

MIT GSU grapples with unfruitful negotiation

So far, MIT and the GSU have reached agreement on three of 26 proposed articles

By Geoffrey Enwere and Jada Ogueh
EDITORS

Since April, MIT's bargaining team and its graduate student union (GSU) have held multiple meetings to negotiate a second collective bargaining agreement, reaching tentative agreement on three of 26 proposed articles. The original contract expired on May 31, leaving around 5,000 graduate research assistants, teaching assistants, and Instructor-Gs working under the terms of the expired agreement.

After months of stagnant bargaining, the GSU launched a pledge on September 9 to strike if necessary. In a press release dated Sept. 11, 2026, the union announced that over 1,000 graduate workers have signed. It is not clear when exactly the GSU is plan-

ning to strike, but the last bargaining session in the month is planned for September 25.

Background

Negotiations started on April 24 with a rally at Hockfield Court with priorities derived from a Fall 2025 survey of nearly 1,800 union members.

In the last week of May, MIT suggested a 12-month extension to the existing contract and an immediate 3% raise. The union stated that MIT presented the offer late at night, marked it as non-negotiable, and set a two-day deadline. At 1 p.m. on May 28, during Commencement, graduate students protested on 77 Massachusetts Avenue.

On June 1, the union rejected the offer without presenting it to the members for a vote and countered with a three-month extension instead.

MIT rejected the counter-proposal, expressing a preference for long-term stability amid what Vice Chancellor for Graduate and Undergraduate Education David L. Darmofal called "a period of significant research funding uncertainty" in an email to the MIT community.

In July, President Trump signed a bill imposing an 8% tax on the annual investment return from university endowments, which, according to leadership, cost around 10% of MIT's annual central budget and resulted in a 16% decrease in "campus direct research activity charged to federal grants."

Darmofal later stated that since the union rejected the offer, bargaining unit members would not get a raise

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PHOTO PROVIDED BY LAUREN CHUA/MIT GSU

Members of the GSU gather on Sunday, Sept. 6, 2026, in preparation of a potential strike if a bargaining agreement is not reached.

Transformed MIT Metropolitan Warehouse opens

Construction on the historic Metropolitan Warehouse first began in 1894

By Samuel Yuan
NEWS EDITOR

The newly transformed MIT Metropolitan Warehouse opened on Sept. 8 with a ceremonial procession by the School of Architecture and Planning.

Situated at the corner of Vassar St. and Massachusetts Ave., the 200,000-square-foot building now houses the Departments of Architecture and Urban Studies as well as several studios and makerspaces.

The architectural surgery performed on the historic building was designed by Diller Scofidio + Renfro, a New York-based architecture firm that has also completed projects such as New York City's High Line and the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Museum.

The brick monolith once served as a storage facility for Boston's wealthiest families, holding goods

like pianos and furs. MIT acquired the building in 1962.

The project's biggest challenge was turning a warehouse designed for objects into a building suitable for people doing creative work.

"Its low floor-to-floor heights, tight column grid, and absence of windows produce dark, cellular spaces without light or fresh air that were inhospitable for academic, much less creative, work," Diller Scofidio + Renfro wrote in a project description.

Following the makeover, large sections of the building's brick walls were replaced with glass, and several open atrium spaces for studios were created by cutting away swaths of the original masonry floors.

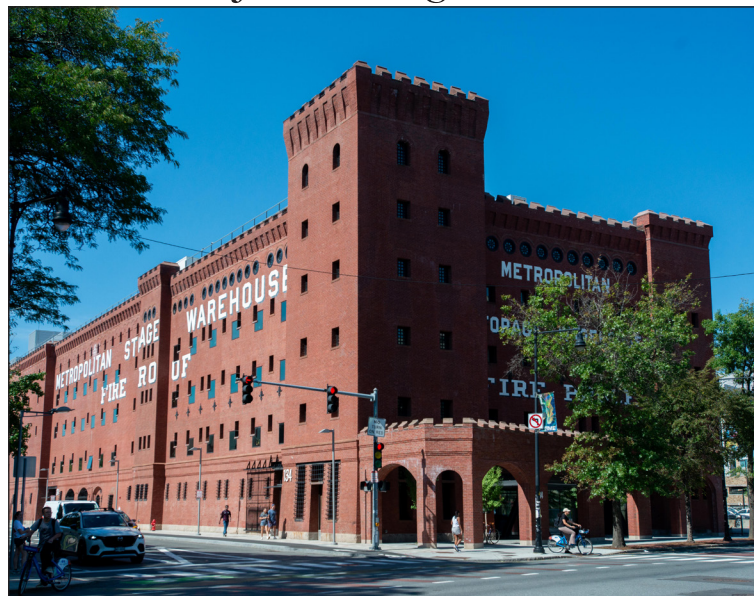
In addition, portions of the original brick archways were left exposed beneath the new floors, preserved so that architecture students could see how the structure was transformed.

"The techniques used in this adaptive reuse project have a pedagogical objective: to expose layers of history and allow students to experience firsthand the possibilities of breathing new life into a relic previously thought to be uninhabitable," the firm wrote.

In a statement to MIT News, Dean of the School of Architecture and Planning Hashim Sarkis said the move reflects the school's bet on the future of architectural reuse.

"I think it sends a very good message that this vanguard school of architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology is moving into a historic building and adapting it for the future," Sarkis said.

The project was supported in part by philanthropy from the T.H. Chan family, Sidara, and MIT alumni, friends, and volunteers.



LEVY LE—THE TECH

The Met Warehouse (Building W41) opens as a new hub for the School of Architecture and Planning. Saturday, September 12, 2026.

MIT AI report hints at Institute's future

Klopfer, Madden: "Changes must be made alongside the students who are impacted"

By Graham Schmidt

On Aug. 13, 2026, MIT's Ad Hoc Committee on AI Use in Teaching, Learning, and Research Training released their final report after nine months of deliberation. Charged by the Institute in January, CMS-W Professor Eric Klopfer and Faculty Head of Computer Science Sam Madden directed the committee of staff, students, and professors, many of whom had previously studied at MIT.

The committee, as established in a letter from MIT leadership, sought to assess AI usage on campus, find opportunities to leverage AI in education, and, ultimately, propose an AI use policy.

Since the first public release of ChatGPT in late 2022, the widespread adoption of generative AI has forced universities to react in varying ways.

For example, Harvard requires each instructor to clearly define course rules around AI use without establishing campus-wide rules. Brown, based on its own report on AI in teaching and learning, opted for a broadly applicable set of guidelines for generative AI while allowing departments and programs to develop additional standards for their specific areas.

