

U.A.S. 3: Guest Speaker President Hockfield

November 3, 2008

- Noah Jessop: I do urge you to ask question that you really think will be constructive; give you a window into the senior administration. Please let's not harp on old issues, but think about moving forward.
- Susan Hockfield: I'm going to give a couple framing comments to set the context for the year. Many of these comments you may have heard before. The themes are not varying by very much. This will be the conclusion of my first year as of December 6. We started strongly a great year last year, and started this year on a strong footing in terms of campus atmosphere. We welcome the freshman class, an exceptional class. However, as strong as things may be, we're faced with extraordinary difficulties elsewhere. Economic crisis continues to broil, and we cannot ignore the fact that there will be financial challenges for us. I want to reassure this group that we will be absolutely steadfast in our commitment to undergraduate financial aid. Need-blind aid is as important to us as anything. We have not anticipated any major changes. If there are students having difficulties, we really hope they'll visit the financial aid office and let us know. I have suggested across the institute that we control spending across the board to maintain our solid financial aid program. We don't really have a good sense of how things will be in the upcoming months. We consider it prudent to constrain making new commitments as we see possible. Tomorrow will certainly be an exciting day. MIT's goal in Washington has been a very serious one for decades. I spend a few days every few months in Washington regarding issues that will improve MIT and the nation. We've been talking with both campaigns to investigate what will effectively contribute to national growth. This innovative economy has strongly powered this country for the past 50 years. I am convinced that we have not been sowing those same seeds over the past few years. The message we've forwarded to campaigns has been to continue to strengthen economy.
 - Energy: I participated in an energy panel with Obama in June, and now McCain campaign has come forward. We hosted an energy debate on campus. In the energy sphere, 23 of our faculty have served as witnesses on national energy issues. I know many students have also participated in these events.
 - Diversity Leadership Congress: One of the things coming up in the next several weeks is the Diversity Leadership Congress on November 18. I think it's an incredibly important event for the Institute. The students and faculty have been very dedicated in improving our campus. MIT has a different intellectual demographic than most schools. Our science departments do quite well compared to other top programs. I want MIT to play a leadership role in this. The conference will aim to listen to people outside the department to learn from experts, and design ways that MIT can improve itself. Part of the responsibilities of participants is to bring concerns to the attention to faculty. It's a new kind of activity for the Institute that I think will improve leadership here at MIT.
 - Summer at MIT: I advise people to really enjoy summer here at MIT. At Family Weekend, especially parents of freshmen. I know between now and end of the semester, I know people will get more and more busy. Despite challenges, so far I think we're off to a great start this semester, and I hope to see things continue to improve.
- Kirk Kolenbrander: I can't emphasize enough what Hockfield mentioned about our commitment to financial aid. One cannot generate a topic that is more strongly supported by alumni than this. It's fundamental to who we are. Amid this economic turbulence, it's important that academic institutions preserve their financial support. And we, MIT, are committed to this.\
- Noah Jessop: Let's cover a spread of things we want to hear about in questions now.

