Basel Adra, the star of the film, wrote: “They refused to support Hamdan just because he is Palestinian. Another sign that our lives don’t matter.” The Academy later issued an apology for not responding adequately.

In the United States, we know the worst is yet to come. On Friday, March 21, the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of State submitted their recommendations on a sweeping and prejudiced travel ban that will affect students and families of many backgrounds at MIT. Trump’s deportations, the attacks on the right to asylum under both Trump and Biden, and the abusive powers of ICE affect all of us and should alarm anyone committed to civil liberties. They are the authoritarian face of a dehumanizing and broken visa system

that treats some human beings as worthy of rights and others as not.

Mahmoud Khalil was right in recognizing that our educational institutions are not simply silent bystanders to the new Red Scare. They are guilty. President Sally Kornbluth, MIT Corporation Chair Mark Gorenberg, and General Counsel Mark DiVincenzo share responsibility for Trump imprisoning students. Every official who moved to sic the cops on their students, every statement that legitimized a reactionary and dubious narrative of campus antisemitism, every colleague who told their peers to “keep your head down,” every board member who ignored the democratic calls to end MIT’s ties to the Israeli military and its weapon suppliers, laid the groundwork for the new Red Scare. The roads to the migrant detention camp in Guantánamo Bay and the prison colony in El Salvador were paved in leafy Cambridge.

Fortunately, MIT students have not followed MIT officials in their abandonment of students to the ICE gestapo. In a landmark and binding referendum, 88.5% of the undergraduates that voted in the UA elections called on the MIT administration to 1) formally condemn the illegal arrest of Mahmoud Khalil by federal agents; 2) publicly adopt a policy of non-collaboration with federal immigration enforcement agencies wherever legally possible; and 3) publicly affirm its support for freedom of political speech on campus.

This referendum hands MIT another public mandate. The majority has spoken, like we did on divesting MIT’s ties to the Israeli military last year. What will they do? A bolder position is surely possible. In 2020, MIT sued ICE and the Department of Homeland Security over their overreach. They can do it again. MIT could take a public position against ICE raids, preventively destroy disciplinary records that ICE authorities could subpoena, and agree to pay students’ legal fees or mobilize its lawyers to represent students in court.

I urge MIT officials to take immediate, public action to protect international students at MIT facing harassment and possible imprisonment in retaliation for exercising their inalienable rights to freedom of speech, expression, and association. I urge MIT to end its criminal ties to the Israeli government and its weapon suppliers. I say all this because there are people in our community living in mixed-status families. There are dreamers who came to this country undocumented when they were young. There are families simply trying to live and seek refuge from violence and persecution abroad.

There are those of us from Jewish backgrounds who have seen the same legal architecture used to deny entry to Jews and deport Jewish dissidents during the Cold War now being deployed against Arabs and Muslims. These attacks cannot be successfully con-

fronted without a united opposition. What they show us is that, no matter how aggressively a school punishes its students, it will never be enough for the pro-Israel lobby. Trump and his thugs cannot be appeased, and the best defense is an organized offense.

In fact, we will not be intimidated by Trump, any more than we were intimidated by the criminal Biden presidency. Zionism has lost the educated youth of our society. I am reminded of the Irish political prisoner Bobby Sands who said, “They tried to bury us but they didn’t know we were seeds,” and “Our revenge will be the laughter of our children.” I personally have great faith in the power of ordinary people to enact radical change, but this requires us to shake off the moral apathy and selfish careerism of our colleagues. It also requires MIT officials to quit pulling our institution away from the edge of courage.

For us as individuals, we must participate in an organized, collective struggle for justice, whether at MIT or elsewhere. If you haven’t already, it’s not too late for you. Get involved. Join an organization, a union, or a BDS campaign. Write. Speak out publicly. Protest. Give to mutual aid or charity. Support responsible journalism. Give your time to teach displaced students through MIT Small Private Online Courses (SPOCs) for Gaza. Radicalize your friend. Go on strike. Put your body in front of a police line. Organize yourselves to foment a crisis in the institution or arena you have the most leverage. We must do what needs to be done to prevent our society from descending further into the darkness of fascism. Our predecessors burned draft cards in the name of stopping murder, while direct actionists today sabotage arms factories. That courage is needed now.

Courage is needed now not because horrors lie around the corner, but because the horrors are already here. We must resist evil not because, in Martin Niemöller’s profound words, that if they first come for the socialists and we don’t speak out, they will come for us next. They have already come, and to be a passive spectator is to forfeit your soul. The crimes against Mahmoud Khalil, against Rümeyssa Öztürk, and against the whole of Gaza are not haunting moral allegories. They are not canaries in the coal mine. They are crimes happening now that must be stopped. What Walter Benjamin understood as catastrophe is not an ever-present possibility. It is the present. Catastrophe, what is called in Hebrew the Shoah and in Arabic the Nakba, is now. History alone will not condemn us if we fail to act. What will also condemn us is the darkened light of our own conscience.

Richard Solomon is a doctoral student in political science and a member of the MIT Coalition for Palestine.

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Commencement 2025: From a 50-year perspective

Jim Zaorski '80 reflects on the turbulence of the 2025 OneMIT Commencement Ceremony

By Jim Zaorski

Forty-nine years ago this September, I arrived on campus and with great delight I learned that my freshman advisor was to be none other than then MIT president, Dr. Jerome Wiesner. In other words, I’d won the lottery. I was surprised that despite being a man of immense achievement and responsi-

bility, Dr. Wiesner also found the time to take a personal interest in all four of his freshmen advisees. He invited us to his home on several occasions and always inquired about our experiences and academic progress.

Also surprising to me for someone in his role, Dr. Wiesner seemed to be a rather taciturn man. He needed to be coaxed into speaking among strangers. It took a lot of

effort to get him to reveal his rationale for choosing to march with students against the Vietnam War despite the fact that a large part of the Institute’s revenues at the time came from defense and government sources. As those who knew Dr. Wiesner can attest, some of his most prescient pronouncements would emerge, almost imperceptibly, from the barrel of his pipe. These quietly revealed his humanity and razor-sharp wit.

A few years later, I was lucky enough to take a course with Dr. Noam Chomsky, likely the leading ethicist of our time. Through classic essays like “Manufacturing Consent,” Dr. Chomsky warned of the dangers of “believing everything you hear.” Most of Dr. Chomsky’s lectures were only barely comprehensible to this 20-year-old aspiring mechanical engineer. Still, they proved well worth the extra effort to unravel and piece together over the course of the week.