Other institutions have leaned into the new opportunities that AI presents. Purdue has expanded its curriculum with an AI course catalog and has designed multiple new undergraduate majors in AI, similar to MIT's Artificial Intelligence and Decision Making (Course 6-4) major. Purdue also became the first university to add an AI competency graduation requirement.

To orient its own response to the prevalent use of AI on campus, the committee relied in part on two com-

munity surveys in Fall 2025 and Spring 2026. Unsurprisingly, the surveys revealed that most students, faculty, and staff use AI on a daily basis for a variety of tasks, believing that it makes them more efficient. Nearly 80% believed that AI skills would be necessary for their future careers.

But many survey takers also expressed significant anxieties. Some had concerns about the accuracy of models and their impacts on society, intellectual property, and the environment. Among all respondents to the 2026 survey, 48% worried about the cognitive consequences of relying on AI. Only 25% of undergraduates felt that MIT was preparing them to use AI professionally. And in its assessment of the current educational landscape, the committee highlighted decreased engagement among peers, weakened teacher-student relationships,

increased difficulty in evaluating student work, and less "creative friction" that drives learning.

Adapting educational processes

"AI can produce credible solutions and provide reasonable responses to almost any written assignment in our undergraduate curriculum," the committee wrote. The report noted a drop in the number of students spending time in-person learning spaces such as office hours, class discussion boards, libraries, and group study sessions.

To adapt to these realities, the report made a number of suggestions. Instructors should shift their focus toward course content that cannot be easily completed by AI, such as in-class discussions, oral exams, and long-term projects. Coursework should be designed around social learning, such

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Darmofal cites Institute’s fiscal uncertainty

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until a new agreement is finalized and that most conditions of the expired contract continue to apply in the meantime. Pay, benefits, and dues will continue to be deducted as before, and MIT will keep deducting dues and agency fees unless an individual withdraws their check-off card.

International students

The union’s Article 12 proposal would, among other provisions, bar MIT from voluntarily consenting to immigration enforcement in classrooms, labs, offices, and dormitories; require notice to the employee and union within 24 hours of any government information request, along with a two-business-day waiting period and validity check; guarantee remote work without loss of pay when a visa prevents physical presence; and extend protections to DACA recipients.

Andy Liu, a 3rd year PhD candidate in the Chemical Engineering Department and an international student from Canada, considers the Trump Administration’s threats against international student statuses as a pressing issue to his quality of life. Citing a shared fear among the international communities on campus, Liu called out MIT for refusing to guarantee these common sense protections.

In an interview with *The Tech*, GSU president Lauren Chua G stated that around 40% of the covered graduate workers in the union are international workers. “It’s a significant portion of our membership, and it’s a huge priority for everybody that international workers get the protections they need,” she said.

MIT has recognized the importance of the issue and expressed its support for international students, yet the union claims it has refused to formalize the protections and reserved the option to exclude them.

Fellows

Since the union’s April 2022 election, the status of graduate fellows has been contested. In March 2023, a National Labor Relations Board regional director determined that fellows are not considered employees under federal labor law since they are not obligated to provide services for funding, a ruling the Board chose not to revisit in July 2024.

MIT relies on that ruling and adds two more arguments: first, classifying thesis research as employment would subject international students to the 20-hour weekly work limit under immigration regulations, which the regional director considered a significant disadvantage; secondly, granting bargaining-unit

status would limit fellows’ flexibility in research and transitional funding.

The union asserts that fellows often carry out the same tasks as research assistants and teaching assistants but are left out of the contract’s protections against discrimination and disciplinary actions, highlighting departments such as Biological Engineering and Chemical Engineering that allegedly cut fellow pay bonuses without warning.

Pay and benefits

The union presented its opening economic package on June 17, more than seven weeks into talks. It included a 10% raise effective June 1, 2026, backdated, followed by 3% in 2027 and 3% in 2028, 20 vacation days regardless of appointment length, Institute-paid dependent health premiums, and several new support funds. It requested that raises be funded by the central Institute budget instead of principal investigators’ grants.

On August 13, MIT proposed a 2.75% raise and an 2.25% raise starting June 1, 2027. The union countered with 7.75% for year 1, followed by 3.5% and 3.25% for years 2 and 3 on September 14.

A living wage

The union cites the MIT-hosted Living Wage Calculator in its demands, noting it shows graduate workers earn 76% of the minimum living standard in the Cambridge-Boston area, alongside a January 2025 Graduate Student Council cost-of-living survey indicating that workers need roughly \$60,000 per year to afford average rent without financial pressure.

MIT published its own analysis on August 20, asserting that the calculator’s assumptions do not apply to its students. By their calculations, the estimated living wage is \$46,500, which is about 10% lower than MIT’s current FY26 minimum 12-month PhD RA stipend of \$51,200. MIT also published stipend comparisons on August 21 showing its FY27 minimum 12-month RA stipend of \$52,500 above every Boston-area peer and most of the Ivy+ group.

Chua claimed that, despite MIT’s “alarmist statements about funding difficulties,” the Institute is still well-funded and fully able to support all its employees, graduate students, as well as facilities and library staff.

Health care

Health care emerged as a flash point in July. MIT’s Management Rights proposal seeks to eliminate the obligation that any changes in insurance providers must preserve equal or superior benefits, while its Medical Benefits proposal aims to replace the current baseline, fixed at the Oct. 1, 2022 level, with cove-

rage matching that of non-bargaining-unit students, as adjusted by the Institute over time.

The union claims this would terminate the guarantee of benefits, such as 52 weeks of covered therapy, and has pointed out that SHIP enrollment records now indicate a fall term from Sept. 1 to Jan. 31 instead of a full year (Figure 6). When asked about the change at the table, MIT said it was not planning to change anything for now.

The union’s counterproposals move in the opposite direction of MIT’s, offering dependent coverage without premium costs, a benefits floor reset to May 31, 2026, and a Health Care Assistance Fund of at least \$400,000 per year to cover out-of-pocket expenses. On August 6, the GSU held a health care town hall outside MIT Health.

In a statement to *The Tech*, Hannah Margolis G, a graduate student in the Lamason Lab, pointed to the closure of MIT Health’s (then MIT Medical) pharmacy in 2022, the phaseout of on-demand COVID testing, and other cuts as examples to why including health care provisions in the contract is important. Margolis credits the union contract won in 2023, which added health provisions such as 52 free therapy sessions per year, as the sole reason she was able to complete her graduate work. Margolis had been hospitalized in her first year after failing to get access to a proper diagnosis and health coverage for managing symptoms. “If there is one thing I’ve learned about MIT during my five years as a PhD student, it’s that they love to cut costs at the expense of worker health and safety,” she said.

