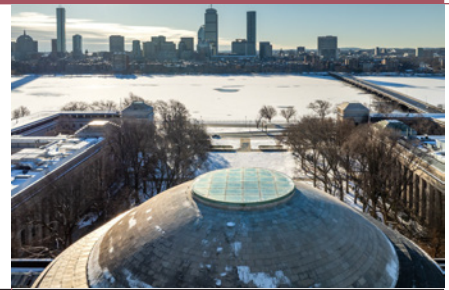


MIT Faculty Newsletter

<https://fnl.mit.edu>

in this issue we offer “Why There Were No Faculty Newsletter Editorial Board Elections Last Spring,” ([page 4](#)); “MIT Runs on Engineers (and Worry),” ([page 4](#)); “Introducing OACES,” ([page 6](#)); a back-and-forth on the use of ad hominem (pages [12](#) and [13](#)); and a reflection on the J-WAFS Program ([page 14](#)).
[Deadline for submissions for the November/December FNL is November 17.]



The Great Dome and the Boston Skyline

Faculty Travelogue Reflections on an Encounter Outside Wichita, Kansas

Jeff Ravel

AROUND TWENTY YEARS AGO my wife and I took our children to visit her brother and his family in Wichita, Kansas. We were living in Medford at the time, near Tufts where she taught Art History; in that near Boston suburb we were raising our children within the confines of our liberal certainties. Our son had been born in the mid-1990s; eight years later, like other colleagues and friends in the area, we had decided to adopt a second child. The three of us flew to Nepal with my brother, where we met our daughter, who was then a toddler.

We returned and settled into our new, expanded, family life, comfortably enmeshed in the blueness of the state of Massachusetts. Part of the reason for the Kansas trip was to introduce our children to some of my wife’s family, and part, perhaps, was a sense that we needed to

[continued on page 10](#)

How US Universities Can Survive State Terrorism*

Catherine D’Ignazio

AS A PROFESSOR AT MIT, I find myself navigating strange waters these days. Last semester, I advised the thesis of a student who left the country because she did not feel welcome in the United States (and she is a citizen). I listened to exceptional students from around the world tell me that they will not be applying to MIT because they do not feel the United States is a safe place for them. I comforted students after federal agents visited their dorms and aggressively sought to interrogate their peers. I supported students, staff, and faculty who had been doxed by vigilante websites hostile to their political views. I advised students how to protect themselves from getting abducted off the street by masked men.

This last one sounds fictional, but it happened: Rümeyşa Öztürk, a Tufts

[continued on page 9](#)

Editorial The Silbey Report: Independence, Transparency, and a Path Forward for the Faculty Newsletter (FNL)

Editorial Board of the Faculty Newsletter

AT THE MAY 2024 Institute Faculty Meeting, a motion was passed to convene an ad hoc committee charged with reviewing and revising the policies and procedures of the *MIT Faculty Newsletter* (FNL) and clarifying its relationship to the faculty as a whole. Over the course of seven months – from September 2024 to March 2025 – the committee conducted interviews, analyzed archival materials, and collected survey data to assess the current state of the FNL and recommend steps for its future sustainability.

Widespread Engagement and Broad Support

The committee’s December 2024–January 2025 survey received 468 responses, three-quarters of which were from faculty and emeriti, reflecting a

[continued on page 3](#)

contents

The MIT Faculty Newsletter Editorial Board

*Nazli Choucri (Vice-Chair)

Political Science

*Christopher Cummins

Chemistry

Yoel Fink

DMSE/EECS/RLE/ISN

*Sally Haslanger (Co-Chair)

Linguistics and Philosophy

*Thomas Heldt

Electrical Engineering and Computer Science

*Ceasar McDowell (Co-Chair)

Urban Studies and Planning

*Tanalís Padilla

History

Nasser Rabbat

Architecture

Balakrishnan Rajagopal

Urban Studies and Planning

Robert P. Redwine

Physics

Warren Seering (Secretary)

Mechanical Engineering

*Franz-Josef Ulm

Civil and Environmental Engineering

David Lewis

Managing Editor

*Editorial Subcommittee for this issue

Vol. XXXVIII No. 1

September/October 2025

Faculty
Travelogue

01 [Reflections on an Encounter
Outside Wichita, Kansas](#)

Jeff Ravel

01 [How US Universities
Can Survive State Terrorism](#)

Catherine D'Ignazio

Editorial

01 [The Silbey Report: Independence, Transparency,
and a Path Forward for the Faculty Newsletter](#)

Editorial Board of the MIT Faculty Newsletter

04 [Why There Were No Faculty Newsletter
Editorial Board Elections Last Spring](#)

Sally Haslanger and Ceasar McDowell

04 [MIT Runs on Engineers and Worry](#)

Franz-Josef Ulm

06 [Introducing OACES](#)

Sadé Abraham, David L. Darmofal, Kristala L. J. Prather

Letters

08 [When Protest Becomes Intimidation](#)

Steve Spear

12 [Are Ad Hominem Attacks
Legitimate Academic Freedom?](#)

Ian H. Hutchinson

13 [Reply to Prof. Hutchinson
on Arguing Ad Hominem](#)

Kieran Setiya

14 [J-WAFS: From an Idea to a Program](#)

John H. Lienhard V

Letters

15 [What's In A Name?](#)

Hubert Murray Faia

MIT Numbers

16 [First US Destination of New MIT PhDs
Over the Last Five Years](#)

Photo Credit: Page 1: Emily Dahl; Page 10: <https://www.facebook.com/p/Jennylou-and-the-Buckaroos-100086119794468/>;
Page 11: Jeff Ravel

Address

MIT Faculty Newsletter
Bldg. 10-335
Cambridge, MA 02139

Website

<https://fnl.mit.edu>

Telephone 617-253-7303

Fax 617-253-0458

Email fnl@mit.edu

Subscriptions

\$15/year on campus

\$25/year off campus

The Silbey Report
continued from page 1

26% response rate – considerably higher than comparable Institute surveys. The results confirmed strong engagement with the *Newsletter*: over 60% of respondents reported reading most or all issues, and emeritus faculty were particularly active readers. The *Newsletter*’s signature “MIT Numbers” and faculty-written articles were the most widely read and appreciated features.

