MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

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December 20, 2019

Dr. Barbara Brittingham
President
New England Commission of Higher Education
3 Burlington Woods Drive, Suite 100
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Dear Dr. Brittingham:

On behalf of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, I am writing to respond to the report the
New England Commission of Higher Education's evaluation team submitted following its visit to
campus September 22-25, 2019. We are deeply grateful to the team for its commitment of time
and energy to this important process and for its thorough and thoughtful review. We also wish
to express our appreciation to you and your staff for the outstanding guidance and support you
have provided throughout this effort.

Below, in italics, are the key issues the team identified, followed by MIT's responses.

*Faculty with whom the visiting team met expressed concerns about the high cost associated
with supporting graduate students at MIT. There is the impression that well-established senior
faculty have left MIT for other institutions, in part because the cost of supporting graduate
students at other similar institutions was as much as 50 percent lower than at MIT...
Particularly given the continued concern the team heard, this remains an issue for MIT to
address. [pp. 12-13]*

While I am unaware of any well-established senior faculty leaving MIT because of the costs
associated with supporting graduate students, even after inquiry, there is no question that we
must do more to address this important issue. MIT has historically taken steps to enhance our
support for graduate students (e.g., through subsidized tuition for research assistants and an
increase in fellowships), but the gap between MIT and our peers in this area has indeed grown.
The provost is partnering with the school deans and the vice chancellor for undergraduate and
graduate education to examine the issue of research competitiveness more broadly and identify
solutions. We are considering a number of options, but developing a thoughtful, sustainable
approach will take some time. For now, we are working to put in place several measures to help
lessen the burden on financially distressed graduate students and their PIs.

*The visiting committee did identify one potential barrier to enhancing research: the require-
ment that all projects pay the full indirect cost rate even when external sponsors set explicit
limits on these cost recovery rates. While the system of department and school cost-sharing
with the Institute seems to allow such projects to proceed, it may be worthwhile to consider
whether substituting a waiver process would enhance incentives for scholars in fields where
support comes primarily from private philanthropy or private foundations. [pg. 13]*

MIT seeks to meet the full need of our faculty who receive awards from foundations and other
not-for-profit organizations that do not provide full indirect cost recovery. Until about 10 years
ago, the federal government provided more than 70% of MIT's funding for sponsored research.

Given this tradition, we have always viewed indirect costs as the means to recover — to the extent allowed by the federal government — the actual costs MIT incurs with regard to facilities and administration; as such, MIT covers any shortfall in indirect cost recovery with unrestricted funds. We believe that asking faculty to apply for Institute funding and requiring MIT's departments, labs, centers, and schools to share the cost encourage a local commitment to a project and convey the Institute's dedication of unrestricted resources. Over the past 10 years, we have worked to diversify MIT's research portfolio, resulting in a shift toward non-federal programs, some of which do not provide full indirect costs. To limit the impact of this shift on faculty, the vice president for research and the provost, in concert with the school deans, have substantially increased institutional funding to support indirect cost under-recovery, especially in the humanities, social sciences, and life sciences — fields heavily dependent on funding from private foundations to support their research and scholarly activities.

MIT should continue seeking new ways to cultivate a broad-based understanding of its policies and practices, including the anonymous reporting hotline for making complaints about wrongdoing. [pg. 27]

Both through in-person meetings and written communications, we are making efforts to improve how we communicate and educate our community about our policies and the different channels that we make available for reporting concerns, including the anonymous hotline. After the team's visit, we adjusted the functionality on MIT's homepage so that a search for the word "whistleblower" will produce links to additional results, including the hotline, MIT's complaint resolution policies and procedures, and the Institute's policy prohibiting retaliation. We will also update and reissue a brochure outlining these channels online and distribute it at MIT's orientation for new employees. Vice President and General Counsel Mark DiVincenzo is assembling a team to strengthen MIT's existing protections for whistleblowers, which include the Institute's non-retaliation policy.

