

# Report of the President

## Adapting to Disruption and Sustaining MIT's Mission

MIT navigated this year of pandemic disruption and uncertainty with a commitment to transparency and open communication. We established new organizations, teams, and structures, and we remained connected virtually through large town hall meetings and frequent more informal gatherings. And we continued to address Covid-19 the MIT way—by standing with the science, working the problem, and modeling the solution for our community and beyond.

In March, we launched [Work Succeeding](#), a cross-MIT planning effort to assess hybrid approaches to work life for MIT staff. We developed guidance, tools, and policies to support new ways of working and encouraging local units to tailor decisions based on their needs. This summer, we will release a toolkit, including planning exercises and work plan templates.

Keeping the whole community safe required that the overall campus population be kept far below normal levels. As we began to plan for the fall, it was clear that we could invite back only a limited number of undergraduates. We decided on rising seniors, who have the least flexibility to satisfy degree requirements and for whom being on campus is especially important for essential work in their programs, from capstone subjects to lab research and theses.

The fall semester kicked off with redesigned, virtual orientations for undergraduate and graduate students, along with special programming for first-years, who began their MIT experience away from campus. Those who returned to campus discovered a very different MIT, with a roster of new policies and safeguards. Regular Covid-19 testing and daily health attestations became routine, along with mandatory masks. MIT Medical conducted contact tracing, delivering test results and exposure information to individuals affected by positive cases and advising them on next steps. We prohibited large lectures and gatherings, and we restricted access to buildings through a single point, and only with an MIT ID. In the spring, we announced a fall 2021 vaccine requirement for all students and employees accessing campus.

We also made several decisions in recognition of the financial uncertainties many families have been experiencing, including eliminating a planned tuition increase and increasing our financial aid budget. We provided every undergraduate student with a \$5,000 Covid-era grant and ensured that each student had an opportunity for paid research, teaching, or service. Many staff members, postdocs, and faculty also faced financial pressures as well as difficulty balancing childcare and work. To help relieve these burdens, we increased the maximum grant available from the MIT Staff Emergency Hardship Fund and offered a supplement for faculty childcare expenses.

Yet amid the intense pressures imposed by the pandemic, we made sure to keep looking forward. In May 2020, I charged Task Force 2021 and Beyond—made up of more than 150 faculty, staff, and students—to think expansively about what we treasure

most in the MIT experience, what works well, and what might be open to constructive change. Informed by ideas and suggestions from our community, the task force offered five key recommendations:

- Rethink how and where we work
- Review classroom education
- Increase the scope and intensity of our holistic learning and training
- Articulate our public responsibilities and imbue them in our community and culture
- Modernize our data, systems, processes, and financial models

These recommendations will help guide us on our path to invent a worthy future for MIT.

## **Repairing and Renewing Our Sense of Community**

### **Fostering Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**

Throughout the academic year, we followed through on commitments to make MIT stronger, safer, more equitable, and more welcoming. In September, we launched an Institute-wide strategic action planning process for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), releasing a [draft plan](#) for community feedback in March. The plan is built on three pillars: composition, belonging, and achievement. It includes a focus on increasing the number of graduate students, postdocs, staff, and faculty from underrepresented groups and strengthening the recruitment of underrepresented undergraduates. Three schools and the Schwarzman College of Computing welcomed new assistant deans to focus on DEI, and searches for DEI professionals in the remaining schools are nearing completion.

With funding from the Provost's Office, we committed to making a combination of immediate investments in research on racism, totaling \$1 million, to create links between related efforts across the Institute and establish important connections with researchers at other institutions. We also announced the [Ad Hoc Committee on Arts, Culture, and DEI](#), appointing Institute Community and Equity Officer John Dozier and Associate Provost Philip Khoury as co-chairs. The committee will develop recommendations aimed at inspiring our community to engage previously marginalized voices and challenge common understandings.

We also took a closer look at two Institute holidays through the lens of equity and inclusion. Following review, MIT designated Juneteenth as a new Institute holiday, starting this summer, to serve as both an acknowledgement of the legacy of slavery and an opportunity to reflect on how we can help drive progress on racial justice and equality.

We also renamed an existing Institute holiday, Columbus Day, as Indigenous Peoples Day, in recognition of the Indigenous peoples and cultures in our country and our community. We funded a new, collaborative project to research and document MIT's Native American history, and we identified options for a dedicated on-campus gathering space for our Indigenous community; we will establish the space when in-person indoor gatherings are again permitted on campus.

### **Working to End All Forms of Harassment**

Guided by the working groups charged in response to the [2018 report of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine on gender and sexual harassment](#), MIT took several actions this year. We established an accessible transitional funding program to lower barriers for graduate students who must switch their research advisors or groups, and we began building a strategic plan for graduate advising and mentoring. In December, I charged an ad hoc committee to develop an Institute statement of shared values, with a report due at the end of the summer.