Disciplinary protections

MIT has stated unequivocally that it will not negotiate academic issues, claiming that an external arbitrator might otherwise reverse grades, qualifying exam outcomes, or degree awards, and pointing out that no comparable institution has consented to binding arbitration on academic assessments. It points to the Graduate Academic Performance Group, departmental committees, and the Committee on Discipline as existing avenues.

The GSU pushed back on the framing, clarifying that an arbitrator would only concentrate on assessing the consequences of poor academic performance, rather than deciding whether poor academic performance actually occurred. For example, they would verify whether standards were clear, consistently applied, and preceded by a chance to improve. The union pointed to a similar protection at Cornell which allows disputes concerning the

procedures and processes around academic decisions to be subject to the grievance and arbitration provisions.

“Essentially, what we’re dealing with is an employer, MIT, who will label anything and everything as academic as a way to circumvent the rights and protections enjoyed by union members,” said Chua.



PHOTO PROVIDED BY LAUREN CHUA/MIT GSU

Members of the GSU protest proposed changes to MIT SHIP among other key issues outside of Lobby 7 on Thursday, Aug. 6, 2026.

“The issue is less about wanting direct oversight over academic matters themselves, and more about closing a loophole that MIT has created to deny graduate workers their contractual rights to fair treatment.”

Union security

On May 11, MIT proposed converting the current agency shop, under which all bargaining unit members either pay dues as members or equivalent fees, into an open shop where payment is voluntary.

The Institute argues that students should not be required to pay thousands of dollars to a national union as a condition of holding an appointment, that non-payers would benefit from the contract regardless, and that some students have raised religious or ideological objections. It points to the Supreme Court’s 2018 *Janus v. AFSCME* decision barring agency fees in the public sector and to right-to-work laws in more than half of the U.S. MIT has also opposed a clause permitting the union to require termination of an appointment a week early (penalizing a student around \$1,000 in wages) because of unpaid dues or fees, which it claims the union has tried to enforce over amounts as low as \$5.

The union labels the proposal as union-busting and argues that an open shop would shift its efforts to recruitment while leaving the enforcement costs to a decreasing number of dues-paying members.

In a statement to *The Tech*, Chua highlighted Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s criticism of open shop policies as an effort to weaken labor unions, thereby reducing wages and infringing on civil rights: “During our first contract negotiations, over 88% of graduate workers voted down MIT’s open shop proposal. The majority of grads were pre-

pared to strike to win union shop in 2023, and we are prepared to do that again to ensure that we can maintain this critical provision.”

A potential strike

Following the same escalation pattern that led to a tentative agreement on the initial contract in September 2023, the union has begun preparing for a strike.

The union has combined bargaining with a public campaign, expanding their allyship to undergraduate students that they claim could be impacted by changes to MIT SHIP. It has also started to circulate a solidarity petition.

A strike would need a majority strike pledge. Then, a strike authorization vote would open to all card-signing members, including fellows and master’s students. After, the bargaining committee would determine whether and when to initiate the walkout. The union regained the right to strike when the contract’s no-strike clause lapsed on May 31.

MIT has said it remains committed to bargaining in good faith while maintaining that several union proposals fall outside the required topics of negotiation.

“A strike is not inevitable,” said Chua. “MIT can choose at any time to meet the needs of its graduate workers and meet our demands to have a contract that protects our healthcare, our union, and our rights.”

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JOJO'S BIZARRE MUSINGS

I was a lighthouse keeper this summer

A reflection on a summer of dead jellyfish, endless sea horizons, and small talk

By Jojo Placides
CAMPUS LIFE STAFF WRITER

The Rockland Breakwater Lighthouse is a lighthouse that sits comfortably at the end of a seven-eighths-of-a-mile granite path. Built in 1902, the lighthouse is pretty much the centerpiece of Rockland Harbor at Maine’s southern coast. If you’re a resident of the small coastal city of Rockland, whether you like it or not, you’ve probably seen the paradoxical yet peaceful sight of an old-timey house in the middle of an ocean.

This summer, I had the unique opportunity to become its keeper.

My responsibilities at the lighthouse were to open it to the public and welcome visitors in. Now, I can hear you ask: “Do you control the light yourself?”

No, I don’t. That thing has been automated since 1965.

“So Jojo, what do you even... do? At the lighthouse?”

I told stories. Over and over.

Almost every day at around 2 p.m., I would show up sweaty and a bit tired after the almost-mile long walk on flat-ish rocks. I unlocked the two rusty locks and opened the heavy metal door. My station was in what was once the living room of the lighthouse. Before I fully opened the lighthouse to the public, I took ten minutes to try to open the windows with my

looked up to a conveniently placed crack in the ceiling. Almost *all* of them laughed at this joke for some reason. I’ve never really found it funny at all.

Still, I carried on the conversation. “First time here?”

They nodded.

“In the breakwater?” To clarify if they meant first time in the lighthouse or first time in the breakwater. And usually, they say it was their first time in Maine and say wherever they came from, whether as near as Maryland or as far as Japan (and even the Philippines, where I’m from!).

At this point in the conversation, I liked to try to sneak in some advertisements for the nonprofit of lighthouse volunteers that I’m part of.

“You picked a lucky day!” I would exclaim if they said that it was their first time here. “This lighthouse is rarely open; even the residents of Rockland have never seen it open before. Now, we’re a nonprofit group of volunteers, trying to keep the lighthouse open more often. If you could chip in, that could be great. We use these funds to try to fix the tower and the light itself, which I’m sure you’re here for.”

Then came the words I’ve said so many times: “All 22 steps to the tower are too rusty to be stepped on. If anyone steps on them, *pwoof!* There goes the entire structure.”

The history of the breakwater

When visitors asked me about the his-

up decrepit. Sloops would have their parts strewn across the floor. It wasn’t until the Great Storm of 1878, which struck Rockland Harbor on Jan. 10, 1878, that Congress appropriated some funds for the construction of a breakwater.