There is an apparent lack of student learning outcomes for a number of MIT programs. This should receive attention, including assessing student learning with respect to the General Institute Requirements. [pg. 29]

Shortly after the evaluation team's visit, Academic Council — the Institute's senior leadership and the elected chair of the faculty — discussed the team's observation that many MIT programs lack student learning outcomes. The vice chancellor subsequently convened a meeting of colleagues from Institutional Research, the Office of the President, and the Teaching + Learning Lab (TLL) to discuss how best to engage MIT's academic leadership in addressing this issue. Early in the spring semester, the vice chancellor and director of the TLL will begin a conversation with the provost and academic deans about improving how we measure the effectiveness of an MIT education. Around that same time, they will visit MIT's Faculty Policy Committee to present a proposal to enhance how we evaluate faculty contributions to teaching.

The vice chancellor and director of the TLL have already begun outreach to individual school deans to support the schools' faculty in developing programmatic outcomes, supporting an upcoming discussion of intended learning outcomes in the School of Science and a workshop for the academic leadership of the School of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences. They will also work with faculty and instructors of MIT's General Institute Requirements (GIRs) to develop intended learning outcomes for the GIRs as a whole and for specific subjects. TLL staff will then

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work with departments and instructors to ensure that they design their subject-level assessments to accurately measure the extent to which students have achieved those outcomes.

Maintaining a balance between curiosity-driven research and more technological and entrepreneurship-based endeavors is important to a science and engineering focused institution such as MIT. Some faculty are concerned that the focus is shifting too rapidly toward the more entrepreneurial and applied side. [pg. 29]

While we recognize that some faculty feel a tension between basic and applied research, it is important to note that the Institute's mission calls on us to do both: "The Institute is committed to generating, disseminating, and preserving knowledge, and to working with others to bring this knowledge to bear on the world's great challenges."[1] Historically, MIT has relied on the federal government for support for basic research, with industry, foundations, and other sources funding more applied research. While the percentage of the federal government's support for campus research expenditures continues to decline, it still outpaces the support MIT receives from nonfederal sources. The Institute is committed to supporting the broad range of our faculty's research interests.

A culture that values risk-taking must also be a culture that creates open dialog that helps identify and responds to negative outcomes. [pg. 29]

MIT has developed a robust network of resources for raising and addressing concerns related to wrongdoing or violations of Institute policy. These include an anonymous reporting hotline and a number of offices, e.g., the Ombuds Office; Title IX and Bias Response Office; Audit Division; Environment, Health, and Safety; Office of Student Conduct; and Human Resources. As noted above, the vice president and general counsel is assembling a team to strengthen and more effectively communicate protections for whistleblowers, and the vice president for human resources recently invited all staff to attend focused conversations about MIT's culture. At an Institute level, MIT's Office of Risk Management and Compliance Services (RMCS), launched in 2013, fosters a culture of risk awareness that promotes intelligent, informed decisions consistent with MIT's values. Through programmatic assessment of top Institute risks, RMCS helps advance MIT's risk preparedness and response capabilities.

Both the administration and faculty should expand outreach, communications, and engagement with undergraduate students, as well as post-docs, regarding decision-making around issues related to residence hall life on the MIT campus to reduce the perception that "decisions are already made" prior to the administration's seeking of student input. [pg. 29]

Over the course of generations, MIT's residence hall system has developed a number of positive qualities that we aim to preserve, but also a few harmful ones that we are working hard to address. Key to this work is a shift from MIT's long history of student self-governance to a model of shared governance. In a spring letter to *The Tech*,[2] Vice President and Dean for Student Life Suzy Nelson emphasized the care the Division of Student Life (DSL) takes to engage students and build consensus on housing matters. In recent years, DSL has led participatory efforts to improve room-assignment processes, design a new residence hall, and enhance housing policies.

[1] https://web.mit.edu/facts/mission.html
[2] https://thetech.com/2019/03/21/dsl-dean-housing-decisions

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It has also published data on a range of student life issues, including housing, to promote transparency.[3] While we continue to look for the right balance between making change quickly and taking a more measured approach, there is no question that we deeply value student input on issues related to residential life (and everything else) and are committed to incorporating student insights into our decision-making processes.

