



RESPONSE TO THE EVALUATION TEAM REPORT  
PREPARED FOR THE NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES  
MARCH 2010

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) appreciates the opportunity to respond to the report prepared by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) site evaluation team following its visit to the campus from October 4-7, 2009. The team's thorough and thoughtful report presented in conjunction with the 10-year review of MIT reflects an exceptional effort to understand a complex and dynamic institution and provides MIT with an insightful analysis to help guide growth and development over the next 10 years.

The team's report identifies several areas that require further attention by the Institute. These are addressed in the sections that follow as organized by the Standards of Accreditation. In particular, two issues within the team's report stand out as areas of significant concern: student dining and deferred maintenance. Each of these issues was identified in prior accreditation visits. Clearly, MIT must begin the comprehensive implementation of thoughtful, strategic solutions. The strategic planning efforts and resources that have been aggressively committed to these central challenges are discussed in Standards Six and Eight, below.

**Standard Two: Planning and Evaluation**

*Evaluation.* With regard to the research available to academic departments from the Office of Institutional Research (IR), the team noted that although MIT has "developed a sophisticated institutional research capacity," the evaluation process did not make clear the "extent to which the departments and visiting committees avail themselves of this information."

In general, the academic departments make extensive use of the department profiles that are produced by the IR. Use of the profiles and strategic indicators has increased steadily over the past few years and IR consults with departments regularly to modify the strategic indicators to address the specific issues of importance to the departments. Further, the chairs of the Corporation Visiting Committees receive copies of the department profiles, and have found that information to be particularly helpful to the Committees as they provide oversight and guidance to the departments.

**Standard Four: The Academic Program**

*Graduate Education.* The team suggested that MIT offer fellowships to the best applicants in science and engineering and develop a fellowship program in order to remain competitive for the top students.

MIT has had such a fellowship program in place since 1999. MIT's Presidential Graduate Fellowship Program admitted the first class of Presidential Fellows in September 1999. The Fellows receive tuition and a living stipend for their first academic year at MIT. The program, which is administered by the Office of the Provost, supports approximately 150 new graduate students as Presidential Fellows each year. In addition, many departments also offer additional first year fellowships.

*Assessing Teaching and Learning.* As part of the overall assessment of teaching and learning, the team observed that MIT uses a paper-based assessment approach that is not ideal as part of a systematic approach to evaluating teaching and learning.

MIT is currently in the final year of a comprehensive project to move the course evaluation system online. Twenty-seven departments are already using the online system and, during the next academic year, all course evaluations will be completed online, resulting in a more thorough and systematic approach to student evaluation.

*The Arts at MIT.* In the Report, the team acknowledged and appreciated the lively arts culture at MIT and the integration of the arts into the uniqueness of the campus environment. However, they expressed concern about the condition and availability of facilities for the performing arts.

We share the team's concern about the condition of the current facilities available for arts programs, especially the performing arts. We are in the process of developing a long-term vision and strategy for all of the facilities at MIT. The visioning process, described more broadly under Standard Eight, below, will be inclusive and will incorporate input from the MIT community to create plans that fit our vision for the future. As part of our overall efforts to assess current and future development of our facilities available for performing arts, we will develop a scheme to enhance our performing arts facilities and, where possible, consolidate these activities.

#### **Standard Five: Faculty**

MIT appreciates the team's recommendation that MIT implement a "more structured process for resolving breaches by students of academic honesty, to ensure a more uniform standard and lessen the burden on the Faculty." This recommendation is based on concerns expressed by the team members that the MIT disciplinary process for matters of student academic misconduct is different from the established processes at their home institutions and a belief that a revision of MIT's process would result in a more uniform standard for students and faculty.

While we acknowledge the limitations identified by the team, we feel the current MIT process is closely aligned with MIT values and provides the procedural uniformity and structure sought by the team. MIT assigns responsibility for resolving cases of alleged student academic misconduct to the Committee on Discipline (COD), a standing Faculty committee comprised of six Faculty (including a Faculty Chairperson), representatives from each of the three Dean's Offices, three undergraduate and two graduate students. The COD hears approximately 15 cases a year. While many other institutions have judicial boards that involve faculty, MIT's system is slightly different in that the authority for the COD is embodied in the Rules and Regulations of the Faculty, which expressly makes student conduct a Faculty issue.

The policy separates the response to student misconduct into academic and disciplinary categories. Once it has been determined that there has been student misconduct, the Faculty member responsible for the class may take appropriate action to respond to the incident. The Faculty member may also submit a letter to the Office of Student Citizenship documenting the misconduct or file a complaint with the COD. This allows the Faculty member, who best understands the facts and circumstances of the misconduct, to determine the appropriate level of response.

A special committee examined the COD system in 2005, and the analysis affirmed the COD process and procedures. MIT is confident that the established COD system operates pursuant to uniform standards and without a significant burden on the Faculty participants.