See, this was my contribution to the breakwater’s history. For years, town historians had tried to find the exact storm that drove city residents to push their U.S. Representatives and Congress to create appropriations for funds for the breakwater. In Congress’s archives, I found a transcript of a speech of then-Maine representative Thompson Murch, who brought up the destruction of a steamer called the *Ulysses* to justify appropriations for the breakwater. Using a Python script to scrape through the archives of Rockland’s old newspaper, *The Rockland Gazette*, for any mention of a “*Ulysses*,” I found a newspaper article dated January 1878 about the “Great Storm.” Reading that title, I knew I found what I, and many others, have been looking for all these years.

I summarized all of this to the visitors, “I found this little tidbit of history myself: there was a great big storm in 1878 that convinced Congress to finally build the damn thing.” Construction took around 20 years, starting from 1880. Stone sloops used wooden cranes to lift heavy granite stones into the seabed.

“Do you know what a sloop is?” I asked the tourists in front of me. Around eight times out of ten, they didn’t know. “Here’s your fun fact of the day: a sloop is basically a sailboat with a big crane to lift the stones into the water.” Of course, I didn’t know exactly what a sloop is. I knew it was a type of sailboat, but the fact that they had a “big crane” was completely made up by me. In reality, a sloop is a sailboat with one primary mast and two main sails, but saying that they were ones that had a big crane to differentiate them from other sailboats was a lot easier to explain to the kids.

These granite stones that the sloops moved came all the way from Vinalhaven (mostly Long Cove in Vinalhaven), North Haven, and Hurricane Island. It took around 20 years to complete the breakwater. This meant that men were tirelessly (or even tirefully) carrying stones into the breakwater from 1880 to 1899.

“It took them 20 years not because it was hard to make — no, not at all!” Here came one of my quips. “It took them 20 years because Congress was so slow in appropriating the funds each year. So what do you know: Congress was so slow then, Congress is slow now.” It’s true, though!

When construction was complete, the breakwater, although protecting the harbor from harsh nor’easters, still posed a massive navigational hazard. In foggy days or dark nights, ships would crash into the breakwater even in the presence of temporary lights or fog horns. “Of course,” I added, “that was before they had GPS.”

People lived inside until 1965, when the light itself was automated. “So everything here has been frozen in time since then. Everything, from the irregular stairs to the heating systems to the refrigerator and rotary phone, has been in here since the ’60s.” The guests looked around and saw the rotary phones or the rusty mechanisms of the wooden windows. I usually directed them upstairs after that.

If they were impressed by my storytelling abilities, my raw, unfiltered humor, or my charisma (or, to be honest, probably the lighthouse), they dropped some dollar bills into the donation jar. Sometimes, they said they’d like to donate, but left their wallet in the car. To which I routinely thought to myself: “Man, it would be really good to have some sort of Venmo option,” because after a month, we still somehow didn’t have one.

Frequently asked questions

I got a lot of questions about whether I stayed inside the lighthouse overnight. Perhaps this was the most frequent question I get. “No,” I said. “The heating’s bad and the water hasn’t run since 1965. If I were to stay here overnight, I’d have to prepare as if I were out camping!”

I usually used this as an excuse to yap about the heating systems of the house. I would point to my left: a weird brick hole in the wall covered by a grate. “That’s the first heating system, built into the house in its original construction in 1902. This leads to a coal brick furnace downstairs in the basement.” Then I pointed to the radiator on my

right: “That’s the second, installed in the 1950s. None of these work anymore.”

However, I just made some of this information up. I don’t know for certain if the brick hole in the wall was ever the heating system. But it’s a lot easier to explain it that way because what else could the darn thing be? Oh, and the radiator being from the 1950s was also made up; it looked like it came from the 1950s.

Another question I got a lot was if the water went over the breakwater? After all, the surface of the ocean at high tide sometimes threatened to break through and envelop the path of granite. “Yes, it has happened!” I would reply. I pointed them to a panel with pictures of the breakwater that has ocean water above it. “Those super tides usually come in mid-August... which is right around this time of year, actually! If that happened to me right now... *whooooo-boy*, let’s just say I’d have to swim home.”

We had a stamp that leaves a pretty nice image of the breakwater lighthouse. If there were kids, I’d rip some sheets of paper from the sign-in notebook and hand them those pieces of paper. “You can get a stamp; they’re free!” I exclaimed. “Some people here get rocks and stamp them. Maybe you could even catch a fish or a lobster and stamp those instead!”

The visitors then ascended to the bedroom upstairs. There’s nothing much, just another poster about the history of the lighthouse and a bed. However, the windows are the main attraction, due to their view of the sea and breakwater from the second floor. For some reason, seeing the endless blue through a window straight out of the ’50s is just really aesthetic. When they came back downstairs, I would ask, “Good upstairs?” I’d usually get a couple of compliments about the views.

Many asked me about the airbed upstairs, assuming I actually did stay here overnight. “There was a massive winter storm that tore the shingles off the roof in January of 2024,” I would reply. “Somebody had to sleep here for multiple nights in order to fix the roof and walls that were damaged.” Of course, none of this was confirmed. All of it was pure speculation on my part.

Then the visitors would leave the lighthouse, do one trip around it, maybe spend some time on the bench, before going back to the breakwater and heading home. “But Jojo, you just made some of this information up!”, you might protest. “The sloops? Northeast? The heating systems? The reason for the beds?” What I learned from telling the stories a billion times is that it doesn’t have to be completely true, just sensational and simple enough to maintain their attention.

But this set of lines that I said every time a visitor ambles in wasn’t set in stone. The whole rehearsed conversation was more like a well-worn path, subject to change depending on how well things went. In fact, I went through a couple of variations that didn’t go well. On my first day, I welcomed somebody by asking where they were from. “Pennsylvania,” they answered.

“Damn, drove all this way here just to see a lighthouse?” I asked. They then turned to their friends and said quietly, “I don’t like that.”

Yeeeeouch.

An observation about small talk — and a theory I’ve had in my mind for a while now — is that small talk is really all about the repertoire of stories that you tell people. When I first came to MIT and went through the arduous process of Orientation 2025, there would be a set of things I’d tell people. Common conversation subjects included name, major, and where I’m from. But within that set, I included some quirky stories about me: about how, for example, I was chased in Chinatown at 3 a.m., or how I almost got removed from my valedictorian spot by my vice principal over prom. They’re... well... quirky. But they make people laugh, and it leads to a good first impression. Being a lighthouse keeper, I realized that *that* is exactly what small talk is: a predetermined repertoire of stories and quips that I’ve rehearsed with others. In small talk, you have to build a bridge between yourself and a person you met 30 seconds ago and barely know. It’s better to come prepared with the tools and materials to make that bridge.