It became clear last year that many at MIT, especially staff and students, did not feel they could safely report behavior concerning the safety of our students, the integrity of our research, or risks to the Institute's reputation. In response we have simplified the hotline reporting system and updated reporting policies and procedures. To address a tension between our commitment to transparency in addressing unwelcome and inappropriate behavior and respect for the privacy of those involved, we are also working to develop thoughtful processes around what information we can share about a given case and with whom.

### **Post-Epstein: Improving Gift Policies and Re-envisioning the Media Lab**

To address issues that emerged last fall surrounding MIT's approval process for accepting significant gifts, we launched a six-month experiment to expand the membership and change certain processes of the Interim Gift Acceptance Committee, chaired by Provost Martin Schmidt. Separately, the MIT Alumni Association and Resource Development retained a consultant to review the Institute's donor and alumni database and are advancing recommendations to further centralize the handling of donor and alumni information.

Over the past year, the Media Lab worked through difficult issues and made a fresh start. With leadership from the Lab's new executive committee, faculty and staff are determining the future internal governance of the Media Lab as well as its values and culture. In December, a new director was appointed: Dava Newman, MIT's Apollo Program Professor of Astronautics. Professor Newman, whose groundbreaking work has advanced human performance in space, takes an interdisciplinary approach to research that closely aligns with the Media Lab's wide-ranging and experimental nature.

### **Heightening Our Impact in Education and Research**

The MIT Schwarzman College of Computing continued to take shape this year, as we neared completion of its building design. But even without a permanent home, the college has taken its place in the life of MIT. In November, the college presented the virtual [AI and the Work of the Future Congress](#). Over two days, scientists, technologists, policymakers, and business leaders debated pressing policy issues regarding artificial intelligence (AI) and finance, mobility, and healthcare. Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella joined the congress for a discussion with MIT labor economist David Autor. The college also began embedding Social and Ethical Responsibilities of Computing (SERC) materials into undergraduate courses and published the inaugural issue of "MIT Case Studies in SERC," a set of peer-reviewed cases for instruction.

MIT continued to lead the way in digital learning opportunities, offering more than 100 courses on the MITx residential platform, with faculty from 25 departments. Continuing last year's trend, 99% of undergraduates took at least one course using the platform. We also extended the Institute's educational impact globally, with MITx attracting nearly 5 million unique learners in 155 courses, 40 of which were new. We launched a MicroMasters program in finance, and we will award 1,260 MicroMasters credentials this year, bringing the total to more than 4,000.

Another educational lifeline for learners worldwide, edX saw its usage grow to 118 million enrollments in more than 3,000 courses. Open edX reached 100 million unique learners, including those on nine national platforms, such as Russia, France, and Japan. And MIT OpenCourseWare, the largest ".edu" channel on YouTube, increased from 2.5 million to 3 million subscribers.

### **Making New Commitments on Climate**

Amid the crisis of the pandemic, we kept our eyes on other urgent global challenges, taking significant action to address climate change. We concluded our [Climate Action Symposia series](#) this fall with the final two of six sessions, held in a virtual format. In total, the symposia brought together more than 12,000 people to examine the current state of climate science and policy, explore pathways for decarbonization of the global economy, and consider how universities can contribute solutions.

In the spring, we released [Fast Forward: MIT's Climate Action Plan for the Decade](#), which outlines the way forward on two tracks. On track one, we must go as far as we can, as fast as we can, with the tools and methods we have now—including science, technology, policy, markets, infrastructure, and levers for behavioral and cultural change. On track two, societies around the world need to invest in, invent, and deploy new tools—and promote the new institutions and policies that it will take to reach net-zero emissions by 2050.

We introduced two key components of the action plan this year. Through an ambitious new research effort called the [Climate Grand Challenges](#), we invited all principal investigators from across MIT to help us define a new agenda of transformative research. We called for bold proposals that address the most difficult problems in the field—problems whose solutions would make the most decisive difference—and were delighted by the response: 94 letters of interest from 385 researchers, representing 90% of departments.

The Climate Grand Challenges were designed to work in tandem with another new initiative, the [MIT Climate and Sustainability Consortium \(MCSC\)](#), which aims to vastly accelerate the adoption of climate solutions, at scale and across industries. The MCSC is an alliance of influential corporations motivated to work with MIT, and with each other, to pilot and deploy the solutions necessary to reach their own ambitious decarbonization commitments, and to help address the global climate emergency in time to make a meaningful difference. Initial members include Apple, Boeing, Dow, IBM, and PepsiCo.