Fast forward twenty-five years to my class’s 25th reunion. That day I had the privilege to sit next to recently installed MIT president Dr. Susan Hockfield at the reunion luncheon. Dr. Hockfield was ebullient. She had just learned that, for the first time ever, MIT had attracted a plurality of the top women scholars in the country. She candidly attributed MIT’s success to Harvard president’s Larry Summers, now infamous, misstep declaring that there might be “issues of intrinsic

aptitude” that might explain the achievement gap in the sciences between the sexes. In my view, although Dr. Hockfield might have been partially correct in her assessment, I personally believe that a lot of credit for this, and many subsequent MIT recruitment victories, should go to the MIT Corporation at the time for having the courage and foresight to appoint our first woman president. The appointment sent a signal to the world. And as I see it, the world has responded disproportionately.

To an outsider, MIT since Dr. Hockfield’s appointment focus has gradually broadened and become less compartmentalized. Interdisciplinary programs have flourished, producing many unforeseen results and opportunities.

Twenty years later, the changes wrought by that Board’s broader vision are evident everywhere. Our Media Lab is a model used by other universities to embrace integrating technologies. The D-Lab is respected worldwide. Kendall Square has been transformed into a worldwide biotech hub of collaboration and innovation.

While 50 years ago it might have been inarguable that MIT was one of the top science and engineering institutions in the country, today, it is equally indisputable that the Institute is one of the world’s top universities,

OPINION POLICY

Management

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

Editorials

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

Guest Submissions

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

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

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

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

Free speech needs defenders, not gatekeepers

By *The Tech* Editorial Board

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

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

viduals for making statements about Charlie Kirk after his assassination.

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

We condemn the hate speech and symbols that have appeared on campus. Anonymous or bad-faith attacks have replaced honest discussion to become the language of much of our campus and institutions around the country. The consequences of such behavior are especially clear on social media, which has become the platform housing the discussion of controversial topics. Behind screens, students across the political spectrum lash out at one another, impress discriminatory titles and affiliations onto others, and contribute to an ever-more polarized environment on our campuses.

MIT is home to a wealth of ideological diversity, and this is a strength among many that makes the Institute a hub for innovation. Thus, we have a duty to protect the right to freedom

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

As MIT's oldest and largest student-run newspaper, *The Tech* remains committed to protecting speech on campus. Student journalists have a duty to cover global and local issues, including conflicts with profound humanitarian consequences, with accuracy, context, and without fear. As campus communities navigate deep disagreements over events in Gaza, our role is to inform, to listen to all voices, and to create space for understanding. The targeting of student protestors, leaders, and journalists – Rumeysa Ozturk, Mahmoud Khalil, and many others – underscore the importance of freedom of press and remind us that open discourse is essential to reconciliation.

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

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

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

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OPINION IN REVIEW

2025 saw *The Tech's* Editorial Board lift the suspension on the Opinion section while the ramifications of President Donald Trump's re-election rippled through MIT. Along with its peer institutions, MIT suffered the consequences of capricious budget cuts that seriously threatened class offerings, research, and student admissions. Meanwhile, support for Palestine has not waned, as Israel's genocide in Gaza becomes more and more undeniable. The Trump administration presented several universities with a Faustian bargain, with MIT rejecting its Mephistophelian compact. As the federal government becomes increasingly authoritarian at home and abroad, the only thing we know for sure is that there is more to come.

Our university is a hub for brilliant minds and varied opinions, and we are committed to making the Opinion section reflect those differing viewpoints. As such, we've implemented strategies to prevent excessive, repetitive exchanges that could degrade the section's quality. We strived to consistently enforce these rules, regardless of our agreement with the author's position, knowing that the section's integrity is ultimately paramount.

The Opinion Editor position sat vacant during V145, so the other members of the Editorial Board assumed the responsibilities of the position. We faced many challenges – we often found it difficult to distribute tasks equitably or maintain a unified stance when we naturally disagreed. Nonetheless, we're proud of the work we've put into the Opinion section over the past volume, and we look forward to V146, which will bring our new Opinion Editor and many improvements to come.

Geoffrey Enwere '26
Volume 145 Managing Editor and
Editorial Board Member

Commencement 2025

Commencement, from Page 16

period. As such, it continually attracts some of the world's best scholars.

This turn of events could be construed as a self-perpetuating cycle. Still, I think we need to be mindful that the future existence of this positive feedback loop is by no means guaranteed. The powerful engine that many have worked exhaustively to develop will always require a constant supply of the best and the brightest to continue to push the frontiers of what is possible.

As I see it, aspiring academic athletes must not only recognize that MIT is not only a good place to develop their skills, they must also viscerally know that the Institute will always put a premium on protecting them personally while providing them with the latitude to explore and express their ideas. If the Institute cannot provide this, the world's top academic athletes will most assuredly find another place that does.

We live in troubled times. As engineers, doctors, economists, professors, and scientists we have become very concerned that scientific analysis and process have been ignored, and often are often disparaged, for political advantage by individuals of dubious motivations.

At Thursday's graduation, MIT sent another signal to the world.

From my perspective, it was the wrong one. I am troubled by President Kornbluth's pronouncement on Thursday that the "friction of disagreement is a very effective way to sharpen each other's thinking."

My discomfort arises not from the plain text of her message, but rather from the message when juxtaposed with the Institute's subsequent actions of that day – that the Class President was banned from walking at a subsequent degree ceremony.

MIT's punitive treatment of the 2025 class president for expressing her own opinions

causes President Kornbluth's statement to come off not as a statement affirming academic independence, but rather as calculated, apologetic appeasement, designed to protect the financial interests of the Institute.

While I have been troubled by this turn of events, I am not willing to take the path of some of my peers who have come to conclude that MIT no longer shares their personal values. They have decided that they can no longer justify continuing to financially and emotionally support it.

MIT has been too important to my personal development as both a student and as a person for me to ever abandon it. While this path has sometimes been rocky, I will always be grateful to it for the things the Institute has given me and the opportunities that it has afforded.

I view the Institute and its community as a family. Families work out problems together and move forward. I am hopeful that given time and reflection, that MIT will regain its footing and once again embark on its mission of not only scientific excellence, but also of academic and world leadership.

In the meantime, I have decided that this year I will do what for me was once unthinkable. I will give half my funds earmarked for academic giving to Harvard University.

I very much believe that many of the things I hold dear are under siege.