Being a lighthouse keeper was like being a non-playable character (NPC) at times,



JOJO PLACIDES—THE TECH

A picture of me lighthouse-keeping.

trusty screwdriver and nail, using them like a chisel. I slid the metal bar that locks the window and pushed the window open. Though opening the windows was a pain, the breeze of wind that walked in and the sunlight that filled the dimly-lit room were the things I lived for.

Most people in Rockland have never seen the inside of the lighthouse before. They walk in with awe on their faces as they admire the surprisingly well kept 124-year-old lighthouse and its windows that look out into the endless sea horizon. Even if they’ve walked up and down the breakwater hundreds of times throughout their lives, they’ll testify that they’ve never seen the lighthouse open. I heard this a lot, and I *lived* for it. I *lived* for the wonder on their faces as they explored this real life easter egg they’ve just unlocked.

However, welcoming people into the lighthouse was much like reading from a script over and over. As they walked into the living room, I would open with the same words. “Hey! I’m the keeper, so try not to break everything... then again everything here breaks on its own...” and then I

tory of the place, I would say a five-minute spiel that I’d practically rehearsed a hundred times. Sometimes they called their kids from the other rooms to listen to my well-worn story. When they gathered to listen to my tale, my mouth pretty much went on autopilot.

And there it began, the history of the lighthouse, told through repeated conversations and somewhat-rehearsed quips.

“Did you know that in the 1850s, in order to get to Boston and New York, you had to go through Rockland first?” It’s a small factoid I would insert into my spiel about the breakwater’s history to illustrate its purpose. Like every story I’ve ever told, this one was unconfirmed — I just made it up to illustrate a point.

“Rockland gets battered regularly by waves and winds,” I continued, pointing towards the vague direction of the northeast, even if I didn’t know nor ever checked where the true northeast was located.

Dangerous northeastern storms (“nor’easters,” as they are called) would crash into the harbor and damage precious shipping equipment. Steamers would end

Small talk, storytelling, and slowing down

Lighthouse, from Page 4

repeating a script over and over. In my third week of doing this, I grew tired of it, so after I opened the lighthouse and its windows, I went outside and sat on the rocks and listened peacefully to the music of Santo & Johnny and The Long Faces. I'd sit at the rocks for hours at a time, admiring the view afar using the binoculars one of the other keepers gave me. Once I spotted a dead lion's mane jellyfish floating in the waters!

Though these conversations are repeated and rehearsed, I absolutely loved all the interactions I had with travellers from around the world as well as the residents, who thanked me for opening the lighthouse for them after decades of coming to the breakwater. I lived for the reactions they have to

my corny-as-hell quips. I lived for the looks of wonder that the children get when they imagine huge sloops lifting stone into the water. I lived for the stories *they* told about other lighthouses and places that they've travelled to.

Storytelling is really a medium where you transport people into another world through vivid words. Stories are how we connect.

But, perhaps most importantly, when there aren't any visitors and the breakwater seems empty, I lived for the moments in between. Being there gave me a peace I hadn't at all known in college. College is a whirlwind of faces, scenes, dialogue, big action, big duties, classes, teachers, dormitories, etc. But in this oh so cruel and fast world, maybe the lighthouse was the only

place circlin' all 'round the sun where time seemed to have stopped.

In a way, I had an intimate relationship with the lighthouse. Out of all the volunteers, I had spent the most hours — over 90 during the summer — inside the building. At this point, I knew every nook and cranny in that damned 124-year-old thing, from the creepy basement to the Fresnel lens caged on top of it. So it was a pain walking away on my last day — walking that full seven-eighths of a mile — one last time as the lighthouse shrunk and shrunk behind me. I felt it calling me. "Jojo! Come back!"

But O, Lighthouse, I have places to be.

When I came home from MIT for the summer, I wanted to work a job that brought me close to the ocean. I wanted to work on a schooner across from my house,

which would've allowed me to travel the coast of Maine every day, but I got rejected. I wanted to work at a sailing tours company, which would've allowed me to spend each morning on a sailboat overlooking the great blue, but I got rejected. It seemed that the ocean had its doors closed on me this summer.

So I wanted to work at the lighthouse because it was my excuse to get up close with the ocean anyways. For now, I won't be on a schooner or a sailboat or a sloop, but maybe I can rest this summer. A sailor's dream cannot fit within a single summer. Maybe I can chase those sailor dreams later, and for now, my life could be tending to a 124-year-old lighthouse and relaxing on the rocks every afternoon. After all, I never really got this chance at MIT.



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BALLET REVIEW

Fall Experience: Prickly, then profound

Boston Ballet’s Fall Experience of the 2026–2027 season elicits laughter and solemnity

Boston Ballet

Directed by Mikko Nissinen

Citizens Opera House

Sept. 10–20, 2026

By Karie Shen
PUBLISHER

Boston Ballet’s showings for the 2026–2027 season include full-length classical ballets like *The Nutcracker*, *Coppélia*, and *Cinderella*. Every year, Boston Ballet also offers Fall Experience, Winter Experience, and Spring Experience, which are contemporary programs. Classical ballet typically follows structured ballet movements, is set to classical music, and displays elaborate costumes. On the other hand, contemporary ballet may mix in unusual music or even narration, as well as modern or jazz dance styles, allowing for bold, experimental art.

This is the case for Boston Ballet’s Fall Experience, which is running from Sept. 10 through Sept. 20 at Citizens Opera House. The performance begins with an orchestra-only prelude of two movements from Igor Stravinsky’s *The Firebird*, “Infernal Dance” and “Finale,” performed by the Boston Ballet Orchestra, followed by two performed ballets.

Cacti

The evening opened with *Cacti* by Swedish choreographer Alexander Ekman. Viewers who came in expecting swans and tutus were in for a rude awakening. Created in 2010, the piece is a love letter to absurdism and a pointed joke at the expense of anyone who takes contemporary dance too seriously. Ekman seems to delight in the critic’s compulsion to find meaning where perhaps none is intended, and *Cacti* is his gleeful trap.

A dozen or so dancers each occupied their own large square platform, which gave the stage the look of a human chessboard. The ensemble moved in organized chaos, synchronized yet often non-uniform. The choreography wove in sounds of breathing, platform-slapping, and finger-snapping, turning the dancers’ bodies and the stage into percussion. It was deeply strange.

