



Massachusetts Institute of Technology

February 11, 2009

Based on input received from both undergraduate and graduate students, we would like to enhance two-way communication between students and the administration. This letter aims to provide an update on important student issues and a preview of our spring agenda.

This letter is a joint effort by the three student deans: Vice Chancellor and Dean for Graduate Education, Steven R. Lerman; Dean for Undergraduate Education, Daniel E. Hastings; Dean for Student Life, Costantino Colombo, and my office as well.

I want to thank the Task Force on Student Engagement for the idea of this letter. The Task Force is composed of students, faculty, and deans; Kirk D. Kolenbrander, Vice President for Institute Affairs; Bish Sanyal, MIT Faculty Chair; and Professor Robert C. Berwick, Chair of the Committee on Student Life. Undergraduates are represented by Noah S. Jessop, President, Undergraduate Association, as well as the presidents of DormCom, the IFC, and the PanHellenic Council. Graduate students are represented by Oaz Nir, President of the GSC; Nan Gu, Vice President; Lorena Lee-Houghton, Secretary; and David C. Opolon, Treasurer.

List of Topics Covered:

1. MIT Budgeting
2. Course Evaluation
3. TA Training
4. Student Information System
5. Textbook Prices
6. International Education Opportunities
7. Curriculum Developments
8. Undergraduate Financial Aid
9. Diversity
10. W-1
11. FSILGs
12. Dining
13. Student Leadership Development
14. Graduate Student Aid
15. Graduate Community
16. Faculty Student Interaction
17. Campaign for Students
18. Student Participation

The topics covered in this letter correspond to the following numbered paragraphs.

#### 1. MIT Budget Planning

In December, we announced that MIT would soon launch an Institute-wide planning process to determine how we can carry out our core mission more efficiently, using fewer financial resources, and without decreasing the quality of our work. We are now ready to begin that process, drawing on the creativity, innovation, and collaboration for which MIT is known. It will be important to work together as a community on these long-term improvements, as we ride out the most serious global economic storm in a generation. Its duration and consequences for MIT are not known. A collaborative planning process is our best hope for protecting our mission.

We encourage you to visit the new *Institute-wide Planning website* (<http://web.mit.edu/instituteplanning>). This is the gateway to full community engagement in the process. You will see a list of members of the community, including students, who are involved and learn about ways you can follow the process and participate. The *MIT Idea Bank* (<http://ideabank.mit.edu>) is a forum where all members of the community can explore and share ideas for how to make MIT more effective and efficient, without sacrificing the Institute's core values. In addition to suggesting your own ideas—from hardheaded efficiencies to inspired new approaches—you can read other submissions and recommend those with the greatest power to make a difference. Task Force members will review the ideas and make recommendations. We hope the community's suggestions will lead to many improvements to how we conduct our operations.