- Ian Smith: I have raised this issue before in February. Problems that accessibility at MIT is not paid attention to well. The Stata center and other buildings do not heed people's needs. Old buildings that need to be retrofitted aren't done so quickly. The entire burden to ensure that MIT is accessible to disabled students is not taken on by MIT. I raise my concern to Dr. Reif, and never heard back. Chancellor Clay has also not gotten back to me. Why is MIT not complying with the law? And why have I not seen any sort of a response regarding this issue?
- Susan Hockfield: I'm sorry to hear your report, and I would say there's not excuse for lack of response by senior officers for your lack of questions. I would only offer that we're in the midst of a profound transition. I'm surprised that you have not received that kind of response. I will look into it and get back to you.
- Do you think the financial crisis will affect number of admitted students for class of 2013? Will Ashdown (W1) affect enrollment?
- Susan Hockfield: We are just at the point of signing contracts that would commit us to the 90 million dollar plan for W1. Once we understood the timing, we went out and talked to a lot of people. The project was on an incredibly rapid schedule. The goal to admit more students in 2010. What this means is that we won't be able to open W1 in 2010. I hope we can get it on target the next year. In a sense this isn't an all together bad thing. There are plenty of other things we need to take care of. Let's set that aside. Unless we can predict the future—regarding the economy—it will be hard to know what we'll be doing. We're anticipating normal sized class next year. We are looking to slightly increase aid next year, not reduce aid. We are not at all expecting to have to reduce the size of the class. It is not just entering students, but also those continuing.
- Vrajesh Modi: Recently Chief Difava discussed how to handle to issue of hacking policy. What are you and the Chancellor doing to resolve the issue of hacking policy?
- Susan Hockfield: This is entire under the Chancellor's business. I understand he's working with the student engagement group. This is one of those things that is always a working progress—perpetual at MIT.
- I was looking into CME. I was wondering if you know anything about plans regarding students intending on going? Do you know anything about the funding allocated for students?
- Susan Hockfield: Structure changed. As far as students who are going. As for as this enormously valuable program, I've talked to several MIT students who gained very much from CME. We will be continuing the program,. There was a change in structure of the program. Let me comment about international experiences. The world is becoming more global. We are going to be in contact with people from other nations more than any other generation. Beyond that, students I've talked to who've been on international programs, these are just experiences that broaden their perspectives, and are almost unmatched. One of the goals for Office of Undergraduate Education is to continue to support these programs, and increase the numbers of these opportunities.
- Whether I go or not depends on my parents and my financial situation. It's great to see another university go about learning in a completely different way.
- Sarah: On the W1 issue, is increased time going to allow for greater. Will any of the plans for renovation going to take into account dining plans?
- Susan Hockfield: I think W1 plans are well underway. Blue Ribbon/Phoenix Group dining committee will not be affected.
- Regarding the Phoenix group: Most of the members are in the class of 2011, so with construction of W1 delayed, are there plans for new Phoenix group to move into Ashdown?
- Susan Hockfield: Phoenix group includes freshmen through seniors. We always anticipated that students would graduate before building is finished.

- Kirk Kolenbrander: Karl Wolff is lead of Phoenix group (2011) that would've been a group that thought they'd spend senior year in W1 and won't. I think Dean Columbo is working closely with group to answer questions: How will it continue? How will it provide a working product that will allow these things to continue?
- Noah Jessop: A group of 50 will continue to be in W1 for the next 10 years, and I don't see why this will change.
- Daniel: Just to expound on pressing personal concern similar to the one brought up by Ian. We aren't able to get results until case is brought up to you. Will you hold 'office hours' where people can bring up issues to you?
- Susan Hockfield: I would like to see issues accomplished through the proper level. I'm flattered by your confidence in my capacitance and ability. We have processes to get students concerns addressed. This is absolutely not okay to have issues not addressed, especially for a long time. I think I'm not being overly optimistic to suggest that there have been many times when students issues have not been addressed at the right time by the right people. It's a style of conversation and operation that I have been very much pressing on organization within MIT.
- So no office hours?
- Susan Hockfield: I tried before, and it wasn't productive. Once a month I used to have lunch with 50 students to discuss issues brought up by students. If that's something that you would all find attractive, then I'd be happy to do that.
- On hacking: I feel that it's an important issues for students here. It's a bit incongruous and helpful to some. Could you perhaps elaborate more on hacking if you can, or could we meet with the Chancellor in an open forum?
- Susan Hockfield: I very much hope you meet with Dean and Chancellor in open forums on these issues. Protecting tradition, especially this particular tradition at MIT, is important for any organization like MIT. We bother to celebrate our 150th anniversary because there is a huge momentum that comes out of our history. It sets a foundation for what we can do going forward. I think the preservation of our tradition is very important going forward. About hacking, one of the things I really think we need to work hard on is a shared understanding of what's acceptable and what isn't. I had thought and I think we all had hoped that conversations we had year before last that produced letter from the Chancellor in the fall...we thought that was an articulation of shared values and boundaries. There continue to be issues about determining what is and isn't hacking. We do need a shared understanding across campus. We need to think about safety, the preservation of property, and standards that form a community.
- How do we codify this further? What steps could we possibly take to get a good understanding.
- Noah Jessop: Hacking is this nebulous orb. We don't want to constrain, but add reasonable hard boundaries.
- I want a plan for determining what actually is this actual boundary. Perhaps, the UA holds open forum with the Chancellor.
- Noah Jessop: I think that's the direction we're talking. We look to determine the boundaries and what are standards? So the best I have on that question is you will be hearing from him and there will be several conversations on these types of issues.
- Kirk Kolenbrander: I will amplify that by saying UA has a real role and obligation to articulate student values on these issues. We all understand here that from where we sit, we have to be able to rely on UA to play a lead voice.
- Mike Bennie: It's a communication issue. There have been very controversial decisions in past (Green Hall, Star Simpson, etc.) What concrete steps can MIT take now so that undergraduate body can see things happening as they play out?