Significantly, the community expressed strong support for the FNL’s independence – from the MIT Corporation, central administration, and faculty governance structures. While most did not see the *Newsletter* as “the voice of the faculty,” respondents overwhelmingly endorsed its role as a venue for diverse perspectives and open discourse on matters of importance to the Institute.

Challenges in Governance and Production

Despite this strong institutional support, the committee uncovered a number of structural and operational challenges. Editorial Board meetings have been irregular, often scheduled on short notice, and lack systematic documentation. The board has at times operated below its stated membership minimum, and the nomination process has been inconsistently applied. New members receive little orientation, and the lack of formal onboarding limits effective participation.

On the production side, the *Newsletter* relies heavily on a single Managing Editor and a largely ad hoc system of soliciting content. The absence of predictable submission deadlines, publication calendars, or robust editorial planning creates significant barriers to sustainability.

A Call for Transparency, Accountability, and Investment

To address these issues, the committee issued a series of recommendations, including:

- **Improving transparency** through public documentation of board meetings, election processes, and policy revisions.
- **Establishing clear term limits and structured nomination protocols**, in consultation with experts in institutional governance.
- **Issuing an annual report to the faculty**, detailing editorial board activities, submission rates, and production metrics.
- **Increasing the number of editorial board meetings** to better manage the growing complexity of the publication.
- **Hiring a professional production editor** to support the *Newsletter*’s management and ensure timely publication.
- **Creating new content spaces**, including a “Letters to the Editor” section and regular updates from faculty governance committees.

In addition, the committee recommended the appointment of a transitional support committee from July 2025 through June 2026 to help implement these changes.

A Note from the Editorial Board of the Faculty Newsletter

We, the Editorial Board of the *MIT Faculty Newsletter*, would like to express our deep gratitude to the committee – informally known as the **Silbey Committee** – for their thorough, thoughtful, and generous work. This report marks not just a milestone in the history of the FNL, but also a moment of reflection and renewal.

We see in this report both a challenge and an aspiration: to hold true to the original spirit of the FNL as a publication rooted in independence, and to evolve it

into something stronger, more transparent, and more inclusive of the full faculty voice. That voice – diverse, discerning, and sometimes discordant – is not noise. It is sound. It is music. Built upon care. Composed with integrity. Resonant with the shared concerns of a community devoted to the life of the mind and the values of a just and open university.

At a time when the very notion of faculty governance is tested by shifting administrative structures, external pressures, and rapid institutional change, the FNL stands as a rare platform where faculty – in all their ranks, from all parts of the Institute – can find a home for their ideas, their critiques, their commitments. The committee’s recommendations call on all of us – not just the board – to act. To not merely preserve what the FNL has been, but to *build what it is meant to be*: an enduring institution of intellectual independence and principled discourse.

We welcome the opportunity to undertake this work in partnership – with the faculty, with governance committees, and with the broader MIT community. The report calls for better structure and stronger support; we embrace that call. But more fundamentally, it reminds us that the faculty voice must not be fragmented or forgotten. It must be heard – not because it is always right, but because without it, the balance of this Institute, and what it stands for, risks tilting irreversibly.

Let us care for this platform together. And let it be worthy of the faculty whose voices give it meaning.

**The Editorial Board
of the MIT Faculty Newsletter**

Why There Were No Faculty Newsletter Editorial Board Elections Last Spring

Sally Haslanger
Ceasar McDowell

SOME OF YOU MAY BE wondering why the *Faculty Newsletter* Editorial Board elections didn't happen this May. The FNL Nominations Committee went through a process of selecting a slate of eight candidates (for five positions) to run for election and the ballot email was scheduled to appear. Shortly beforehand, we received an email from the Office of the Provost explaining that the election would be paused. We learned that four faculty had lodged a

complaint with the Provost against the Board concerning our process for selecting the slate of candidates.

The FNL Co-Chairs met with the Vice Provost and the Chair of the Faculty more than once and were told that the election could continue. Before the ballot was to be sent (for the second time), we received notification that the election was again paused. Since then, the Co-Chairs have met with the Vice Provost, the former and current Chairs of the Faculty,

and the new Provost to resolve the issue. Negotiations have resulted in an agreement. We will aim to have elections by December 1, 2025. ■

Sally Haslanger is Ford Professor of Philosophy and Women's Graduate Studies, and Co-Chair of the Faculty Newsletter Editorial Board (shaslang@mit.edu).

Ceasar McDowell is Professor of the Practice of Civic Design of Urban Studies and Planning, and Co-Chair of the Faculty Newsletter Editorial Board (ceasar@mit.edu).

MIT Runs on Engineers (and Worry) A late-summer dispatch from a campus where even the downhill picks up speed

Franz-Josef Ullm

IT'S MID-AUGUST AT MIT, and nothing is flat – not the skyline, not the sidewalks, not even the downhill. Everything tilts into motion. The air already carries that faint trace of Back-to-School™, not yet the haunted kind – more like a stray bottle rocket on July 3rd: a reminder that the real noise will soon crescendo.