Ekman also had a gift for the unexpected comic beat. Dancers occasionally slapped themselves lightly across the face in deadpan unison, and the audience couldn’t help but laugh. Slow-motion sequences stretched time. Other moments recalled synchronized swimming or the absurd spectacle of a dozen dancers running in place. Shadows and light cast shapes that blurred the distinction between real movement and illusion.

Around the halfway point, each dancer acquired a potted cactus, handling it with the solemnity one might reserve for a sacred object. Ekman, true to form, offered no explanation, instead teasing the audience with confused, unclear narration.

The piece’s most charming passage was the pas de deux danced by Ji Young Chae and Daniel Rubin. It was also performed with narration, as though the dancers had been handed microphones and were broadcasting their inner monologue. It was playful and intimate, breaking from the formality of traditional performances.

Cacti is an uncomfortable piece, but it is an incredible sensory experience.

Vertical Road (Reimagined) 2023

The second ballet of the night is *Vertical Road (Reimagined) 2023*, created for the Boston Ballet by Akram Khan. If *Cacti* was a provocation, *Vertical Road (Reimagined) 2023* was a reckoning. As described in the program, this piece “explores humanity’s earthly nature, rituals, and the consequences of our actions.” It was a strikingly beautiful ballet.

The set was virtually empty, and felt like a sacred ground. Dancers wore ancient-style tunics and were dusted in powder so that every movement released small clouds into the dimly lit air.

The piece opened with a striking image of division. Two dancers were set apart from the ensemble — one was utterly still and statue-like, while the other moved around them with desperation, as if trying to call them back. The rest of the ensemble moved as one organism: forceful and pulsing. It was ritualistic.

Khan draws his inspiration from the Sufi tradition and the Sufi poet Rumi. Sufism is a mystical branch of Islam that seeks union with the divine, and Rumi, a celebrated voice in Sufism, taught that the body in motion could become a pathway to the sacred. In *Vertical Road*, this was felt in the recurring tension between being rooted in the earth and reaching upward, as though the spine itself was a rope connecting the two. This is the “vertical road”: the distance between the mortal and the transcendent.

Then came one of the evening’s most arresting images: a transparent screen, illuminated by a warm, amber light resembling sunset. Several dancers appeared trapped behind it, pressing against its surface, while one stood marooned on the near side, reaching toward them. The screen rippled like water disturbed by something beneath. It was an image of longing and reaching toward a world just beyond one’s fingertips. *Vertical Road* felt like seeking something beyond what the body alone can reach. It left the audience moved.

The Fall Experience is a bold, striking show with the ability to deliver both laughter and deep awe. Together, *Cacti* and *Vertical Road* map a full terrain of what dance can express.



PHOTO COURTESY OF ROSALIE O’CONNOR/BOSTON BALLET
The Boston Ballet perform Alexander Ekman’s ‘Cacti’ for their Fall Experience at Citizens Opera House. September 2026.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THEIK SMITH/BOSTON BALLET
The Boston Ballet perform Akram Khan’s ‘Vertical Road (Reimagined) 2023’ for their Fall Experience at Citizens Opera House. September 2026.



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The Boston Ballet perform Akram Khan’s ‘Vertical Road (Reimagined) 2023’ for their Fall Experience at Citizens Opera House. September 2026.

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SPORTS BLITZ

By Daina August

Men’s Cross Country:

Sept. 6:

Participated in the MIT alumni meet

Sept. 12:

Participated in “Battle of Massachusetts” exhibition relays

Women’s Cross Country:

Sept. 6:

Participated in the MIT alumni meet

Sept. 12:

Participated in the “Battle of Massachusetts” exhibition relays

Field Hockey:

Sept. 1:

Win against Simmons University, 4–0

Sept. 5:

Win against University of New England, 2–0

Sept. 12:

Sept. 15:

Sept. 19:

Football:

Sept. 4:

Win against Nichols College, 35–7

Sept. 12:

Win against New England College, 70–0

Sailing:

Sept. 12:

Toni Deutsch ’58 Trophy, 6th and 7th of 17

Sept. 13:

Harry Anderson Trophy, 6th of 17

Sept. 13:

Sept. 18–19:

Sept. 18–19:

Sept. 19:

Sept. 19:

Sept. 19:

Men’s Soccer:

Sept. 1:

Win against Emmanuel College, 2–1

Sept. 4:

Tie against Suffolk University, 2–2

Sept. 8:

Sept. 12:

Sept. 16:

Sept. 19:

Women’s Soccer:

Sept. 1:

Win against Gordon College, 5–0

Sept. 5:

Tie against New York University, 0–0

Sept. 8:

Sept. 12:

Sept. 16:

Sept. 17:

Sept. 19:

Men’s Tennis:

MIT Classic (Sept. 11–13)

Win against Brandeis University, 6–2 (Singles)

Win against Babson College, 5–3 (Singles)

Win against Wesleyan University, 5–2 (Singles)

Loss against Amherst College, 1–2 (Doubles)

Win against Colby College, 3–0 (Doubles)

Loss against Babson College, 1–3 (Doubles)

Loss against Bowdoin College, 1–2 (Doubles)

Women’s Tennis:

MIT Invitational (Sept. 18–20)

Singles Main Bracket:

Katie Driscoll ’29 Quarterfinals, Sophia Yang ’29 Quarterfinals, Claire Zhou ’30 Quarterfinals, Rayna Li ’29 Round of 16, Chloe Zeng ’28 Round of 16, Carley Chen ’29 Round of 32, Anselma Petrie ’28 Round of 32

Singles Consolation Bracket:

Petrie Quarterfinals, Chen Round of 16

Singles TIM Consolation Bracket:

Doubles Main Bracket:

Doubles Consolation Bracket:

Doubles TIM Consolation Bracket:

Women’s Volleyball

Brandeis Invitational (Sept. 4–5)

Win against Stevens, 3–2

Win against Connecticut College, 3–1

Win against Wentworth Institute of Technology, 3–1

MIT Invitational (Sept. 11–12)

Win against Brandeis University, 3–1

Win against Maine Maritime Academy, 3–0

Win against University of Scranton, 3–0

NYU Mid-September Invitational (Sept. 18–19)

Loss against Ithaca College, 1–3

Win against Wentworth Institute of Technology, 3–1

Win against New York University, 3–1

Men’s Water Polo

Bruno Classic (Aug. 29–30)

Loss against Air Force Academy, 14–17

Loss against California Baptist University, 7–21

Loss against Wagner College, 13–14

Loss against University of the Pacific, 5–22

Bucknell Invitational (Sept. 19–20)

Win against Mercyhurst University, 24–11

Win against Mount St. Mary’s University, 15–10

Loss against Salem University, 10–11

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Established 1891

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Volume 121, Number 1

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WEATHER, p. 2

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Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139

Tuesday, February 19, 2003

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The ultimate guide to Boston bug battling

Boston listed as high risk for West Nile virus by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health

By Daina August
SCIENCE STAFF WRITER

Though returning to campus may feel like the end of summer, Massachusetts mosquito season lasts long beyond the end of MIT's summer break, stretching all the way to November. Although the Institute's more urban location within Cambridge and distance from wetlands like the Alewife Brook Reservation does lead to fewer mosquitoes, people playing sports in Briggs field or socializing on Kresge Lawn in the evenings may still be painfully aware of the insects' presence.