My decision to contribute to Harvard is based on the reality that, today, Harvard finds itself in the crosshairs of those who would try to dismantle the protections for free speech, academic freedom, and scientific credibility, seemingly for their own personal enrichment. I much appreciated Harvard's efforts to continue to speak truth to power regardless of the cost.

Right now, intentionally or unintentionally, Harvard finds itself at the frontline of this

battle. I may not agree with all of Harvard's decisions, but I am much more fearful of the prospect where a strategy of "divide and conquer" succeeds than I am fearful of creating the perception that I implicitly agree with all of Harvard's decisions.

(Yes, my decision is somewhat ironic coming from a guy who, in 1979, waded along with other unnamed accomplices through the freezing Charles River to paint a carefully engineered big red "T" on the Harvard dock the night before the Head of the Charles Regatta. My guess is that if you live long enough, you'll likely see everything.)

Sadly, today, resisting power comes with a very, very, steep price.

This said, I would contend that sacrificing one's ideals by appeasing power to avoid conflict, comes with a much larger long-term bill.

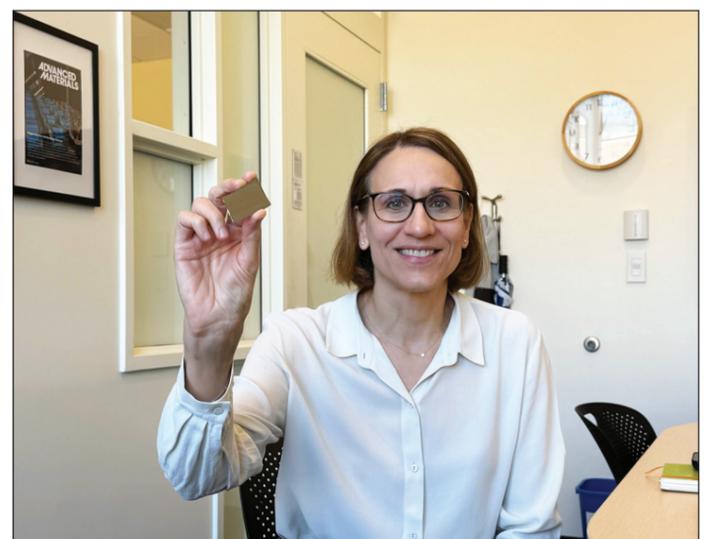
I realize I am just one small pail of water in a vast ocean of MIT alumni donors. MIT should hear that very many of us are willing to sacrifice to support it in defense of the fundamental values which we all hold dear. I imagine the same could be said for many students, professors, and staff.

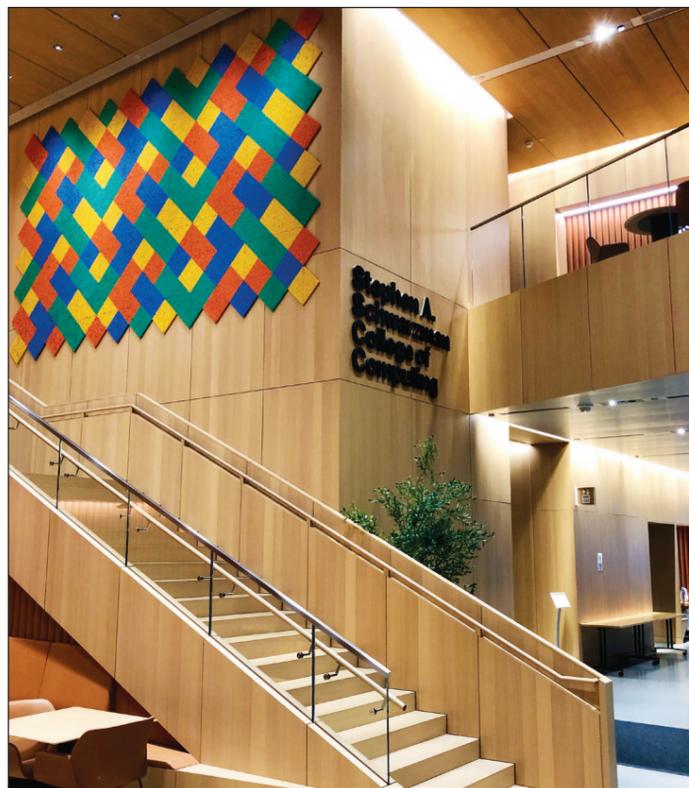
Whether this knowledge will change the current calculus, only time will tell.

Jim Zaorski graduated from MIT with a BS in Mechanical Engineering in 1980 and received his JD from Rutgers University-Camden in 1983. He was founder and CEO of Sequoia Retail Systems from 1984 until it was acquired by Blackboard Inc. in 2016. He has continued to be involved with the MIT community, working with and helping to fund Susan Murcott's clean water projects in Nepal and Ghana, donating to the MIT Climate Clock, and judging and contributing funds to the PKG IDEAS Social Innovation Challenge.

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Reading a university newspaper during a turbulent year creates a strange kind of whiplash. Any headline feels manageable alone: a policy change, a protest, a funding cut, a record-breaking statistic. But taken together, they don't resolve into a clean narrative. There's growth alongside contraction. Celebration alongside quiet loss.

We didn't come to MIT expecting to spend our nights arguing over editorial calls, weighing how to cover stories that would upset people we know, or learning to read between official statements and lived reality. We came to study science and engineering, to leave with technical skills and a clear professional path. Instead, we learned how much goes unseen depending on where you're looking from. We learned that the most important truths are often the least measurable. Our training tells us to eliminate confounding variables, to separate signal from noise. But Institute life is all confounding variables. The noise is the story.

Our science backgrounds turned out to matter, too. Journalism isn't so different from research — you start with assumptions, and your job is to test them. If you think you already know the story before you report it, you're probably wrong.

That became clear when we reported on AI in education and research. I expected broad agreement within departments. Instead, we found sharp disagreement even among people in the same field. The story wasn't "MIT embraces AI" or "MIT resists AI." It was uncertain. That only surfaced because we asked people what they actually thought, not what we assumed they would say. Science gave us facts. Journalism gave us context. Both matter.

MIT doesn't exist in a bubble. Being a student here means moving through overlapping worlds: campus culture and hierarchies, Cambridge's mix of wealth and precarity, and a Boston shaped by both activism and segregation. This is MIT at the street level — it's messy, imperfect, and alive. It taught us

about scale and solidarity in ways no classroom could.

MIT trains us to believe that any problem can be solved with enough technical expertise, but questions about power, values, and the kind of society we want don't yield to optimization.