This year's twist: we have a new provost. An engineer. Again. MIT hiring engineers into leadership is like Dunkin' selling coffee – no one is surprised. MIT runs on engineers. And yet,

engineers (and I'm one) tend to make headlines more when something is on fire. I wish our new provost well. Truly. I also give it until mid-September before the first alarm bell rings. (The first Institute Faculty Meeting – announced by our new faculty officer team with tea before and booze after – is September 17.)

Inbox as Barometer

The first signs of seasonal change aren't in the trees or the weather – they're in my inbox.

June emails: *Have a great summer! Rest! Recharge!*

Mid-August emails: *Advising schedules are posted. Faculty retreat is coming. Get ready.*

My replies? Around 1 p.m. the next day – if I remember to flag them. Sometimes I pretend the reminder was the original. Outside, the crickets (Orthoptera, for those keeping score) chirp in sync with the departmental pings. Both grow louder until the season tips over.

[continued on next page](#)

MIT Runs on Engineers (and Worry)

Ulm, from preceding page

Two Time Scales

Inbox pings are one thing. Sirens are another.

Since January, we've watched an administration strike early at academia where it hurts most: the grants, the funding. Then they came for the students exercising their First Amendment rights – *Mahmoud Khalil*, arrested in New York; *Rümeysa Öztürk*, abducted in Somerville; *Mohsen Mahdawi*, detained in Vermont – a string of ICE actions that sent a wave of panic through MIT, the same panic that rippled through Boston's immigrant neighborhoods, from Somerville to Chelsea, from East Boston to Malden. *Our students. Our neighbors.*

Universities adapt – it's what they do – but adaptation here moves at the pace of academia, measured in years or decades. This administration operates an order of magnitude faster. Two speeds, as engineers might put it, separated morally by light years. But morals don't protect you, not even on the streets of Somerville.

How to Make a President Fly

It's been a year or two of academic superhero films that end badly. Remember when Harvard's president stood up this spring to the political bullies? For one bright, cape-flapping moment, we thought: invincible. Then – skyscraper → pavement.

I know too much about free fall not to recognize one, whether from gravity or under duress. The first is physical, the second moral – and as we keep learning, morals don't provide food.

The list became a tragic trilogy in 2024: UPenn first, Harvard second, Columbia third. All women. One of them Black. Adaptation now – in 2025 it sounds more like survival mode – requires a parachute stitched from equal parts legalese and plausible deniability. Bless Sally Kornbluth, who somehow threaded that needle without tearing the fabric.

The New Boyle's Law

When Columbia signed its first agreement with the Trump administration in late July, Harvard was bound to follow – as if Boyle's law, pressure inversely proportional to volume, had been rewritten as: political pressure inversely proportional to institutional backbone.

This year's shift is more than turbulence – it is austerity. Hiring frozen. Budgets cut five, sometimes ten percent.

As if someone had been running an exercise in hypothesis testing, the Institute closed its DEI office and eliminated the VP for Equity and Inclusion post. Diversity, Equity and Inclusion have been left orphaned in the hallways, like boxes no one claims to own.

Graduate enrollment down eighteen. By my rough calculation, that's 250 fewer gowns crossing the stage at Commencement. Don't trust the math – trust the trend. The years of plenty are over; the years of famine have begun.

(Admissions supplied their own corollary: Black representation down from 13–15% to 5%, Hispanic from 15–16% to 11%. We are anxiously waiting for the Class of 2029 numbers.)

As if someone had been running an exercise in hypothesis testing, the Institute closed its DEI office and eliminated the VP for Equity and Inclusion post. Diversity, Equity and Inclusion have been left orphaned in the hallways, like boxes no one claims to own. The humanities, too, are being tested: support persists through selective programs and collaborations, but the mood is quieter, more defensive – part of the same holding pattern gripping the entire campus as it reorganizes, subdued around scarcity.

Scarcity scales faster than innovation – and with far less trial and error.

Scarcity may be measurable, but August makes it personal.

Summer Blues

It is tempting, in August, to dress all this up in laws of nature: Boyle last year, Newton's Third perhaps this year, or even something quantum, indeterminate, beyond comprehension. But none of that explains the mood.

Late summer always feels thinner, lonelier. The inbox grows louder, the campus stays quiet, and you begin to fear you won't finish what you set out to do.

The nods of community are fewer, the casual conversations that remind you you're not alone.

And what lies ahead – already appearing in August – are the harder encounters: the colleague reeling from a grant cancellation, the quiet mention of budget cuts, the graduate student who fears being refused re-entry at Logan, or the advisee you are guiding through a disciplinary process that found no summer rest.

Successes and struggles alike remind us that we live this experiment together – a community that persists, even when August makes it feel otherwise.

Hope is not a law of nature. Hope is a choice – one we make together. I have two weeks left to practice it, to pretend nothing has happened. At MIT, we call that strategic adaptation. And in August, it sounds almost like hope – which, if not a law of nature, may yet be a force of nature. ■

Franz-Josef Ulm is Class of 1922 Professor in the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering (ulm@mit.edu).

Introducing OACES

Sadé Abraham
David L. Darmofal
Kristala L. J. Prather

IN AUGUST 2025, WE were pleased to announce the arrival of OACES (pronounced “oasis”), or the Office of Academic Community, Empowerment, and Success.

OACES is a “pillar” (or sub-unit) in the [Undergraduate Advising Center \(UAC\)](#), combining the current staffing, budgets, and programs of the Office of Minority Education (OME) and the UAC’s Advising & Student Belonging (ASB) pillar (including FLI [First Generation and/or Low-Income] student success, associate advisor program, and transfer students). The other UAC pillars are the Office of the First Year (including orientation, FPOPs, first year advising and programming), Academic Achievement (including tutoring, student success software, and proactive advising support), and Strategic Initiatives (including assessment, communications, and upper-level student programming).

