

Date: Mon, 05 Feb 2007 10:22:30 -0500

To MIT Students:

This morning, Professor James L. Sherley has begun a fast to express his disagreement with the decision not to promote him to tenure and with the outcome of his grievance process. Three reviews have concluded that the tenure process in his case was fair and proper and that there is no evidence that race influenced the process. The Provost has reviewed the history of the case in a recent letter to the faculty, which is available at <http://web.mit.edu/provost/letters/letter01292007.html>.

We take seriously, and are gravely concerned by, Professor Sherley's intentions. While we have encouraged him to seek other means to express his views, the Institute will respect his right, as a member of our community, to publicly express his disagreement in a manner that does not disrupt the work of the Institute or put others in the community at risk.

I am writing to you for three reasons. First, I ask all of you to respect Professor Sherley's right to disagree publicly, regardless of your own views about the case. I also ask you to respect each other's views about the case. Respect for free expression is an important value in our community, and benefits all of us.

At the same time, I am aware that many members of our community do not understand how the tenure process works. Over the next few days, we will provide a number of venues to discuss the tenure process and related matters. I invite those of you with concerns about the process to take advantage of these opportunities to take part in an important community dialogue.

Finally, I urge you to consider our community values. We are committed to creating and sustaining a community that is diverse in many important ways: in race and ethnicity, in gender, and in economic, cultural, and national backgrounds. While we have much to celebrate in these domains, we must continue to explore how we can do better and how we can maintain an environment in which we can all thrive and in which we can take pride. Your efforts to advance diversity, in your student communities and in your relationships, are important contributions to our community.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Phillip L. Clay
Chancellor