At *The Tech*, we tried to reflect the full range of student life, even when that meant discomfort. We covered protests because MIT students were there, and they mattered. We covered campus preview weekends and record-breaking yield rates because those mattered too. We reported on federal funding cuts as research grants were terminated and health budgets shrank. All of it belonged in the record.

Years from now, when someone wants to understand what MIT was like in 2025, they won't turn to glossy reports. They'll look at the student newspaper. I hope they'll find a community wrestling honestly with itself. I hope they'll observe students from hundreds of backgrounds trying to make sense of the Institute they're both part of and

trying to change. I hope they'll see championships and protests, scholarships and visa fears, ambition and uncertainty living side by side.

My science training gave me a deep respect for MIT. But respect gets complicated when you're responsible for telling the truth. The hardest editorial choices came when accuracy conflicted with institutional comfort.

Our job wasn't to resolve MIT's contradictions. It was to document them, to say: this happened, people cared, and it mattered. MIT has enormous power to shape research agendas, to credential future leaders, to anchor regional economies, to influence policy. If we don't tell our own story, someone else will. They'll flatten it. They'll miss the texture.

This year contained multitudes. We tried to bear witness to as many of them as we could. And in a year like this one, that may have been the most important thing we did.

— Karie Shen '27,
Volume 145 Editor-in-Chief



Punxsutawney Phil's predictions are in, and this year the science agrees

A tale of two (and counting) storms

By Daina August

SCIENCE STAFF WRITER

Massachusetts is far from the only state to be hit with heavy snowfall this winter. The same storm that closed MIT campus on Jan. 26 led to the cancellation of over 19,000 flights as well as a series of power outages impacting over a million people. Extreme cold, ice, and winter storm warnings were issued in counties across 41 states, including Texas and other parts of the Deep South, where infrastructure required to withstand the extreme cold does not exist. A week later, a nor'easter hit the southeastern U.S., bringing snow as far south as Fort Myers, Florida, and up to 20 inches in North Carolina. Fortunately for Cambridge, the path of the storm curved eastward offshore, missing the city and triggering coastal flooding warnings in Nantucket and the Cape Islands. Though nor'easters have long been associated with winter in New England, snow in Florida is certainly unusual. So where did these storms come from?

Demystifying the polar vortex

These two storms, as well as the freezing weather they brought with them, were

caused by a polar vortex event. The polar vortex is a rotating low-pressure cell of cold air located in the stratosphere above the North Pole. Directly below it in the troposphere is the polar jet stream, a circular wind system that keeps cold Arctic air close to the pole. When the stratosphere warms and the polar vortex weakens, the jet stream also weakens. A weakened jet stream tends to deviate from its usual path and wander southward, bringing cold air with it. While there is natural variation in jet stream strength, severe southern wandering like what the U.S. is currently experiencing is rare. These events are becoming more common, bringing Arctic temperatures to areas of the world that lack the appropriate infrastructure for such conditions, but scientists are unsure of exactly why.

A wandering jet stream will definitely bring frigid polar air. Nonetheless, this phenomenon alone is not the cause for winter storms; there needs to be a source of moisture. The Gulf is a suitable candidate if the polar vortex extends south enough. In addition to these moisture-catalyzed storms, polar vortex events can also lead to a process known as bombogenesis. According to

the late meteorologist and MIT professor emeritus Fred Sanders, bombogenesis occurs when a low-pressure system's pressure drops at least 24 millibars in 24 hours. These pressure drops are boosted by strong temperature differences between air masses, such as when smaller waves in the jet stream break off and form independent systems with a core of polar air. The storm from last weekend is an example of a weather system that underwent bombogenesis.

Ongoing research

As the Arctic warms, polar vortex events are becoming more frequent. Although it's still unknown how exactly these two events are connected, scientists like MIT Visiting Scientist Dr. Judah Cohen are trying to find ways to predict these extreme cold spells. Dr. Cohen and his team are focusing on how the polar vortex is shaped by year-to-year weather conditions, such as Siberian snowfall and sea ice cover in nearby areas of the Arctic. According to their model, temperature differences between areas of Siberia may be linked to the instability and stretching of the polar vortex. Years where Siberia received high levels of early-season snow while the nearby Barents and Kara

Seas had less sea ice tended to correspond to anomalous cold snaps in the central U.S. This is due to regional temperature differences forming atmospheric waves, which can reflect upward and disturb the shape of the polar vortex.

Cohen's team have trained a machine learning algorithm to identify these disturbances and provide potential early warning for polar vortex events. This algorithm is unique in that it is used to predict cold snaps several weeks in advance, a much longer timescale than standard ten-day forecasts. Last December, this model was able to predict a smaller-scale polar vortex event — which caused temperatures to plunge the week before MIT's fall semester finals — earlier than traditional forecasting methods. In the short term, Cohen's forecast indicates that the rest of this winter will be very cold. Even if there is not a full polar vortex collapse like some meteorologists predict, more stretching like what has already been seen is very likely. One can only hope that Punxsutawney Phil was wrong again this year, but all signs point to his wintry six-week prediction being painfully accurate.

Chocoholics Unite!

At the MIT Laboratory for Chocolate Science, eating experimental results is not only encouraged—it's part of the fun

By Veronika Moroz

SCIENCE EDITOR

It's Friday night, and a loud clanging noise can be heard from the ground floor of Simmons Hall. A group of MIT students and affiliates is hard at work performing a monumental experiment. The clanging is coming from the final step of their process, when they "set" their experimental creation by tapping trays against a table to pop any air bubbles that might complicate their results.

Not that those results could ever be anything less than delicious. The scientists in question are part of the MIT Laboratory for Chocolate Science (MIT LCS), a student group whose mission statement includes "spreading the appreciation of chocolate on campus." Every Friday night at 7 p.m., members congregate at Simmons to make, discuss, and eat their favorite delicacy.

A sweet revival

The MIT LCS was founded in 2003. At one point, the club went through over 500

pounds of chocolate a year. For Sara Winther '27, the club was one reason she chose to attend MIT. "I was like, 'Oh, they have a chocolate club?'" Winther recalled. "This has to be a good place."

MIT LCS was on hiatus when Winther arrived on campus in 2023. That all changed at the end of her freshmen year, when Winther saw an email from past members looking for people to restart the club.

Winther immediately knew she had to join. "I was actually in Greece that specific day because I was on vacation with my family," she explained. "We had just arrived. It [was] very late in the evening because of the time difference, and I [remembered], 'Wait, I need to go on a meeting for chocolate. This is important.'"

