

## Department of Linguistics and Philosophy

The Department of [Linguistics](#) and [Philosophy](#) is divided into two sections consisting of 27 faculty members, 72 graduate students, two dozen or so visiting scientists and scholars, an administrative officer, an academic administrator, a systems administrator, two lab managers, and four support staff members. Each section operates independently, yet between them there is a significant overlap of intellectual interests in education and research spanning the faculty, graduate students, and visitors.

### Research: Linguistics

Research by MIT's linguists continues to develop and test accounts of the representational and computational properties of the languages of the world. The department's overarching research goal is to understand the human capacity for language. Important questions include: Which of its properties are uniform across the human species? Which of its properties play out differently in the languages of the world, and how? What does the interplay of uniformity and diversity in language structure teach us about language acquisition and learning? How do these properties of language interact with other cognitive systems? Specific, testable proposals are explored, developed, and challenged by students, faculty, and visitors who are pursuing research on syntax, semantics, pragmatics, morphology, phonology, phonetics, and the interfaces among these systems.

The department also provides students and faculty with support for experimental research and computational modeling in language acquisition and phonetic, syntactic, and semantic processing. Facilities within the department include the [Language Acquisition Lab](#), the [Experimental Syntax and Semantics Lab](#), and the Phonetics Lab. Experimental and computational research is also conducted in collaboration with colleagues from Brain and Cognitive Science and Electrical Engineering and Computer Science, especially the Speech Group and other colleagues focusing on language acquisition, variation, and change.

Fieldwork on less-studied and endangered languages is an important research emphasis for many students and visitors. A feature of this research is a simultaneous emphasis on documentation and specific scientific questions of linguistic interest. Recent dissertations reflecting these twin goals have reported findings on languages as diverse as Dinka (Nilotic, Sudan), Tlingit (Na-Dené, Alaska), Chol and Tseltal (Mayan, Chiapas), Quechua (Bolivia), and Zulu (Bantu, South Africa). In addition, a [master of science degree program](#), begun in fall 2004, has graduated several students from communities attempting to revive indigenous languages.

### Research: Philosophy

Philosophy at MIT studies a diverse range of central topics and is characterized by a rigorous analytic approach. Among the topics currently pursued are consciousness and the mind-body problem; language and communication; self-knowledge; ethics and practical rationality; the nature of race and gender; mathematical logic, including formal theories of truth; the semantics of conditional statements; perceptual knowledge; the nature of time; and the role of mathematics in science.

## PIKSI Diversity Workshop

In 2015, in collaboration with the University of Massachusetts-Boston Philosophy Department, a group of Philosophy graduate students organized a summer institute for members of underrepresented groups: Philosophy in an Inclusive Key Summer Institute-Boston (PIKSI-Boston). The event brings 20 students, five diverse faculty from the region, and four teaching assistants to campus for a week. They attend classes and panels on graduate school and professional life and participate in non-academic fun activities. Students are paired with mentors who provide guidance and help them with their writing and, eventually, graduate school applications. Some of the sessions have been recorded so that informational panel discussions can be made available to a wider public.

In the initial effort, Professor Sally Haslanger worked with the American Philosophical Association (APA) and the board of an existing PIKSI at the Pennsylvania State University to submit a proposal to the Mellon Foundation for funds to support efforts to promote diversity in philosophy. Philosophy is arguably the least racially diverse of all disciplines in the academy, including science and engineering. Mellon awarded the APA \$600,000 for a wide range of efforts, among them PIKSI-Boston. Dean Fitzgerald was a key support for PIKSI-Boston and the Mellon grant, offering \$15,000 for three years; the Department of Linguistics and Philosophy committed \$5,000 for three years, plus staff support. In 2017, the APA and the Mellon Foundation renewed their funding for three years, as did Dean Nobles and the department. The summer of 2020 was to be our last summer of funding, but due to the COVID-19 crisis, this summer's PISKI-Boston was canceled. It has been rescheduled for 2021, with the hope that the unspent funds from 2020 will roll over. In addition, Dean Nobles has agreed to contribute \$20,000 (an increase of \$5,000) and the Philosophy Section will contribute \$5,000 for five years, from 2021 to 2025.

## MITx Classes

Adding to the previous roster of three MITx classes, Philosophy developed a fourth, 24.02x Introduction to Ethics: Moral Problems and the Good Life, taught by Professors Caspar Hare, Kieran Setiya, and Tamar Schapiro.

## Publications

Faculty on both sides of the department participated in numerous colloquia and acted as keynote speakers at conferences and workshops throughout the United States and the world. A number of our faculty served as editors and/or members of editorial boards for numerous journals both in the United States and abroad. They also published a large number of journal articles, book chapters, and reviews. Publications in the last academic year included books by Professor Emeritus Samuel Jay Keyser, *The Mental Life of Modernism* (MIT Press) and *Turning Turtle: Memoir of a Man Who Would "Never Walk Again"*; Professor Roger Schwarzschild, *A Course on Semantics*, with Daniel Altshuler and Terry Parsons (MIT Press Textbook); and Professor Michel DeGraff, *Gid Fizik Inisyativ, MIT Ayiti*, with Paul Belony and Glenda Stump (Amazon & JEBCA Editions). Professor Bradford Skow's *Reasons Why* came out in paperback with Oxford University Press, and Professor Kieran Setiya's *Midlife: A Philosophical Guide* was translated into Chinese, Dutch, German, Greek, Romanian, and Spanish.

## Honors and Awards

Professor Stephen Yablo gave a Howison Lecture at the University of California at Berkeley, and a workshop on his book *Aboutness* was held in his honor at the University of Vienna. Professor Daniel Fox was awarded a Nirit and Michael Shaoul Fellowship from the Mortimer and Raymond Sackler Institute of Advanced Studies at Tel Aviv University. Professor Agustín Rayo's book *On the Brink of Paradox* was selected as the winner of the 2020 PROSE award for best textbook in the humanities published in 2019. Assistant Professor Edwin J. Green was awarded the Class of 1948 Career Development Chair.

## Leaves of Absence 2020

Professor Agustín Rayo was on a dean's leave in the fall and a sabbatical leave in the spring. Professor Daniel Fox was on sabbatical leave for the academic year. Professor Yablo was on sabbatical leave for the spring. Assistant Professor E.J. Green was on parental leave for the spring semester.

## Personnel

Currently there are two underrepresented minority and six female faculty members in the department. Our efforts to recruit qualified female and minority candidates will continue.

This year the Philosophy Section ran a search for a junior faculty member and an open rank faculty position. Sam Berstler was hired from that search as an assistant professor with a start date of July 1, 2021. In addition, Daniel Greco was hired, upon approval of the executive committee, as associate professor with tenure beginning January 1, 2021. The Philosophy Section and the MIT Schwartzman College of Computing also ran a search for a tenure track assistant professor position that did not yield a viable candidate. A new search will be conducted in 2020–2021.

**Alex Byrne**

**Head**

**Professor of Philosophy**