While OACES is new, it builds upon the remarkable 50-year history of OME. In this article, we discuss both the history of OME and the creation of OACES.

Leveraging OME: 50 Years of Academic Empowerment

Founded in 1975, the OME was created “to promote academic excellence, build strong communities, and develop professional mindsets among students of underrepresented minority (URM) groups, with the ultimate goal of developing leaders in the academy, industry, and society.” For 50 years, the OME has served MIT undergraduate students with caring staff and mentors, innovative programs,

and a powerful sense of community and belonging. (Of note, MITEES, another one of MIT’s hallmark programs focused on offering access and opportunity for middle school and high school students to pursue STEM, debuted that same year.)

OME got up and running quickly, as some of its now well-known programs predated its creation. Project Interphase (i.e., [Interphase EDGE](#)), created in 1969 to “ease the transition for incoming first-year students, particularly those from underrepresented backgrounds,” became a foundational element for the early OME. The program engages with students during their first two years beginning with an intensive eight-week summer session prior to students’ first year at MIT. Designed to expose scholars to key academic concepts, campus resources, and the pace, rigor, and culture of the Institute, it also provides a strong foundation for building community and fostering a sense of belonging. Fast forward to recent years, the Interphase summer session now includes a virtual option to further expand its reach. This year, the program received its highest ever number (250) of applications and nearly 100 students participated online and/or through on-campus activities.

Likewise, tutoring via the Talented Resource Scholar’s Room (TSR²) dates back even earlier to the Tutoring Program established by the Black Student Union in 1960. Today, there are upwards of 800 engagements with TSR² during the academic year.

For those who have engaged with the office over the past five decades, OME is

most defined by the community it has created and nurtured through evolving activities and opportunities to suit the changing needs of students.

The past decade in particular has seen enormous adaptation. Interphase’s two-year scholar enrichment program was adapted in the early 2020s into a parallel online format to serve more students. Let’s Chat@OME debuted around the same time, allowing students to drop into OME and talk with mental health and counseling staff, to ease access and destigmatize care. The Industrial Advisory Council for Minority Education (IACME) grew by nearly threefold, increasing member companies, as well as adding nonprofits, government labs, and alumni affinity groups to the mix.

More recently, stemming from conversations with students, [The Standard](#) and [the CRWN](#) (pronounced “crown”) were both created to “holistically support the academic, personal, and professional success of students,” very much akin to the UAC’s mandate and strategy. The synergy of these and other OME programs with the UAC ensures that OME’s remarkable work and legacy will endure.

Founding OACES: Charting the Next 50 Years

The UAC, created in 2023 to provide a transformative academic advising experience, represents one of our most significant investments in support of MIT’s undergraduate students. As the UAC took shape, it became clear from extensive con-

[continued on next page](#)

Introducing OACES

Abraham et. al, from preceding page

versations across the community that both the UAC and the OME could be strengthened and their missions further advanced by bringing the OME within the UAC.

and staff, to develop a mission statement and name for the combined OME and ASB organizations that would build on the 50 impactful years of the OME and the recent accomplishments of ASB and reflect the desire to strengthen the support for our current and future students.

community in academic settings; empowerment by providing the resources and support to build confidence and belonging; and success (academic, personal, and professional). These themes can be recognized in the mission and legacy of OME.

SELECT OME MILESTONES

1960	The Black Students' Union (BSU) started the BSU Tutoring Program (BSU TP).
1969	Project Interphase established with 40 students.
1975	The Office of Minority Education established.
1979	Second Summer Program (interdisciplinary, hands-on, project-based class held during IAP) established for first-year students only.
1990	The BSU TP program moves from the BSU to Building 12. Name changed to the Tutorial Services Room (TSR) and the program is managed by the OME.
1990	Industrial Advisory Council for Minority Education (IACME) established.
2006	The Laureates and Leaders program established; first class was accepted in Spring 2007 with 10 students.
2007	OME Student Advisory Council established.
2007	The Mentor Advocate Partnership (MAP) pilot launched with OME staff as mentors and 36 first-years as protégés.
2009	Second Summer Program name changed to Momentum; now open to first- and second-year students.
2010	OME Faculty Advisory Committee established.
2010	The IACME Charter/Constitution amended to include tech and non-tech companies, government, non-profits, as well as representatives from two MIT alumni affinity groups, BAMIT and LAMIT.
2012	Interphase program reimagined to include first-year advising and summer/academic year components; takes on new name: Interphase EDGE (Empowering Discovery Gateway to Excellence).
2013	E-MAP (MAP E-Mentoring Initiative) started with a cohort of 25 students and 25 Industry/alumni mentors.
2014	TSR (now TSR^2) moves from Bldg. 12 to Building 16.
2018	The Standard debuts.
2020	Interphase online option, Interphase EDGE/x, created to reach more students.
2023	The CRWN debuts.
2025	OACES is formed. OME Celebrates its 50th anniversary.

The ASB pillar in the UAC is a response to changing demographics, as 30% of our students now identify as first-generation and/or low-income. We also have a growing population of transfer students, including veterans. Thus, ASB and OME were naturally aligned, as both share a commitment to academic success, mentorship, and belonging for students from historically marginalized backgrounds and/or those who have navigated unique paths to MIT.

Last spring, Dave charged a working group co-chaired by Kris and Sadé, and composed of students, faculty, alumni,

The working group kept a strong focus on its assignment while still making room for deep philosophical and contemplative discussion ranging from educational pedagogy and scholarship to organizational behavior (with insight from Sloan alumni), alongside current students' on-the-ground perspectives about how they hoped to experience the space and programming.

From that came . . .