Ever since that fateful meeting, Winther has served as the secretary of MIT LCS. A materials science student and avid chocolate expert, Winther sat down with *The Tech* to talk about the science behind this beloved Valentine's Day staple.

The perfect bite

Chocolate comes from cocoa beans that go through a long series of processing steps. The beans are harvested, fermented, dried, shelled, and then ground up and mixed with other materials (like sugar or milk powder) and refined. The resulting intermediate — baking chocolate — is where MIT LCS's molding process begins.

The club buys baking chocolate in bulk online, often from brands like Guittard and Calbot, before melting the chocolate to get their preferred texture. Chocolate is a complex molecule: while substances like water only have three phases — solid, liquid, and gas — chocolate has six. Each phase additionally has a different texture and melting point, corresponding to a specific crystal configuration of the triglycerides — the fats in cocoa butter.

The phases are numbered in order of melting point, with Phase I having the lowest and Phase VI having the highest. According to Winther, most chocolate eaters prefer Phase V, which "melts at about the temperature that you have in your mouth, but not the one that your skin is at." Phase V chocolate also has an appealing glossy exterior and a "nice snap" when you bite into it, Winther said.

However, achieving the desired texture is not as simple as ordering a particular phase of chocolate online. To purify choco-

late so that all of the crystals are aligned in Phase V, the MIT Chocolate Lab uses a process called tempering.

The science behind a silky-smooth bar

Tempering isn't actually unique to chocolate: in fact, Winther noted that steel manufacturers use a similar process to produce strong iron. Here's how it works: first, students heat up the chocolate, breaking all of the crystal bonds and liquifying the substance. When it cools down, the chocolate is mostly in Phases III, IV, and V. These are the highest available energy states because Phase VI takes a long time to form naturally.

To get rid of Phases III and IV, students raise the temperature between the melting point of Phase IV and Phase V. While not high enough to melt Phase V chocolate, the temperature is hot enough to melt all Phase III and IV chocolate in the mixture. As the former Phase III or IV chocolate cools, the crystals attach themselves in the Phase V configuration, Winther explained. This creates a bar with uniform texture.

Based on the size of the batch, MIT LCS can employ a special technique called seed tempering. By melting some untempered chocolate and then adding in about a third of its weight in tempered Phase V chocolate, this effectively creates a template for which crystal structure the cooling mixture should follow. MIT LCS has its own seed tempering machine, which they use whenever they're working with at least 12 pounds of chocolate.

Once the chocolate has been tempered, the students pour it into special molds and tap the molds against the tables to release air bubbles. These molds are so delicate that they can only be hand-washed with warm water: any soap or corrosive chemical risks leaving a tiny hole in the mold where chocolate can get stuck. Excess cracks or moisture can disrupt the chocolate's crystal structure, causing sugar or fat to crystallize on the outside of the chocolate bar and producing white stains called "blooms." While sugar or fat blooms don't change the taste or texture of the chocolate, they prevent the resulting candy from having the perfect sheen that confectioners desire.

Spreading love like it's (melted) chocolate

MIT LCS's meetings are open to everyone in the MIT community. Sometimes, they run chocolate molding sessions.



PHOTO COURTESY OF MIT LCS

Students in the MIT Laboratory of Chocolate Science (MIT LCS) molded chocolate designs of MIT.

Other times, they play board games and sample different types of chocolate, discussing the difference in mouthfeel and flavor profiles of beans from different parts of the world.

They also organize public-facing events, like tours of the Taza Chocolate Factory and fundraisers where they sell their creations. Last year, the club led a chocolate-making workshop at Walker Memorial for graduate students living at 70 Ames Street.

For Winther, MIT LCS has become more than just a place to celebrate chocolate. "It's a community where I can actually relax," she said.

By hosting meetings on Fridays, the club offers a space for people to de-stress after a long week. "Instead of just going home and collapsing and being like, 'Oh my god, I have so much to do this weekend,' you actually have a dedicated hour to hang out with friends," Winther said. "And then maybe [you can] cheer up a bit, because [you] can get a bit of chocolate."



PHOTO COURTESY OF MIT LCS

The MIT Laboratory for Chocolate Science created chocolate shells with varying designs.

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Seahawks defense dominates Patriots to win Super Bowl LX

The Seattle Seahawks defeated the New England Patriots 29-13 to win Super Bowl LX this past Sunday

By **Matthew Barnett**
SPORTS EDITOR

On Sunday, Feb. 8, the Seattle Seahawks, led by their stout defense, defeated the New England Patriots 29-13 to win Super Bowl LX in Santa Clara, Calif. The victory secured the Seahawks their franchise's second Lombardi Trophy and gave New England their sixth Super Bowl loss in franchise history, an NFL record.

How the game went

The first three quarters of the game were marked by elite defensive play from both Seattle and New England. Both defensive fronts applied constant pressure on the opposing quarterbacks, keeping both Sam Dar-

nold and Drake Maye off target and out of the endzone. The bulk of early offensive productivity came from Seattle's run game, led by running back Kenneth Walker III. Consistent gains by Walker III positioned Seattle to convert four field goals through three quarters, making the score 12-0 late into the third quarter.

A strip-sack of Maye by Seahawks defensive end Derick Hall at the end of the third quarter was soon converted into the first touchdown of the game early in the fourth quarter. Sam Darnold hit tight end AJ Barner for a 16-yard touchdown pass to cap off a one minute and 24 second drive to push the score to 19-0.

The Patriots quickly responded as Maye capitalized on a hurry-up offensive play, catching Seattle cornerback Riq Woolen out of position and sending a 35-yard touchdown pass over his head to wide receiver Mack Hollins.

Though the quick score might have seemed like a momentum shift, the Patriots could not keep things trending in a positive direction. Maye was subsequently intercepted on two consecutive drives as the Patriots attempted to climb out of the 19-7 deficit. The first interception was converted for a Super Bowl record 5th field goal by Seahawks kicker Jason Myers, making the score 22-7. The second interception

was returned 45 yards by DE Uchenna Nwosu for a touchdown, all but sealing the game at 29-7 with four minutes to play.

A seven-yard touchdown pass from Maye to running back Rhamondre Stevenson brought the game to 29-13, but a failed two-point conversion left the deficit at 16 just outside of the two-minute warning.

Out of timeouts and out of time, the Patriots could not mount an improbable comeback as Seattle closed the door on their hopes and secured their victory over the AFC Champions.