### **Standard Six: Students**

*Student Services.* The team aptly recognizes that the issue of dining at MIT is of immediate concern at all levels of the Institute and that student dissatisfaction with the current dining options is widespread.

For the past few years, MIT has engaged in an examination process of the dining system with the goal of revamping and reforming the dining experience at MIT. In 2007, the Dean for Student Life convened the Blue Ribbon Committee on Dining (BRC) to examine the existing dining system, with a particular focus on the House Dining program and a charge to consider how food is served, the nutritional aspects of the food selections, the role of dining in student development, and the opportunity to build community through dining. The Institute also engaged the services of an award-winning food services consulting firm to perform an in-depth analysis and evaluation using focus groups, market survey research, peer-school benchmarking, and extensive community opinion surveys. Three different reports were issued during Spring 2009: the consultant's report; the BRC report; and the Undergraduate Association report.

The Dean for Student Life is currently reviewing the data, comprehensive analyses, and detailed recommendations contained in the reports to develop a plan to design a dining system that addresses the longstanding issues with dining. We anticipate that a comprehensive plan to address House Dining will be released to the community for comment and input in May 2010, with implementation in Fall 2011.

Students care deeply about the dining system. Therefore, as the Institute decides a course of action, communication with students will be inclusive and transparent. The plan will be built around the principles of choice, community, and financial stability. An MIT dining plan will provide broad student choice within a system that is fiscally viable for the Institute. MIT students will continue to have a range of dining options based upon their choice of residence. The options include cook-for-yourself communities; fraternities, sororities, and independent living groups (FSILGs) with room-and-board plans; and residences with inclusive plans for house dining. Campus Dining will improve house dining to better reflect community goals, improve service and quality, and develop community and social engagement.

### **Standard Eight: Physical and Technological Resources**

There is broad recognition both on campus and by our governing bodies that reducing the deferred maintenance backlog must be a priority in the coming years. As the team rightly notes, MIT must develop and implement a comprehensive and sustainable long-term plan to reduce the backlog of existing deferred maintenance projects and undertake preventative maintenance planning to lessen future deferred maintenance related expenditures.

MIT has been in the process of addressing the backlog over the past few years pursuant to the recommendations in the Comprehensive Facilities Audit completed in 2007 by Vanderweil Facility Advisors. For the last three years, MIT's central budget allocated \$40 million annually for capital

renewal and renovations. In FY'10, due to fiscal pressure, the central \$40 million budget was reduced by \$10 million; however, the budget will be restored to \$40 million for FY'11. Through partnerships with departments, labs and centers, the units have contributed approximately \$20 million each year in matching funds, resulting in an average \$60 million annual capital renewal and renovation budget. However, the \$60-million figure does not represent the sole source of spending on deferred maintenance.

It is often the case that a major capital project or renovation simultaneously addresses deferred maintenance. In recent years several major capital projects (projects exceeding \$5 million) addressed a deferred maintenance problem even though the project was characterized and funded as a major capital project. Examples of major capital projects include the \$65 million renovation of a portion of the Main Group, coupled with the creation of new infill space in the Main Group occupied by Physics and Material Science and Spectroscopy; the \$29 million renovation of Building E25; and the renovation of the W1 dormitory (\$30 million of work funded and currently underway). Additionally, the budgets of the Division of Student Life, Facilities Repairs and Maintenance, Utilities, energy efficiency retrofits and others have included significant funding for renovations, which simultaneously address deferred maintenance.

Through this capital work, over the past few years we have addressed certain categories of building-related issues cited in the Vanderweil report on a comprehensive basis. We are making significant progress on our campus-wide roof replacement program. We are midway through updating the elevators campus-wide. We have also addressed, albeit on a case-by-case basis, specific academic and research needs by renovating laboratory and classroom space to respond to the current requirements of the various disciplines.

In spite of our recent efforts to reduce the backlog of the building-related deferred maintenance issues cited in the Vanderweil report, the projected cost of addressing deferred maintenance has increased from \$400 million in 1999 to \$1.4 billion in 2008. This increase is not sustainable.

The Vision 2030 process, currently underway, is aimed at identifying the physical campus that will allow MIT to fulfill its mission over the next 20 years. Vision 2030 places a strong emphasis on renewal and will develop a comprehensive strategy to garner the funding required to address MIT's physical needs. A technical capacity study of the Main Group has been completed and has identified a path to clustering research-intensive activities and renovating the Main Group by sections through a series of discrete projects over a number of years.

We recognize that advances in the disciplines cannot all be accommodated efficiently and economically solely through renovation. MIT will be required to build a certain number of new buildings prior to 2030 to accommodate technically advanced work on campus. In many instances, though, we will reuse vacated buildings for less technically demanding disciplines and activities. Finally, we also recognize that for some buildings, particularly those built in the 1950s and '60s, the most prudent course of action might be demolition and replacement, rather than renovation. As we chart the future of our capital facilities, reducing the deferred maintenance backlog in a timely and systematic manner remains a priority for MIT.

\* \* \*