This year, mosquitoes are more than just a mild annoyance. Earlier in the summer, researchers at the Massachusetts Department of Public Health announced that mosquitoes sampled around the state tested positive for West Nile virus (WNV), a generally mild but potentially serious mosquito-borne illness. Two days before the bulk of freshmen arrived at MIT for Orientation, the Boston Public Health Commission announced that a man in his 60s tested positive for WNV, the first case in Boston this year. As of time of publication, Boston is considered high-risk for the disease, and seven people have tested positive for WNV in Massachusetts this year.

What is West Nile virus?

West Nile virus is the most prevalent mosquito-borne illness in the continental U.S. and is generally spread by mosquitoes in the genus *Culex*. In Massachusetts, there are three common disease-spreading species in this genus, two of which primarily live near urban areas like Boston and Cambridge. Those species, *Culex pipiens* and *Culex restuans*, are most active during the summer and early fall. Nationwide, the number of people who test positive for WNV peaks around early September.

For people bitten by infected mosquitoes, there is often not much of a noticeable

Some people who are fed up with constantly being bitten jokingly refer to themselves as “mosquito magnets” and resign themselves to their misfortune.

change in health. While around 2,000 people per year are typically diagnosed with WNV nationwide, this is generally assumed to be an underestimate of how many people actually have the disease. Mild symptoms of WNV are often confused with generic flu-like illnesses, with many infected people even being asymptomatic. However, elderly people and those with weakened immune systems or other chronic health conditions are at higher risk of more severe illness due to WNV. Severe WNV cases can cause infection of the central nervous system, resulting in swelling around the brain and paralysis. Of those with severe infections, about 10% of cases are fatal.

While most people are not at risk of serious disease or death, the city of Boston has encouraged residents to protect themselves against mosquito bites. These measures include limiting time spent outdoors between dusk and dawn, using EPA-approved mosquito repellents as directed, wearing long-sleeved shirts and long pants while outside, and removing or covering bodies of standing water.

New hope for "mosquito magnets"

For some, avoiding mosquitoes does not feel as easy as simply covering up. Some

people who are fed up with constantly being bitten jokingly refer to themselves as “mosquito magnets” and resign themselves to their misfortune. While scientists still do not entirely understand which exact factors make some humans more attractive to mosquitoes than others, past research has shown that human scent plays a large role.

Researchers at Florida International University (FIU) led by PhD student Kaylee Marrero have discovered that even if a person is particularly attractive to one species of mosquito, they might not be as attractive to other species.

Even then, there is likely no single recipe for becoming a “mosquito magnet,” just an unlucky combination of skin microbiota, amount of sweat, diet, and other factors.

More recently, researchers at Florida International University (FIU) led by PhD student Kaylee Marrero have discovered that even if a person is particularly attractive to one species of mosquito, they might not be as attractive to other species. Marrero and her colleagues had 119 participants take turns placing their arms in a tube separated from mosquitoes by a mesh layer and counted the number of mosquitoes attracted to the specific person. The procedure was repeated for two mosquito species, and researchers asked

participants to wear a nylon sleeve for 12–16 hours for capturing scent used to measure a third species' attraction. One of the most striking results of the study was that in most cases, no individual person was highly attractive to all three species. Marrero's team also identified the specific compounds present in participants' scent profiles in order to find commonalities between participants that were highly attractive to the bugs.

Though this type of per-species research is fairly new and the FIU study's sample size was relatively small, the idea of different types of mosquitoes being attracted to differently-scented humans makes sense from an evolutionary perspective. By using distinct factors to select targets, mosquitoes could reduce competition between species. Given how complicated human scent is, even small variations like the presence or absence of a specific compound could make an impact from a mosquito's point of view, leading to different people becoming "magnets" for different species.

The FIU team's findings could give new hope for any self-identified "mosquito magnets" by shedding light on the specific compounds different mosquito species are attracted to. With that information, it could be possible to create regional, species-specific strategies to help people more at risk of being bitten by disease-carrying mosquitoes. Unfortunately for those in Boston, the three species Marrero's team surveyed are currently not commonly found in Massachusetts. Until more research is carried out on other species' preferences, the most you can do to avoid being bitten is by using broader methods: cover up, use bug spray, and limit time outside when mosquitoes are active. Thank goodness for the Infinite!