Key players and statistics

Seahawks RB Kenneth Walker III was named Super Bowl LX MVP for his pivotal contri-

butions to the Seattle offense. Walker III rushed for 135 yards on 27 carries (5.0 yards/carry) and had two receptions for 26 yards for a total of 161 scrimmage yards.

Patriots QB Drake Maye completed 27 of 43 passes for 295 yards and two touchdowns, but threw two interceptions late while also losing a fumble that put a victory out of reach. Maye was also sacked seven times.

Patriots CB Christian Gonzalez had a phenomenal night that will be forgotten because of New England's loss. The third-year defensive back was targeted five times and allowed only one reception for 16 yards, notably recording three passes defended.

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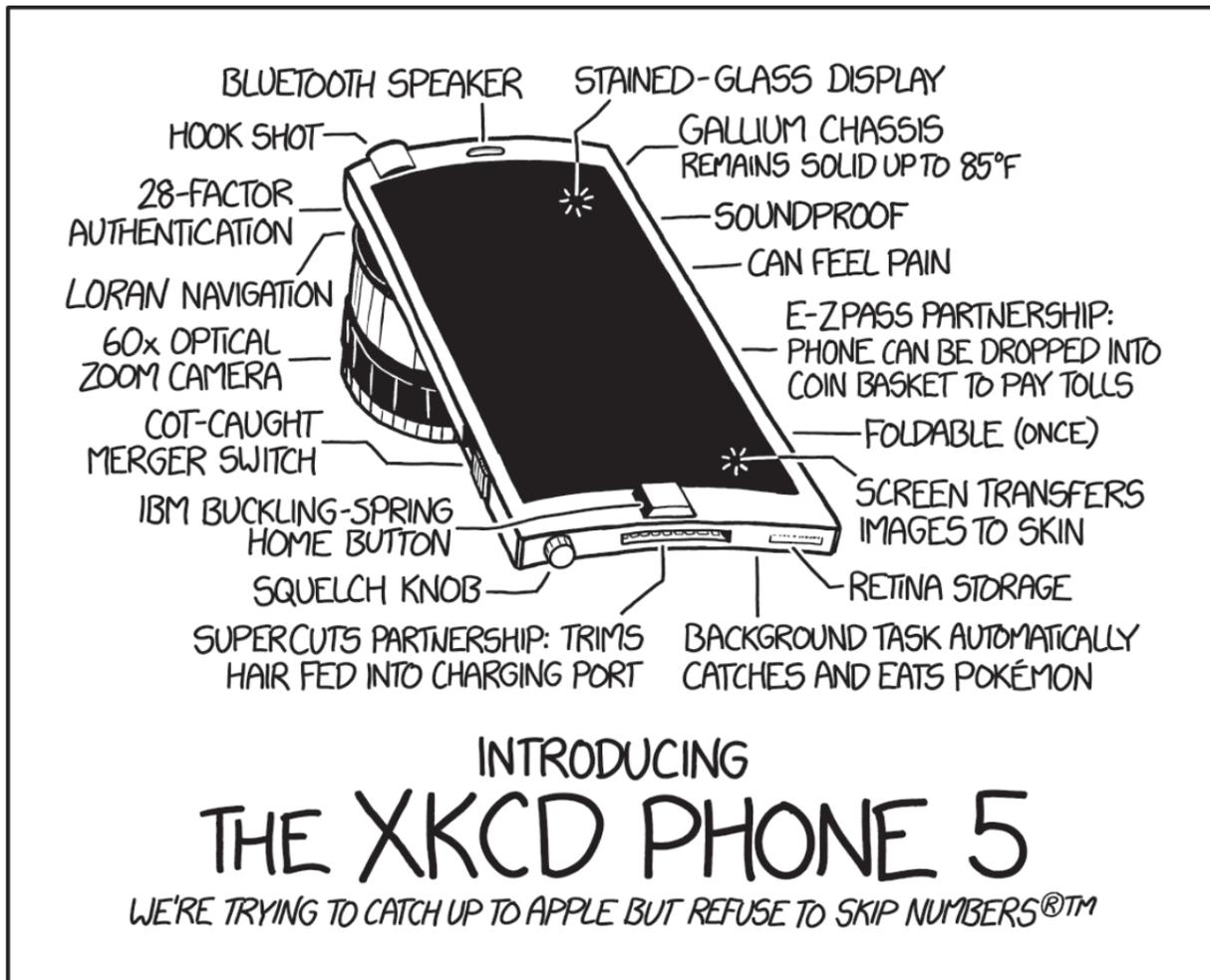
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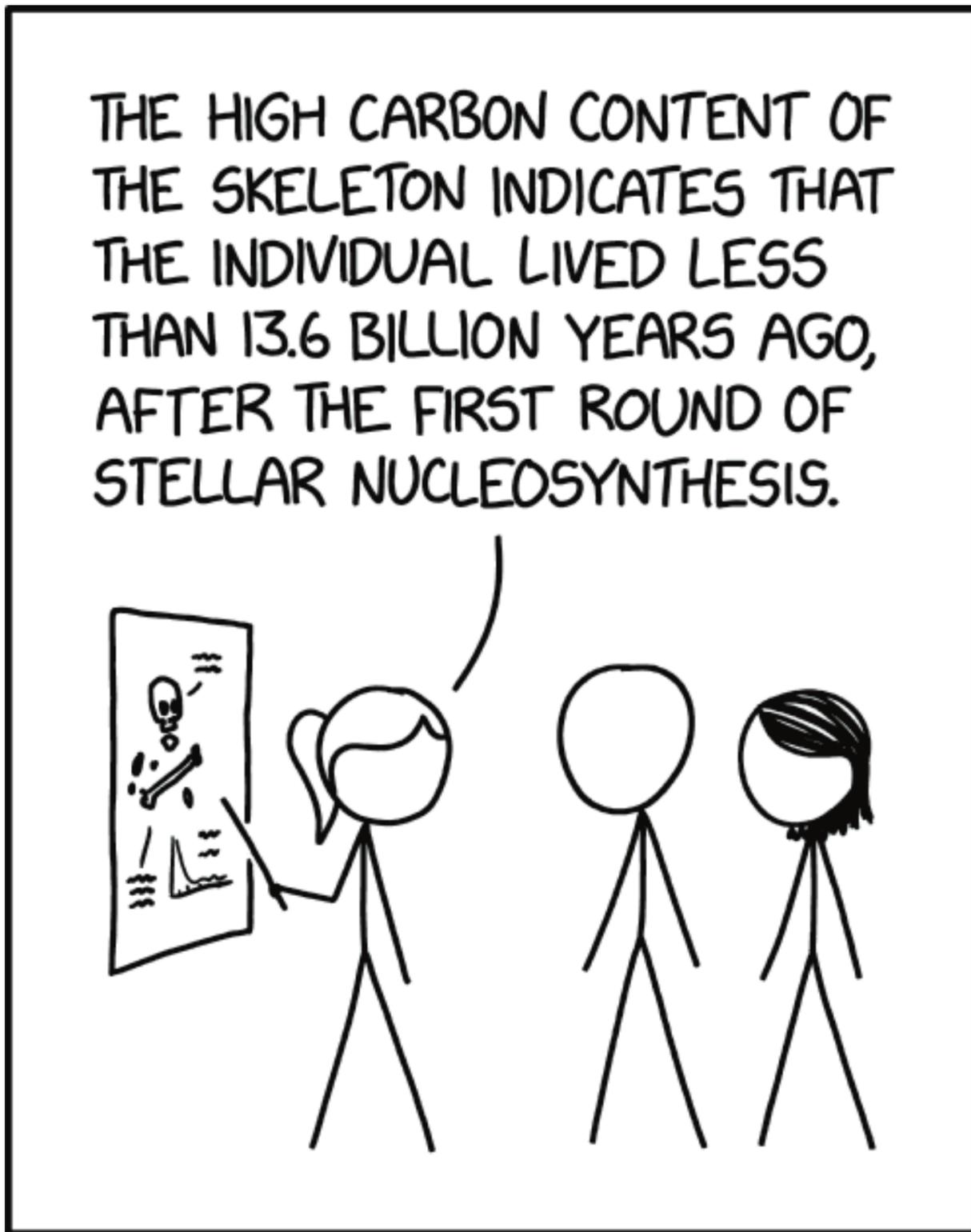
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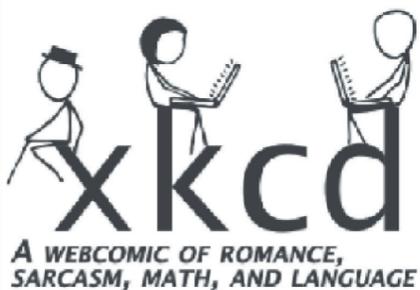
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by Randall Munroe