### **Undergraduate Education**

2. At MIT, we are committed to delivering education with excellence and in a way that encourages life-long learning. There are several new or evolving developments. We have started to move to online course evaluation (<http://web.mit.edu/subjectevaluation>) for all subjects. This will give faculty more timely and comprehensive feedback on their teaching and your learning.
3. We have also implemented mandatory TA Training for graduate students, before they teach the first time. This initiative responds to the need to improve graduate student teaching quality and to better support graduate students as they prepare for careers in teaching. This will be a win-win solution for undergraduates and graduate student alike. (See <http://web.mit.edu/due/resources/06tap.pdf>.)
4. Our student information system (WEBSIS) is in need of a major overhaul. The system is critical because it is our way to manage a host of information and service functions between a student's admission and graduation. We are engaged in both a review of needs and options and in planning what should be done in the coming years to move to a system that provides better services and is far more maintainable. You can follow our work in this area at <https://web.mit.edu/stu-future/www/>.
5. There is growing national concern about the price of textbooks. A campus group has been working on this issue ( <https://wikis.mit.edu/confluence/display/OTI2/OTI>). At the urging of the UA, we have created the ability to order textbooks online through the Stellar course management system. This is part of our efforts to address the larger issue of textbook costs.
6. As part of MIT's commitment to increasing international educational opportunities for all of our students, DUE established a Global Education Office to provide seamless access to information, and created a comprehensive global website of educational links (<http://web.mit.edu/goglobal/>). Programs such as MISTI, D-Lab, and IROP (international UROPs) were expanded to serve more students, the Cambridge-MIT Exchange was extended, and several small exchanges with partner universities elsewhere in the world were initiated.
7. There are several evolving or recent curriculum developments. The Subcommittee on the Communication Requirement (SOCR) published the results of a two-year assessment of the implementation of the requirement (<http://web.mit.edu/commreq/background.html#assessment>). In a major move, the faculty voted to replace double degrees with double majors ( <http://web.mit.edu/doublemajor>). We believe that this will give our students much more flexibility to create options for their education. The faculty debated changes to the General Institute Requirements because of the report of the Educational Commons Subcommittee (ECS) of the CUP (<https://web.mit.edu/ecs/mit-only/recommendations.html>). ECS argued that these recommendations would have made the structure of the HASS GIRs more transparent and helped focus students' attention to the different modes of analysis and theories used within these fields. The recommendations by ECS also provided flexibility in accommodating differing learning styles and student educational goals, and potentially allowed the inclusion of varied pedagogies and new subject matter through a new Engineering GIR. The motion did not pass and the faculty will now decide on the next steps.
8. In the last year, we increased our commitment to undergraduate financial aid. Several enhancements took effect in the 2008-2009 academic year. Families earning less than \$75,000 a year have all tuition covered by MIT scholarships or grant. The student loan borrowing expectation was eliminated for these families, and MIT eliminated home equity in computing financial need for families earning less than \$100,000. The loan and work expectations were also reduced by 10 percent for all financial aid recipients. The details can be found at [http://web.mit.edu/sfs/financial\\_aid/enhancement\\_stats.html](http://web.mit.edu/sfs/financial_aid/enhancement_stats.html). We will maintain our commitments to student aid through this financial crisis. Any student concerned about financial aid is encouraged to visit Student Financial Services. This includes seeking a review, if family circumstances change.

9. We remain committed to a diverse student body. MIT had a major Diversity Leadership Congress at which more than 40 students joined approximately 260 faculty and staff leaders. We welcome suggestions from students about how to increase diversity and take advantage of the diversity we have. You can follow the work of the Congress and learn about ways you can participate at <http://web.mit.edu/diversity>.

## Student Life

10. The Division of Student Life (DSL) aims to set new standards of excellence in integrating living and learning, while fostering a safe, healthy, and supportive environment for the MIT community. In the last year, we have introduced a number of initiatives to enhance the student life experience and partnered with the various constituencies that will benefit from these programs. This work is described in our website at <http://studentlife.mit.edu/>. In the fall, we postponed the **renovation of W1**. This spring, MIT will proceed with limited improvements to the building. We are able to take this step now due to the extraordinary generosity of an anonymous donor who understands the importance of this project to our community. The scope of work will renew the building envelope, including rebuilding and bracing parapets, cleaning and re-pointing the masonry, replacing windows, and repairing limestone lintels and sills. We will also re clad the copper roofs on the two cupolas. This work makes economic sense, is critical to the overall project, and protects the building from further deterioration. We will continue our efforts to raise funding for the remainder of the project, which remains an Institute priority.
11. The Association of Independent Living Groups (AILGs) has continued to formalize its role, and has been instrumental in connecting with the alumni chapters to further support our Fraternities, Sororities, and Independent Living Groups (FSILGs). Coherence has been introduced via an extensive combination of student educational programs, student, and alumni volunteer recruitment, with the support of the Alumni Association, and the introduction of benchmarking and compliance programs. The Accreditation Program and the Safety, Licensing, and Inspection Program include compliance with regulatory requirements and health/safety standards, strategies and mechanisms for risk management in handling crises, and human resource planning. The partnership between DSL, the students, and the alumni/ae on these initiatives has introduced stable, measurable standards to the operation of the FSILGs.
12. Improving our dining program is a major opportunity and challenge. The existing dining program at MIT is complex: it provides many options, serves a number of constituents, and seeks to meet a variety of needs. It is not a system. Developing a meal plan that promotes sound nutrition and creates opportunities for community building and is consistent with the diverse cultures of our living groups represents an achievable opportunity for major enhancements to student life. The Blue Ribbon Committee on Campus Dining will make recommendations to the MIT community in February. You can view information about committee's work and its membership at <http://ua.mit.edu/exec/>.
13. The Office of Student Leadership Development recently launched the Student Leadership Development Interactive Opportunities Database; it is meant to be the first phase of a virtual leadership center and lists leadership development opportunities. (See <http://studentlife.mit.edu/sld>.)