• **A new name and mission.** The naming was critical, as the team wanted to convey the importance of:

Similarly, the OACES mission statement developed by the group explicitly recognizes the OME foundation: *The mission of OACES is to build on the pioneering work of the OME, which long supported the academic empowerment and success of historically marginalized and underrepresented student communities. Expanding upon this legacy, OACES will champion the success of students who have faced challenges on their paths to or at MIT, including but not limited to students*

[continued on next page](#)

Introducing OACES

Abraham et. al, from preceding page

who are first generation, low income, transfer, underrepresented, or underserved. Open to all students, OACES is committed to fostering academic excellence; personal and professional growth; and strong, connected communities that empower students to thrive as leaders in academia, industry, and society.

- **A new leader.** Associate Dean and Director Sadé Abraham, who led UAC's ASB and, over the past academic year, served as interim deputy director of the OME.
- **A fantastic home.** The entire UAC staff, including OACES, is located in Building 11, first and third floor. Integrated within the Advising & Academic Achievement (AAA) pillar in the UAC, the OME's TSR² (The Talented Scholars Resource Room) will become the foundation of an effort to make tutoring more available for all undergraduates. TSR²'s physical home will be in the OME's former space in Building 4.

- **A new Advisory Council.** Reporting to the vice chancellor for graduate and undergraduate education (GUE), it will provide strategic advice about OACES and related GUE efforts and be an essential way for current and future leaders to remain aligned with what today and tomorrow's students need to thrive. This council will include students, alumni, staff, and faculty. The OME's previous faculty advisory council (OMEFAC) will be integrated into the new Advisory Council. The OME's previous student advisory council (OMESAC) will remain and be renamed as part of OACES.

In the words of Sadé, "the result is more than just a new acronym. It is a unified ecosystem designed to serve all of our students holistically. Our team brings both deep institutional history and fresh energy."

For those of you who have benefitted from or worked with the OME, rest assured that within the new organization, there remains a strong commitment to both the former OME and ASB portfolios. Our hope is that having both organizations under one umbrella will lead to even

greater synergy and expansion of our efforts, enhancing the services we offer to students.

Looking Forward

The OACES team will spend the coming months refining its strategic plan, seeking advice from students, faculty, staff, and alumni, and reaching out to the campus community, all while settling into its new space and running current programming. In short, we are looking for community members, especially those dedicated to teaching, learning, and advising, to be engaged in co-creating what's to come.

Fittingly, these energizing changes come as OME marks its 50th birthday. We hope you will join us for a celebration of its legacy and to honor its new era as OACES. More details on the celebration to come. ■

Sadé Abraham is Associate Dean, Undergraduate Advising Center (sabra712@mit.edu).

David L. Darmofal is Vice Chancellor, Undergraduate and Graduate Education (darmofal@mit.edu).

Kristala L. J. Pratha is Arthur Dehon Little Professor of Chemical Engineering (kljp@mit.edu).

letters

When Protest Becomes Intimidation

To The Faculty Newsletter:

"This is Not an Editorial" may not have been an editorial, and it certainly was not a pipe. However, to write "Instead, faculty and students who protested the war – as students have always done in moments of conscience – were met not with dialogue, but with discipline." is disingenuous.

Too often, protest was not a free expression of plurality. It became intimidation.

Jewish students and staff were excluded from areas on campus, were subject to verbal harassment and physical threat, and public spaces were occupied by masked masses whose numbers, volume, hostility, and anonymity were frightening.

This was not protest. It was mob rule.

Sure, one might question the nature of the discipline. In fact, had such actions targeted any group by Jews, one would

have expected discipline swifter and more severe.

But to write this off as over reaction to non-provocation?

That's telling in its own right. ■

Steve Spear

DBA MS '93 MS '93
MIT Sloan School of Management,
Senior Lecturer

**How US Universities
Can Survive State Terrorism**
D'Ignazio, from page 1

University doctoral student, was detained by federal agents in March while on her way to break her Ramadan fast. Like other student kidnappings and visa revocations around the country, Öztürk's appears to be an [ideological deportation](#), attempted because she cowrote [an op-ed in her student newspaper](#) urging Tufts University to publicly acknowledge the genocide in Palestine.

These are not normal times, and these are not my normal job duties. It is within the job description for a scholar and professor to try to name and describe precisely and truthfully the world that we encounter around us. For this reason, I want to offer a term from international relations to characterize Rümeyşa Öztürk's abduction and many other actions of the current administration: *state terrorism*.

Political scholar [Ruth Blakeley](#) writes that "state terrorism should be understood as a threat or act of violence by agents of the state that is designed to induce fear in a target audience, so that they are coerced into changing their behavior in some way." What distinguishes state terrorism from other routine uses of force is that the violence is designed to "send a message" – to reverberate out into the population, to engender fear, and to shift behavior.

The US government's detentions of students such as Öztürk constitute a burgeoning form of state terrorism, particularly when considered alongside other acts of political violence and coercion. These include using taxpayer dollars for deporting undocumented workers – some while they were seeking food outside homeless shelters, [dropping their kids off at daycare](#), or [driving to their high school volleyball practice](#). Or consider the apparently random acts of extreme aggression against other people who pose no threat: the German green-card holder stripped naked and interrogated until he collapsed and the Canadian woman held for two weeks in a detention center because of an expired visa. These acts include a raft of executive orders that strip rights from and deny the very existence of the transgender community, attempts to black-mail universities into ideological submission, and partisan investigations of law firms who

work with the administration's political opponents.