The Schwarzman College provides both opportunities and challenges for faculty growth and enhancement of diversity among the faculty. [pg. 29]

The MIT Schwarzman College of Computing (SCC) will partner with MIT's Institute community and equity officer (ICEO) once that person is hired to search for an assistant or associate dean of equity and inclusion. This new role will focus on improving and creating programs and activities that help broaden participation in computing classes and degree programs, increasing the diversity of top faculty candidates in computing fields, and ensuring that faculty search and graduate admissions processes have diverse slates of candidates and interviews. The college aims to promote a culture of inclusion from the start and aspires to lead in this area for greater impact in academia and in the tech industry. The SCC leadership recognizes the complexity of this challenge and is committed to fostering an environment that leverages the diversity of thought and the dynamism of an inclusive community.

Renewed attention and energy should be given to recruiting, engaging and giving voice to diverse populations, including underrepresented minorities. [pg. 29-30]

MIT remains committed to cultivating a community that is welcoming and inclusive to diverse perspectives and backgrounds, including underrepresented minorities. As noted above, the MIT Schwarzman College of Computing presents an exciting opportunity to recruit and engage diverse populations in computing. We are taking steps to advance this priority more broadly. In May, the provost announced a new approach to leading and organizing MIT's efforts around community, diversity, equity, and inclusion. Since July, Professor Tim Jamison has served in the new role of associate provost, working with the Institute's leadership to ensure equitable practices during the faculty hiring, promotion, tenure, and review processes. We are also currently recruiting for the Institute community and equity officer (ICEO), a position that was vacant at the time of the evaluation team's visit, to build understanding, capacity, and programming across MIT. Both the associate provost and ICEO are members of MIT's senior leadership and serve on Academic Council.

The committee anticipates that MIT will complete a thorough investigation [into the Institute's engagements with Jeffrey Epstein] and will improve its oversight processes and policies in response to its findings. The community is hurt deeply and is wondering what it really means to MIT and its culture. This is leading to some distrust... Is there a larger cultural problem? [pg. 30]

The evaluation team visited at a difficult moment for our community. Since late August, when Jeffrey Epstein's gifts to MIT were disclosed, we have been grappling with fundamental questions regarding the principles and processes that guide MIT's fundraising activities and working to address complex cultural issues the situation has uncovered. At my request, in early

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[3] https://studentlife.mit.edu/about/goals-mission-and-organization/meet-suzy-nelson/key-matters/dsl-data

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September MIT's vice president and general counsel retained a law firm to gather the facts surrounding interactions between Epstein and the Institute and report to the Executive Committee of the MIT Corporation and me. The firm, Goodwin Procter, has completed its review and is finalizing a report, which we expect sometime after the upcoming holidays. I will respond to the Commission's November 25 letter once the Executive Committee issues a statement about the fact-finding.

In October, the chair of the faculty and provost launched two *ad hoc* committees — one to define a set of values and principles to guide the assessment of MIT's outside engagements, the other to review and recommend improvements to MIT's processes for soliciting and accepting gifts. I expect the committees to complete their work by the end of spring 2020.

To gain a deeper understanding of the cultural issues that have come to light, I have spent most of my time these last few months listening. I have held open forums with staff, faculty, students, postdocs, and alumni, and met in more private settings with leaders across our community. I have also begun a tour of MIT's 30 degree-granting units in an attempt to reconnect with our faculty and staff and engage all of MIT in a process of collaborative problem solving, a longstanding Institute tradition. I shared my early learnings from these conversations in a letter to our community.[4]

In October, MIT released the preliminary reports of four working groups I charged in April to recommend actions to foster a more inclusive, respectful, and equitable culture, specifically examining matters of leadership, policies, training, and the power imbalances in working and academic relationships. Following a period of community feedback, the groups are now finalizing their reports, which they will submit to an advisory board of senior officers and faculty leaders. The advisory board will then help shape the group's recommendations into a roadmap for change, a vital step in addressing complex cultural challenges on our campus.

MIT has learned a great deal over the last few months; I have too. Although this has been a painful experience for our community, I am confident that MIT will emerge stronger, kinder, and more welcoming because of it. I am dedicated to leading us through this critical process.

I look forward to discussing these issues with the Commission when I visit in the spring.

Sincerely,

L. Rafael Reif

LRR/arw

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[4] http://news.mit.edu/2019/letter-president-reif-learning-our-community-1031