## Graduate Students

14. Despite the financial downturn, we plan to continue to provide substantial support in the form of graduate student financial aid. Our long-term vision is to expand the number of graduate fellowships (particularly for first-year students) and to secure long-term funding. Graduate fellowships are a major goal of our Campaign for Students, which was launched this past October and runs through 2011. In the shorter term, the contraction in MIT's operating budget will have some impact on our ability to do this. Our funding for graduate education comes from many sources, each of which is likely to be affected differently by budget reductions and the overall economic situation.
  - Teaching assistantships are funded through allocations of general Institute budget funds that are provided to the departments. Some departments may find it necessary to reduce the number of TAs they can support. The decisions on how much of any department's budget reduction will be achieved by reducing the number of TAs will be made by the respective department heads. Although fellowships come from many sources, they are largely funded through payouts from endowed accounts.

- The number of fellowships MIT can provide from its own funds is therefore likely to decline as the endowment payout drops, particularly in the fiscal years after FY10. In addition, some fellowships are not fully funded through endowment, and general Institute budget funds are used to make up the difference. There are likely to be fewer such fellowships starting in FY10.
  - Research assistantships are the single largest source of graduate student funding. These are entirely unaffected by cuts in MIT's budget. However, any effects the general economic situation or actions by the federal government to stimulate the economy have on research funding from industry, government, foundations or other sources may change overall research volume at MIT which in turn may change the ability of the faculty to support research assistants.
  - Lastly, we expect student loans to continue to be available to eligible graduate students. The one area of concern that we continue to work on is finding sources of student loans for international graduate students. Many Sloan MBA students had used a loan program that was discontinued. Fortunately, we have identified an alternative source for these students through the MIT Federal Credit Union. We are still working on making these loans available to non-Sloan international students.
15. Our commitment to having a vibrant graduate community that provides opportunities for leadership and continued intellectual growth beyond the lab and classroom remains unchanged. We plan to continue important programs such as the Graduate Student Life Grants and to support the crucial work of the Graduate Student Council. In addition, Deans Hastings and Lerman continue to work together with the departments on areas such as TA training and the new certificate program that aims to support and recognize excellence in graduate teaching. We will also continue the important programs such as the Path to Professorship that prepares late-stage women graduate students for academic careers and the MIT Summer Research Program that brings talented graduate students to MIT for summer research experiences, preparing them for graduate studies.

#### **Other Items**

16. The Committee on Student Life is working on a website that aims to promote faculty and student interaction. A new website for INTERACT is scheduled to go live early in the spring and will enable those who desire to find faculty who share their interests.
17. The Campaign for Students was launched in October 2008 with the goal of raising \$500 million financial aid, student life and learning. To date we have raised more than \$305 million. While the weak economic situation challenges us, we are confident that we will raise funds that will support students' needs and our aspirations for faculty to support our educational mission. Information about the campaign is at <http://giving.mit.edu/priorities/campaign/index.html>
18. Students are involved in many aspects of planning and decision-making at MIT. Unfortunately, this student participation is not well known by the average student nor is the committee system as transparent as we would like. Administration and student leaders are working very hard to improve the sharing of information and to promote transparency. In addition to the regular UA and GSC sites, you will find new information and be able to follow developments of the Student Engagement Task Force at <http://gsc.mit.edu/index.php/committees/nom/243>.

#### **Conclusion**

I welcome your comments on this letter and suggestions on matters discussed here. I hope this letter encourages you to connect with student leaders on matters of direct concern. I welcome your comments as well.

Finally, the deans and I will redouble our availability to meet with students and student groups. We are open to unscripted and informal venues for conversation. Have a Great Spring Term.