- Susan Hockfield: The purpose of Task Force on Student Engagement is to figure out what steps there will be in decision making. I think we have not done as good a job as we could or should in communicating with students. This idea of letter periodically is a new letter. We have starter ideas to boost . Student channels don't provide transparency you want. I'm not sure just putting things on a website is communicating. I've been using email communications. As these forms of communication get more abstract, people have too many things..spam and such. How do you communicate in a way that is effective? One of the problems in this extraordinarily intelligent communicate is that some process has to be used to make decisions to make reasonable decisions in a reasonable amount of time with reasonable input. This is always tough in a smart community such as this. Some will agree with policies, some won't. We are all really unhappy with W1 issues, but that's just the way some things go.
- Noah Jessop: In contrast to the situation with Green Hall, the Task Force called together Monday morning, then entire Phoenix Group brought together before decision was stamped and ready to go. This way, everybody had at least a little seat at the table to make a decision.
- Susan Hockfield: W1 decision could be changed. If someone offers 90 million dollars, we would reconsider. This is why the UA is so important. It is impossible for the Chancellor and myself to communicate with all students, and really to emphasize role of UA in coming up with hacking policy, this really underscores the importance of student government. The better communication between the student government and students is where communication should be.
- Kirk Kolenbrander: Here we sit in UA Senate chambers, and in front of DormCon, Panhel, and the IFC, and with all these organizations, we develop shared understandings.
- Vinayak Rande: I think your ideas are great. I think problem with communication in general, is that students will not necessarily know who makes decisions and why they're made. What about glass box meetings? Where students can actually show up to meetings to see what's happening. Sometimes when students don't understand, we come up with conspiracy theories. So I think these theories aren't true. So maybe that might be one direction to go in. What do you think about allowing students to attend student related meetings? Like W1 and MIT being short on money.
- Susan Hockfield: We're not short on money. Funds have not dried up. In order to renovated W1, we build these buildings with debt. Question was whether we should commit 90 million of the Institute's debt now not knowing how the economy will turn out or how our endowment will be. The way we manage endowment is perpetuity. So next generation of scholars has the same financial strength. If we decided to pay out contracts for W1, we'd be committed to servicing that debt. Can we make commitment to servicing that debt? This year, the Institute is spending 74 million dollars on student financial aid. I don't think I'll be a pessimist in thinking that endowment funds for undergraduate financial aid will decrease whereas demand increases. Decision on W1 is not because we don't have money, but because we are allocating our money for necessary things. As for your other question, the work that the institute accomplishes is done at a breathtaking rate. Decisions are made quickly and at the right level. I don't think we're perfect in communicating stages of decisions. There have been decisions that have been announced by someone other than by me.
- In a good democracy, information should be available to many.
- Susan Hockfield: We love having student input, and fact that ENG profit decision made about incoming class and financial aid. It is astonishing that students are involved in these processes. The place I think we've really fallen short is communication, and communication channels.
- Kirk Kolenbrander: I think communication problem is one that we all own. In committee discussions, students are present. That's part of transparency...students being able speak with other student representatives.

- One of the things I thought upset the student body is Star Simpson case. Would the administration act the same way as they did in making that decision again?
- Susan Hockfield: I said at faculty meeting at end of spring. I think response was not at finest hour. I think it was done under difficult circumstances. I think we said too much and spoke too soon. As many of you know, I love talking to students. I love attracting students, and I think the kind of education that MIT offers is really at highest level available. It's because of amazing students, faculty, and interactions, which makes this place truly the extraordinary place that it is. You all will understand that there are 20,000 people on campus (10,000 students) over 100,000 alumni, we engage an enormously important connections with industry, government, so many others. And the number of places where my attention is required is enormous. I attend as many student events as I can. What I would really like to dismiss the W1 incident and clear that up. I don't want any students thinking that I don't care about you students. I thank you for the opportunity to allow me to join you this evening, and I hope to continue these conversations in the future.