These government actions constitute both *threats* of violence and actual violence. But they are not only (or, in some cases, at all) about the individuals and institutions involved. Öztürk's abduction is not specifically about her or her actions. Rather, it was a premeditated viral news event intended to sow fear among all international students and convey the idea that none of them are safe. The Trump administration's strategy conjoins specific instances of threats and violence with widely reported media representations in order to spread fear. This is what distinguishes the current violence of the state as terrorist. It is not only a judicial project but also a public relations project and a strategic communications project.

Moreover, the administration doesn't only need to use their own propaganda networks to distribute information about such events. The left- and center-leaning media are doing an excellent job circulating the violence and boosting public feelings of vulnerability and helplessness (thanks, *New York Times*). This gives the appearance that state terrorism is working, and in certain ways that might be true. I would estimate that about a third of my own working hours – hours that professors should be using to advance science and innovation or educate and mentor students – are now consumed with combating the impacts of state terrorism on my university campus: widespread fear, self-censorship, capitulation, and silence. But we can disrupt this cycle. Naming these actions as state terrorism enables us to analyze the current situation and survive political violence, as people who have come before us have survived.

How can US universities survive state terrorism?

If you are in university leadership, you can lead with courage and moral clarity. Such qualities are hard to come by these days, not least because our administrators in higher education are, quite understandably, not trained to combat terrorists. The political moment requires us to adapt. Faculty, students, and staff would like to see a muscular and coordinated defense of the core values and mission of higher education. This includes resisting political interference to

adopt a particular definition of antisemitism, dissolve DEI programs, adopt scientifically incorrect definitions of gender, or [rewrite history to teach a series of untruths about white male heroes](#). It includes the courage to use endowments and mobilize alumni networks to survive this period of assault. As basic playground logic tells us, you don't fight bullies by sticking your head in the sand or politely waiting for them to stop punching your friend.

If you are a university professor, the most important action you can take is to leave your office and talk to your colleagues. Many are scared to speak out for fear of becoming a target, losing funding, or seeing their students deported. I understand this fear and feel it too. Yet there are simple things we can do in the course of our everyday professional lives that will help us support each other through this period: We can go to faculty meetings, share information with each other, join national advocacy organizations, and host gatherings where we laugh and cry about the absurdity of all of this. Once we start talking to each other, other courses of action magically become possible.

If you are in a community (as I hope all of us are), you can connect with mutual aid groups who are protecting their most vulnerable members. I have been deeply inspired by the work in my own town, where neighbors are rejecting dehumanization and scapegoating in favor of love and generosity. We are protecting neighbors from kidnappers, feeding people, comforting children, and supporting families. In contrast to the acts of state terrorism, these simple actions spread a different message: *you belong here*. These networks of mutual aid have sprung up in [cities](#), [across states](#), and [throughout the entire country](#).

Surviving state terrorism will not be easy. During this period, we must remember that the current project is an elaborate exercise in political theater designed to spread fear, isolation, and division. Acts of radical care, everyday courage, and collective action are the most effective antidote to state terrorism. ■

*First published in the AAUP blog.

Catherine D'Ignazio is an Associate Professor in the Department of Urban Studies and Planning (dignazio@mit.edu).

**Reflections on an Encounter
Outside Wichita, Kansas**

Ravel, from page 1

expose the kids to the world beyond the East Coast. To be fair, as we boarded the plane at Logan we were not entirely in snob mode. I had spent part of my childhood in Iowa and Nebraska, and my wife had family members, going back at least two generations, who had lived in various midwestern states, including Kansas. Nevertheless, we were convinced that our daily routines and expectations, not to mention, we imagined, our political sympathies, differed markedly from most folks in Wichita. It was the mid-aughts, 9/11 was still fresh in people's minds, and the Bush administration was pushing regime change in the Middle East. In 2004, a book entitled *What's the Matter with Kansas? How Conservatives Won the Heart of America* had created a stir in progressive circles. In short, we thought that despite our claims to open-mindedness, the level of cognitive dissonance experienced during the trip would be high.

The visit with my wife's brother and his family was enjoyable. It was good for the kids to get to know their cousins a little better. Their Wichita house had a backyard pool that kept us cool as we did cannonballs and dunked the little ones. The adults and spouses became better acquainted, and everyone was warm and welcoming. Late one afternoon we all piled into a few cars to head to the Prairie Rose Supper Club in Benton, Kansas, about half an hour northeast of Wichita. The Prairie Rose featured live Country and Western music performed by the Prairie Rose Wranglers. Much later, according to my wife's brother, the Prairie Rose went under when its owner was sent to jail for fraud. Apparently, he had tried to open an amusement park nearby, using the Prairie Rose as collateral. The planned amusement park never materialized, however, and the would-be investors came to realize that the proprietor was running a scam. The place was eventually resurrected by new ownership

as the Prairie Rose Ranch, "Where the West Comes Alive!" Its current website advertises acts such as Jennylou and the Buckaroos. Sadly, though, the Prairie Rose no longer offers "traditional chuck-wagon suppers."

When we arrived at the Prairie Rose in that earlier, more innocent age, we were seated at one of the long picnic tables in the performance space and given menus listing the various barbecued options. As servers circulated taking orders, an emcee appeared on the stage to warm up the crowd; he sported a healthy midwestern twang. At one point, as we were debating the merits of barbecued beef ribs, pulled pork sandwiches, french fries, and onion rings at our table, the emcee asked people in the audience to name their hometowns. Various people spoke up: "Wichita!" "Kansas City!" And points north, south, east and west of Kansas. Thinking I would be clever and perhaps hoping to be seen as exotic in

[continued on next page](#)



Jennylou and the Buckaroos

**Reflections on an Encounter
Outside Wichita, Kansas**

Ravel, from preceding page

that setting, I stood up and, pointing to our daughter, yelled “Nepal!” The emcee paused, then repeated the information for the benefit of the rest of the crowd. He continued his warm-up patter, and soon the food began to come out of the kitchen. When ours arrived, we hungrily dug in.

