

Office of the Associate Provost for International Activities

The [Office of the Associate Provost for International Activities \(OAPIA\)](#) supports and develops international engagements that contribute to MIT's mission of advancing the frontiers of knowledge, educating tomorrow's global leaders, and bringing knowledge to bear on solving the world's great challenges.

The associate provost advises the president and the provost on existing and new international policies and programs, consults with faculty on the development of international activities, helps to shape major new international initiatives involving multiple MIT units, and works with MIT administrators to design and implement these activities effectively and efficiently.

The associate provost sponsors the International Advisory Committee, co-sponsors the International Coordinating Committee (ICC), and serves on the Senior Risk Group (along with the vice president for research and the general counsel), established in 2019 to oversee the Institute's engagements in elevated-risk countries. He serves on the governing boards of the Singapore-MIT Alliance for Research and Technology and the MIT Portugal Program, and on the board of trustees of the Skolkovo Institute of Science and Technology (Skoltech). Programs overseen by the OAPIA include the Institute's collaboration with Skoltech and the Singapore University of Technology and Design.

Accomplishments

Climate Grand Challenges

During this reporting year, preparation for the launch of the Climate Grand Challenges initiative was carried out. This is a research effort sponsored by the associate provost and the vice president for research. Activities entailed gathering input from deans, department heads, and faculty involved in climate research to develop an approach to tackling climate change that draws on MIT's particular capabilities. Additionally, a 25-member faculty advisory committee was formed, charged with organizing and overseeing the process leading to the selection of a group of grand challenge research projects. The committee consists of research leaders from all five MIT Schools and the MIT Schwarzman College of Computing, as well as participating Institute-wide units.

International Strategic Plan Implementation

The associate provost published "A Global Strategy for MIT" in May 2017, which included recommendations for strengthening MIT's international engagement. The two-year implementation plan was completed at the end of 2019. Two remaining core activities center around the Global Partnerships project—which promotes and coordinates collaborations in China, Africa, and Latin America—and the Expand the Global Classroom project. As part of Global Partnerships, the MIT-Latin America Summit was planned for November 2020 to explore new opportunities for MIT engagement in Latin America but was postponed to 2021 due to Covid-19. A multi-year implementation plan for Expand the Global Classroom was developed and launched last year. The final phase consists of initiatives around communications and awareness building, expansion of programs, lowering barriers to participation, and improving global operations.

MIT-Indonesia Seed Fund

The MIT-Indonesia Seed Fund was established in the fall of 2019 with funding from the Indonesian government. Its purpose is to support innovative projects between MIT and Indonesian researchers on important technological and socioeconomic issues relevant to Indonesia. To facilitate joint collaborations, MIT hosted a two-day conference with over 100 researchers from Indonesia in December. The subsequent call for proposals resulted in 64 submissions, with 40 awards made.

Administrative Initiatives

Guidelines for Hosting International Visits

New guidelines for hosting visits by senior international leaders were developed with input from a variety of stakeholders including Institute Events, the Office of Communications, and the MIT Police. The guidelines were developed with the goal of standardizing the process across the Institute. They outline the vetting process for hosting senior visitors and identify issues to be considered by visit hosts (media, security, etc.).

New Review Process for Elevated-Risk International Proposals

In April 2019, the vice president for research and the associate provost for international activities announced a new review process for “elevated-risk” international proposals. This effort was launched to strengthen MIT’s internal processes for evaluating and structuring international engagements that may pose special risks to the Institute and that merit additional faculty and administrative review by the International Coordinating Committee, the International Advisory Committee, and the newly created Senior Risk Group. For now, this includes all engagements with China, Russia, and Saudi Arabia. For the period covered by this report, 196 international projects and proposals were reviewed as part of the new elevated risk process, of which China/Hong Kong represented 82%, Saudi Arabia 13%, and Russia 5%.

International People Placement

International People Placement (IPP) is a central support mechanism for reviewing and facilitating the assignment of MIT employees internationally. It is coordinated and staffed by the OAPIA, with subject matter experts from human resources, the vice president of finance, the vice president for research, and the Office of the General Counsel. In FY2020 the volume of placement requests (normally about 50 per year) expanded dramatically in response to inquiries from the MIT community requesting to work abroad for an extended period of time due to Covid-19. Working with senior administration and multiple other offices, the IPP team developed and implemented a plan to track and review over 150 Covid-related requests through June 2020.

Personnel Information

The Office of Major Agreements (including the executive vice president and treasurer) was formally merged with the OAPIA in October 2019, including transfer of the following staff members: Tammy Greenwood, administrative assistant; Linda Dionne, program manager; and Robin Lemp, director, global support. John Brisson stepped down as director of the collaboration with the Singapore University of Technology and

Design, a position he had held since 2012. Diana Dao transitioned into a new role as senior program assistant.

Future Goals

Climate Grand Challenges

The Climate Grand Challenges process will be launched in July 2020. The identification of grand challenge research projects will proceed in two phases:

- Phase I— Submission, refinement, and evaluation of letters of interest
- Phase II— Invited submission of full white papers, each articulating a grand challenge research problem and proposed solution

The overall goal is to draw on the creativity and commitment of the MIT community to identify game-changing solutions to hard climate-related problems and to make progress toward assembling the integrated, focused teams—eventually including partners from industry, finance, nonprofits, and other sectors—needed to develop and implement these solutions rapidly.

International Strategic Plan Implementation

The two-year implementation plan will soon be complete, so the focus will move to other recommendations from the Global Strategy report as well as additional efforts in areas initiated in the two-year plan. For example, Phase 3 of Global Classroom will implement many recommendations to improve the global program offerings and their administration. The recommendation to strengthen tools and support for faculty engaged in international work also will be addressed this coming year. This includes an overhaul of the ICC website—a central repository of global support resources designed to inform and assist faculty, staff, and students.

MIT Africa Seminar Series

OAPIA has convened a faculty steering committee, led by Professors Ibrahim Cissé and Gabriella Carolini, to plan and deliver a thematically-driven Africa lecture/seminar series in FY2021. The goals of the seminar series are to create a mechanism for inviting leading researchers and experts from Africa to MIT and to continue with efforts to build an Institute-wide community of faculty, staff, and students whose work involves the continent.

MIT-Latin America Summit

Due to Covid, the MIT-Latin America Summit was postponed until 2021.

Communications

OAPIA will launch a new Global MIT website in December 2020 as part of a new communications strategy.

Richard K. Lester
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