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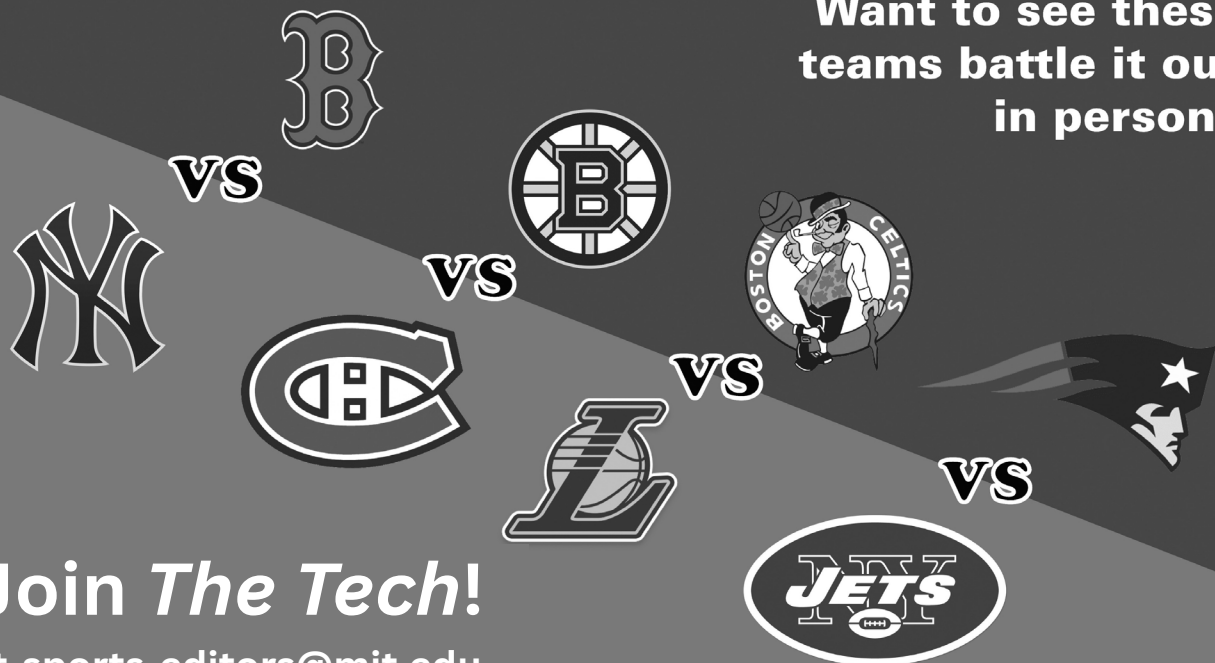
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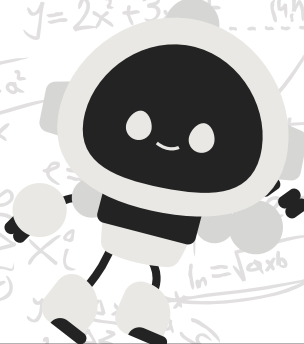
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The consequences of overrelying on imperfect AI

Professor Marzyeh Ghassemi PhD '17 PD '17 describes how using AI systems in human settings can exacerbate social inequality, and what scientists can do about it

Veronika Moroz
SCIENCE EDITOR

Applications of faulty machine learning models are already worsening existing social problems, says Professor Marzyeh Ghassemi, PhD '17 PD '17. Ghassemi runs the Healthy ML group, which uses AI to equitably improve human health. In addition to building better models, she uses her expertise to raise awareness about the ways AI can fail.

Gassemi spoke with *The Tech* about the negative impacts of applying AI to human systems and about scientists' responsibility to ensure that the technologies they develop are being used ethically. The following interview has been edited for length and clarity.

The Tech: How and why are machine learning models being used in situations where they can harm minority groups?

Ghassemi: If you train models on one dataset, it's going to do worse on another dataset, and I think that's not well communicated.

We've had AI scribes for a while now in a healthcare setting. [Assistant Professor] Allison Koenecke of Cornell Tech showed that if you pause for a long time, the OpenAI

transcription tool Whisper inserts violent and sexually explicit content into the medical notes in the acoustic pause. Some people with medical conditions or for whom English is not their first language might pause for a longer time. Some of the papers evaluating AI scribes are saying, “Some of the stuff it said wasn’t accurate, and that might cause problems.” There’s a gap between what academic machine learning communities want to show, which is the potential, and the application areas like health that have large amounts of capital.

In the U.S., [some] judges are shown scans of people's brains, and then for-profit companies will show an AI system and say, "Our model can predict that this person has a violent brain based on their fMRI scan, so they should get longer sentencing." [MIT Professor] Oliver Rollins has a book coming out on this. That [diagnosis of a violent brain] is not a real thing, but because it comes with the shininess of AI, it seems believable.

TT: What do you think it will take for AI to be deployed equitably?

Ghassemi: We should have better regulation. There's so many examples in American

history where a technology was introduced, and it can do wonderful things, but there were also harms, and so it was regulated. I think we need strong nonpartisan consumer pressure. We need to make it clear to our representatives that this is a forefront issue.

I've been told by lawyers that we decide the nitty-gritty details of our regulatory processes based on lawsuits. My hope is that there's a throughline between some of these lawsuits and better regulation. As more lawsuits are lost [by tech companies], we will see more of an appetite from government officials towards regulation. There'll be a realization that they need to step up, or they will lose elections. But it's a difficult process, and we don't actually know how we're going to get from one side to another side.

TT: What should MIT do to ensure that these new technologies are used responsibly?

Ghassemi: I think we should have a much stronger science engagement arm. There are some universities that have invested heavily in hiring faculty that have expertise in not just the technical side, but also on the regulation, legislation, and political engagement side. They have experi-

ence in how policymakers will want information given to different decision-making bodies.

As a scientist, if you love the thing you work on, it can be very hard to say, “I’m not going to support any use of my technology for anything except for this set of things.” I think that as a technology developer, you have a responsibility to communicate what other people don’t have the training to be aware of. This is not the most common view in science. People vary in their comfort levels on prescribing uses of technology, even if it’s a technology that they themselves develop.

There is a program [MIT's Science Policy Initiative] where students go to Capitol Hill, meet with staffers or congresspeople, and communicate about important issues like AI and science funding. I'm very proud that MIT has that, and I know so many graduate students who have taken the time to go on that trip. They're earning expertise here at the institution, and then they're taking the time to communicate with decision makers. Engaging with policy is very difficult, and I think it's something that we as a university should invest more in.

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Dear Class of 2030:
MIT has long celebrated the open exploration of ideas. In 2022, the faculty affirmed this tradition in a Statement on Freedom of Expression and Academic Freedom:

Learning from a diversity of viewpoints, and from the deliberation, debate, and dissent that accompany them, is an essential ingredient of academic excellence.

Debate and deliberation of controversial ideas are hallmarks of the Institute's educational and research missions and are essential to the pursuit of truth, knowledge, equity, and justice.

In accordance with these ideals, MIT's policies on speech are viewpoint-neutral. Within their bounds, community members and guests are encouraged to speak their minds freely; there should be no fear of censorship.

Learning at MIT takes place inside and outside classes, in discussion with

your fellow students, or when speakers are invited to campus. In a community committed to freedom of expression, neither community members nor outside speakers can be canceled or shouted down because their positions are controversial, or because they are perceived as offensive or harmful.

Make the most of your opportunities to engage with those whose opinions differ from your own: it will likely be to your benefit, to the benefit of your interlocutors, and to MIT as a whole. Congratu-

lations on earning a seat in the Class of 2030! We look forward to seeing you on campus.

Sincerely,
Co-Presidents of the MIT Council on Academic Freedom
Alex Byrne
Ian Hutchinson
Piotr Indyk
Antoinette Schoar
Bradford Skow
Andrew G. Sutherland

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OPINION POLICY

Management

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

Editorials

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

Guest Submissions

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

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

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

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