As we began eating, we noticed an elderly white couple making their way towards our picnic table. Given that I had identified our daughter as Nepali, we were wondering what they could possibly want with us. Were they curious? Were they offended? Were we about to be treated to a tirade, drenched in xenophobic, 9/11-fueled rage, about immigrants who were ruining the country? We braced ourselves. The couple arrived at our table, positioned themselves directly opposite our daughter, and began to speak. At first we could not recognize the words that came out of their mouths, but then it dawned on us: they were speaking Nepali! Our daughter, of course, looked at them uncomprehendingly. We had adopted her just as she was on the cusp of language. She had forgotten the few words of Nepali that she might have once known, aware of the necessity of learning the language of her new home. When they realized that she did not understand what they were saying, they turned to us and switched to English. Smiling, they explained that in their youth they had served in the Peace Corps in Nepal. Over the years, as they had raised their own children back in the States, they had kept their Nepali alive, using it as a private form of communication when they did not want their kids or others to know what they were saying. We were shocked, then amused. We chatted with them a while longer, they bid us farewell in Nepali, and we turned back to our food and the music of the Prairie Rose Wranglers.

Later that evening, back in the hotel with the kids, we began to process the encounter. We were a little embarrassed. Despite the supposedly enlightened views



At the Copan Monastery in the hills above Kathmandu in Nepal

that we tried to bring into our classrooms, despite our determination to raise our children as people who would appreciate those from different backgrounds, we had badly mistaken the intentions of this couple. It was a humbling realization. In a single moment in rural Kansas, the world had rotated ever so slightly on its axis, offering us an unexpected perspective on our own misguided assumptions.

Over the last two decades when I have told this story, it has always been in private conversations, with the aim of making fun of myself. Why am I recounting it now in this public, MIT faculty-sanctioned space, in a moment when the inclusive values the Institute celebrates are under specious

attack? Couldn't this anecdote be interpreted as evidence that the liberal professoriate is just as blinkered as its critics claim? I would hope not. To my mind, the couple who approached us that evening at the Prairie Rose was a reminder, no matter one's political beliefs, of the infinite human capacity to learn and grow. They had embarked many years earlier on a mission to educate themselves and help others. On that Kansas evening they reminded us of those lessons, whose aims are easy to forget in the partisan passions of the moment. A little less heat, and a little more namaste (as they say in Nepal), would serve us all well over the next few years. ■

Jeff Ravel is Professor Emeritus of History (ravel@mit.edu). He lives in New Mexico.

Are Ad Hominem Attacks Legitimate Academic Freedom?

Ian H. Hutchinson
Co-President of the MIT
Council on Academic Freedom*

THE LATIN PHRASE *ad hominem* meaning *to the person* describes approaches to argumentation, debate, discourse, and politics, that consist of personal attacks against the opposing speaker, rather than presenting arguments or evidence relevant to the topic under discussion¹. The practice was criticized by Greek philosophers as early as Aristotle. From a logical viewpoint, ad hominem attacks are usually recognized as a type of fallacy. Unfortunately, political discourse today is full of them. Personal insults and name calling, formally called *abusive ad hominem* attacks, have become the norm, frequently practiced by the current US President and many other politicians. Social media seems to be their natural habitat.

Other, less offensive, forms of ad hominem discourse predominate in many modern arguments, especially online. *Circumstantial ad hominem* argumentation consists of reference to some circumstance in the opponent's life that might explain psychologically why they hold their position. In the last century, Oxford don C. S. Lewis colorfully called this vice *Bulverism*², saying "You must show that a man is wrong before you start explaining why he is wrong. The modern method is to assume without discussion that he is wrong and then distract his attention from this (the only real issue) by busily explaining how he became so silly." Another specific form, *Guilt by association*, refers to an ad hominem argument in which assertions are attacked based on the opponent's association with another group considered to be guilty of some error or vice.

The common factor that makes all these varieties ad hominem is that they aim to discredit opinions by discrediting the person.

Criticizing a person's actions might sometimes be warranted, but the intent to discredit their ideas by implication is rhetorical misdirection. Even the less offensive modes of ad hominem argumentation often lack civility as well as logical relevance. It is disheartening, therefore, that two recent high-profile events concern ad hominem attacks by MIT faculty members (in the Linguistics and Philosophy Department, no less) on other members of the Institute.

Faculty attacks against a postdoc and a graduate student, such as those alleged (but as yet unproven) in the Brandeis Center's suit³ against MIT and an MIT professor, amount to an egregious abuse of power as a faculty member, failing in the academic responsibility to engage in civil and rational discourse, and instead attempting to intimidate those disagreeing by abusive ad hominem attacks and threats. Even if such actions and speech, persisting over many months, were to be judged legal under the first amendment, they remain academic harassment, unworthy of an MIT faculty member. They plainly contravene what the Faculty Statement on Free Expression⁴ calls the "expectation of a collegial and respectful learning and working environment" and "civility [and] mutual respect." A perpetrator ought to have been restrained in a timely manner by the MIT administration and strongly disciplined.

The "open letter"⁵, signed by a number of MIT students and by two MIT professors⁶ in his own department, denigrating Professor

Byrne⁷ for his contributions to the HHS "Treatment for Pediatric Gender Dysphoria" report (1 May 2025⁸), reserves its extreme language for the federal government. However its accusation of "failure to uphold your responsibilities as an academic" seeks to undermine Prof. Byrne's reputation by an unfounded ad hominem attack on his credentials, his intentions, and his cooperation with the government. The posting of this attack online without even bothering to send a copy to Prof. Byrne, shows that the intent was to discredit and "cancel" his ideas by a public attack on him, rather than to engage with his expressed opinions or arguments. No cogent arguments or evidence are offered to counter the findings of the report or even to support the letter's criticism of Professor Byrne. His publishing a well-documented analysis of Gender and Gender Dysphoria⁹, or participating in a government report, violates no principle of academic responsibility. It ought to be critiqued on the basis of its content, not of his supposed character or qualifications.