Katie Spivakovsky named 2026 Churchill Scholar

Spivakovsky: “Really take advantage of all that MIT has to offer”

By Vivian Hir
SENIOR EDITOR

Katie Spivakovsky '26, a biological engineering (Course 20) and artificial intelligence and decision making (Course 6-4) double major, was recently named a 2026 Churchill Scholar. Each year, the Churchill Scholarship provides 16 American students the opportunity to pursue a fully funded one-year master's degree in science or engineering at the University of Cambridge.

At Cambridge, Spivakovsky plans to pursue a Masters of Philosophy (MPhil) in biological sciences at the Wellcome Sanger Institute, a genomics and genetics research institute. In an interview with *The Tech*, Spivakovsky reflected on her path to being named a Churchill Scholar. She spoke about her interests in leveraging experimental and computational techniques for gene editing and synthetic biology research.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

The Tech: What made you interested in applying for the Churchill Scholarship? How did you feel when you were selected?

Spivakovsky: I had a desire to take a year between graduating and starting my PhD, because I felt like [while] undergrad had taught me a lot, there were still some key skills in both molecular biology and computational modeling that I thought I'd benefit

from before embarking on a PhD. For a while, I was considering doing the Course 6 MEng program here.

But in parallel, I also thought it made sense to apply for the Churchill as a way to gain direct genomics [skills] — in both wet lab and dry lab — at the Sanger Institute. It's just a year to be at one of the best genomics institutes to gain some skills before starting a PhD.

When I found out, it was very shocking and surreal. I was doing a crossword with my boyfriend in my dorm, and an email notification popped up in the corner saying, “You've been selected.” I was so stunned that the notification went away, and I kept doing the crossword, until a few seconds later, it hit that this [was] actually something that was important. I was like, “Oh my gosh, I need to stop.” I called my parents, and I think the biggest thing for me was feeling like I had made them proud.

TT: What do you intend to do as a Churchill Scholar, and how does this connect with your long-term professional goals?

Spivakovsky: The Churchill year is just a single year, which is quite short. I'm going to be joining a project that a PI already has going on at his lab. I'll be working on some of the gene editing tools that I haven't had a chance to learn yet, like CRISPR-based tools and going into the wet lab and actually using them. But then [in] parallel, I'll also learn some of the computatio-

nal workflows that are associated with both analyzing that data and generating hypotheses to go back into the wet lab to validate. For my long-term goals, I do want to pursue a PhD after the Churchill year.

In my PhD, I want it to be pretty hybrid, like wet lab [and] dry lab. Ideally, I'm interested in synthetic biology for therapeutics and using machine learning and AI to inform the designs, but primarily developing therapeutic circuits for human health.

TT: How has your MIT experience shaped the person you are today?

Spivakovsky: MIT has been so formative for me. In a variety of ways, I feel like I've tried to do MIT to the fullest extent possible. I've double majored in Course 20 and Course 6-4 intentionally, and MIT has done a great job of helping me learn both of those spheres.

Beyond just the academics, MIT has offered a lot of amazing extracurriculars and research opportunities that have helped me really iron out exactly what I'm interested in. I've done multiple UROPs. I've been involved in clubs on campus, especially the MIT Biotech Group and the NEET (New Engineering Education Transformation) community, who are so inspiring and fun to be around as well as [giving me a] better glimpse into what kinds of topics I'm interested in.

MIT, philosophically, has taught me to embrace chaos and to really



PHOTO COURTESY OF HANNAH WANG

Katie Spivakovsky '26 is a 2026 Churchill Scholar.

enjoy the feeling of biting off almost more than I can chew — but figuring it out as I go — and understanding how to tackle all of the fun opportunities in front of me.

That's how I want to live my academic life: an intentional and fun chaos where I'm in the wet lab in the morning, scrambling to write code in between meetings, and teaching a class in the afternoon — just enjoying all of these different dimensions of life.

TT: What advice do you have for MIT students interested in fellowships like Churchill?

Spivakovsky: It's easy to look at people who have won these [fellowships], see the stories that they portray and feel like it is such a polished package — that they must have been very intentional about how they crafted

their story along the way. But I don't think that's true.