## Enhancing MIT's Campus and Innovation Ecosystem

We advanced our commitment to student housing this year, completing the new graduate student residence in Kendall Square and the new undergraduate residence on Vassar Street. We began construction on the renewal of Burton-Conner House and advanced design and permitting for a graduate student residence on West Campus.

We also advanced design for the Met Warehouse—future home of the School of Architecture and Planning—and Project Manus—MIT's effort to upgrade our makerspaces and foster student maker communities. Completed projects include renovation of the MIT Boathouse and of Hayden Library, which includes a beautiful new courtyard that will open to students next fall. Despite brief delays from Covid-19, Kendall Square construction remained on schedule. The new Office of Admissions, Office of Sustainability, and Welcome Center are now complete, along with the MIT Museum and the Open Space next to the Kendall/MIT T stop.

MIT venture firm [The Engine](#) concluded investing in new companies from its Fund I, with 27 startups in the initial portfolio, and closed Fund II with \$265 million in capital raised and \$295 million in total commitments to close by the end of June. The Engine began investing out of Fund II with five companies focused on climate change, human health, and advanced systems and infrastructure. The Engine also broke ground for its expansion at 750 Main Street and provided recommendations to the Biden Administration on programs that could help tough-tech companies compete and scale in the United States.

[Solve at MIT](#) was again successful in bringing global innovators together virtually, with 725 registrants and more than 12,000 views for its plenary livestreams. Sessions featured a timely conversation on Covid-19 vaccine developments with Moderna co-founder and chairman Noubar Afeyan, who announced Moderna's partnership with COVAX to distribute 500 million Covid-19 vaccines to countries around the world. Equally timely in this age of ubiquitous online meetings was an interview with Eric Yuan, founder and CEO of Zoom.

## Strengthening MIT's Voice, Connections, and Influence

As we were ramping up for the fall semester, US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) announced that it would not allow international students on F-1 visas to take a full online course load this fall if they were present in the United States. The ruling had potentially serious implications for international students at MIT and across the country, and [MIT and Harvard jointly filed suit](#) against ICE and the US Department of Homeland Security. About a week later, the federal government rescinded this misguided policy.

In January, our community learned some distressing news. MIT Professor Gang Chen, a widely respected scholar, teacher, and member of our faculty, had been arrested on allegations of federal grant fraud in connection with MIT's collaboration with the Southern University of Science and Technology (SUSTech) in China. In a [letter to the MIT community](#), I explained that MIT's collaboration with SUSTech is one of many faculty-led collaborations that the Institute maintains and that such collaborations, crucial to advancing frontier

science, are common in academia. On behalf of MIT, I voiced strong support for Professor Chen and for all of our Chinese and Chinese American community members.

Throughout the year, I had opportunities to speak for MIT interests and values. I contributed a *New York Times* op-ed on the strategic importance, to MIT and the nation, of welcoming foreign talent. I wrote a *Boston Globe* piece on the two-track approach to climate change outlined above, which puts equal emphasis on current technology and new breakthrough solutions.

MIT played a central role in pushing forward the Endless Frontier Act, bipartisan legislation to authorize funding for a new tech-focused directorate and research at the National Science Foundation. I addressed the critical importance of federal research funding in the *Chicago Tribune* with Indiana University President Michael McRobbie. The Institute also helped shape federal policy toward university interactions with China and continued to inform federal policymaking through research reports on the future of work and other critical topics.

### Looking Ahead to MIT's Future

MIT made several critical hires and promotions that will help guide us into the future. Glen Shor, vice president for finance, agreed to become MIT's next executive vice president and treasurer, with Katie Hammer filling his former role. And Nergis Mavalvala, astrophysicist and associate head of the physics department, was named dean of the School of Science as Michael Sipser stepped down after six years of service to return to the mathematics faculty.

We concluded MIT's *Campaign for a Better World*, having surpassed our \$6 billion goal; as of April 30 the total was \$6.09 billion. Highlights this year included gifts for capital projects, graduate student support, and a Student Wellbeing Lab, as well as funding for Covid-19 emergency outreach, research and student support. The enormous success of the campaign has positioned the people of MIT for impact as they strive to solve humanity's urgent global challenges.

As we wrap up the academic year, the direct and indirect effects of Covid-19 continue, and they continue to be wildly uneven. Some members of our community have experienced terrible illness, grief, loss, and dislocation. All of us have struggled with disconnection and uncertainty, and our nation's political divisiveness only adds to feelings of anxiety.

Yet I believe we can take encouragement from the awareness that difficult, painful times have the potential to inspire important, constructive, positive change. And I am convinced that the challenges our community has faced this year will help lead us to a wiser, kinder, more equitable MIT in the future.

**L. Rafael Reif**  
President