The best thing you can do for yourself is truly follow the things that you're passionate about as an undergrad and trust that when it comes time for like applying either to PhD programs or to fellowships, if you just give yourself time to do some introspection, all of your past experiences will fall into place.

Besides that, really take advantage of all that MIT has to offer. I think faculty are amazing, especially in Biological Engineering. The clubs that I'm involved with have really incredible people that have taught me many different perspectives on life and academics. All of the research experiences and all these opportunities at MIT — just dive into everything.

MIT community joins “ICE Out” protest

Speaker Chris Martinez '27: “Immigrants are people, not criminals”

By Jada Ogueh
NEWS EDITOR

On Friday, Jan. 30, over 100 MIT affiliates marched from Hockfield Court to join hundreds of Bostonians protesting ICE in Copley Square amidst freezing temperatures. A coalition of Boston-area organizations including Mass 50501 and the Boston Party for Socialism and Liberation organized the Boston “ICE Out Everywhere” protest to support the call from Black and Somali student groups in Minnesota to “end ICE's reign of terror.” This protest, among others nationwide, follows the massive general strike in Minnesota where thousands of protesters took to the streets of Minneapolis to demand that ICE pull their agents from the city.

The journey to Copley Square

Around 2:30 p.m., MIT affiliates gathered in Hockfield Court. Signs planted in the ground, courtesy of the MIT Graduate Student Union (MIT GSU), read “UNIONS DEMAND: ICE OUT!”

The MIT GSU organized the MIT contingent to march to the ICE Out

tionwide shutdown to protest “ICE terror.”

“We were proud to organize a delegation of over a hundred MIT community members...in just five days,” Chua stated. She believes the broad participation in the protest demonstrates how many people are “horrified at how ICE is killing, abducting, and brutalizing people” nationwide.

According to Chua, MIT GSU's mission to improve the working and living conditions of MIT graduate workers is “deeply connected to our opposition to ICE's violent terrorization of immigrants.” She then added that 40% of graduate students at MIT are international workers. Top priorities for the upcoming contract fight include protecting international workers at MIT from ICE and the “anti-immigrant policies of the Trump administration.” Chua noted that addressing those priorities included their drafted proposals and coordinating with the broader Boston community, like the ICE Out protest.

Chua reiterated MIT GSU's commitment to stand in solidarity with their “union siblings” at the Univer-

sity of Minnesota Graduate Labor Union (UE Local 1105) and immigrant workers nationwide as “long as their rights and dignity are under attack.”

Some minutes later, the MIT delegation walked towards the Kendall/MIT station, holding up signs. In conversations with *The Tech*, some participants revealed that some had never attended a protest before, while others were seasoned veterans.

After arriving at Copley Station, MIT community members marched through the subway chanting “ICE Out” to the surprise of passersby. Frigid wind and the sight of hundreds of Bostonians holding signs with slogans such as “ICE MELTS UNDER PRESSURE” and “ARREST JONATHAN ROSS FOR MURDER NOW!” greeted the MIT group as they emerged from underground. Jonathan Ross was the ICE officer involved in the fatal shooting of Renee Good in Minneapolis.

Perspective from an MIT speaker

Chris Martinez '27 was one of the speakers. Martinez “saw the inspiring call for a national shutdown” from Black student groups at the University of Minnesota and “wanted to take [his] chance to follow their lead.”

When asked why he decided to speak at the protest, Martinez referenced three perspectives. As a worker, he was motivated by the “continuation of the history of strikes in the U.S.,” what workers have won for the American people, and the fact that workers' power can “curb the Trump agenda.” The son of immigrants, Martinez was consumed by a “deep and personal pain to see members of our communities suffer at ICE's hands.” Finally, he felt “sympathy and rage” at the deaths of Renee Good, Alex Pretti, and “too many more.” Because of his perspectives and experiences, Martinez wrote he had “a duty to channel all of this into words worthy of the moment.”

Martinez was inspired by the “historic” Jan. 30 national shutdown. “In the freezing cold, I saw a fire burning amongst the people,” he wrote. “People Power and united across ‘dividing lines’ manifesting at a scale our generation has never seen.”

In response to future plans regarding ICE demonstrations, Martinez

wrote, “It goes beyond rallies,” pointing towards political education and community building efforts as key strategies to organize a nationwide general strike to “get ICE OUT.”

Martinez stressed that now is the right time to get involved in organiza-

tions that oppose injustice. “Reform can't fix institutions as pervasive as ICE, so it must be abolished,” he urged. “ICE and fascism aren't new to the US or unique to MAGA,” Martinez said, and called out Democrats for their inaction. He also warned those telling others to “comply” that “legality has never been morality.”



LEVY LE—THE TECH

Protesters gather in Hockfield Court before heading to the anti-ICE rally in Copley Square on Friday, Jan. 30, 2026.

Other speakers Bryan Winter, a retired U.S. Army Sergeant and veteran's representative for Mass 50501, also spoke at the event. “When I stare out into this sea of courageous colors...I realize now, in a way that I never have before, that this is what Liberty is,” Winter remarked. “We are not mere protestors or activists. We are patriots. We are not Democrats or Republicans. We are Americans.”

graduate union are living in fear. “Fascism has arrived,” they remarked.

Lokesh then addressed the white members of the crowd. They stated that it is easier to relate to a white man — referring to Alex Pretti — than the hundreds of migrant workers who have faced oppression prior to the Trump Administration. They urged the crowd to have empathy for those workers as well. Lokesh also asked students to remember their privilege and power. They pointed out that deportations are part of the “larger systemic issue” of capitalism. “If they can suppress the immigrant worker,” Lokesh noted, “they can suppress you next.”

Sometime around 5 p.m., the crowd marched through the streets around Copley Square to protest ICE. The demonstrators chanted, “Immigrants are welcome here, say it loud, say it clear.”



JADA OGUEH—THE TECH

Anti-ICE protesters rally outside of the Boston Public Library in Copley Square on Friday, Jan. 30, 2026.

protest. “An injury to one is an injury to all,” said MIT GSU President Lauren Chua G. In accordance with the labor movement and the union's core principle of solidarity, MIT GSU decided to respond to the University of Minnesota students' call for a na-

sity of Minnesota Graduate Labor Union (UE Local 1105) and immigrant workers nationwide as “long as their rights and dignity are under attack.”

Some minutes later, the MIT delegation walked towards the Kendall/MIT station, holding up signs. In



Leave marks,
not sharks!

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