One can appreciate that undergraduates, who are only beginning to learn the expectations of academic discourse, might be ignorant of the fallacious nature of ad hominem argumentation. One would expect that the dozen or so MIT Philosophy graduate students signing the "open letter" ought to know that ad hominem attacks are philosophically mis-

[continued on next page](#)

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ad_hominem

² <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bulverism>

³ <https://brandeiscenter.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/06.25.2025-MIT-Complaint.pdf>

⁴ <https://facultygovernance.mit.edu/december-23-2022-update-free-expression-statement>

⁵ <https://dearprofessorbyrne.wordpress.com/>

⁶ Whose names have been removed from this article at the request of the FNL Editorial Board.

⁷ Who thereafter wrote a "Dear Colleague" letter defending his reputation against the misrepresentations of the open letter <https://web.mit.edu/abyrne/www/DearColleagues070325.pdf>

⁸ <https://opa.hhs.gov/gender-dysphoria-report>

⁹ <https://news.mit.edu/2024/mit-philosophers-call-civil-discussion-gender-sex-0220>

**Are Ad Hominem Attacks
Legitimate Academic Freedom?**
Hutchinson, from preceding page

guided and illogical. For MIT professors to engage publicly in ad hominem attacks against other professors is at least a failure of collegial-

ity and civility, and a bad example to students. For a professor to mount abusive ad hominem attacks on more junior members of the Institute is academic harassment, abuse of power, and an attack on academic freedom, not an exercise of it. ■

*Not speaking for MITCAF as a whole, which has a range of opinions on this topic.

Ian H. Hutchinson is Professor Emeritus of Nuclear Science and Engineering (*ihutch@mit.edu*).

Reply to Professor Hutchinson on Arguing Ad Hominem

Kieran Setiya

PROFESSOR HUTCHINSON CLAIMS that the authors of the open letter to Professor Alex Byrne¹ commit the logical fallacy of arguing ad hominem. To commit this fallacy is to illicitly exploit a negative assessment of someone's person – their character, motives, or actions – as an objection to their ideas, aiming to discredit their views by discrediting them. Prof. Hutchinson concedes that “undergraduates, who are only beginning to learn the expectations of academic discourse, might be ignorant of the fallacious nature of ad hominem argumentation.” But, he adds, “[one] would expect that the dozen or so MIT Philosophy graduate students signing the ‘open letter’ ought to know that ad hominem attacks are philosophically misguided and illogical.”

I am not writing to defend the open letter or the “collegiality and civility” of authoring or signing it – Prof. Byrne has posted his own response² – but as a professor in the Philosophy Section, I can assure readers they need not fear our students are confused about the ad hominem fallacy.

The open letter criticizes Prof. Byrne's participation in the recent HHS report on Treatment for Pediatric Gender Dysphoria.³ To criticize someone's actions, rightly or wrongly, is not to commit the ad hominem fallacy, so long as one does not imply that their

ethical failings impugn their ideas. One could, for instance, criticize someone for writing a report even when one agrees with its content, or when its validity is not at issue, because one thinks it will be misused, or have bad effects. Moral criticism of this kind is not properly described as “ad hominem” – at least not in the sense of the fallacy – though it may of course be mistaken or misguided. That would have to be established on the merits, by considering the ethical arguments, pro and con.

Prof. Hutchinson writes: “The posting of this attack online without even bothering to send a copy to Prof. Byrne, shows that the intent was to discredit and ‘cancel’ his ideas by a public attack on him, rather than to engage with his expressed opinions or arguments.” But the open letter is clear that it does not call for “official or unofficial sanctions” and that its focus is Prof. Byrne's actions, not his ideas. Prof. Hutchinson provides no evidence that the authors of the open letter are arguing in bad faith or inviting any inference from Prof. Byrne's actions to the validity of his views. The letter states explicitly that its central arguments are intended to have force “*even for those who share your views*.” What's more, the timing of the open letter, along with its express content, are evidence against Prof. Hutchinson's interpretation: the graduate students who signed the open letter were long aware of Prof. Byrne's views on gender; his book, op-eds, academic articles and public talks prompted no similar letter; and the open letter indicates that it was issued in response to his involvement in the HSS report, the action it primarily criticizes.

There is no basis for an accusation of bad faith and thus no basis for the charge of arguing ad hominem – as opposed to engaging in moral criticism, right or wrong.

Why does this matter? Not just because the graduate students in Philosophy who signed the open letter cannot be convicted of misunderstanding the ad hominem fallacy, but because the overly expansive accusation of “arguing ad hominem” is rhetorically dangerous. It risks portraying the university as a space exempt from moral debate, in which moral criticism of the actions of academics is always misdirected or “logically fallacious.” But our actions as academics are open to critique as well as our ideas, and the activity of moral argument is central to at least some parts of the academy, where it is protected as an exercise of academic freedom.

Ironically, Prof. Hutchinson himself takes aim at actions, not ideas: he objects to the act of posting the open letter by appeal to arguments in the ethics of academic inquiry. One could speculate about his motives, as he speculates about the motives behind the open letter. Does he commit the ad hominem fallacy, aiming to discredit the views of the signatories by discrediting their actions? I hope he would agree that such speculation is unfair. We should take authors to be arguing in good faith unless we have strong evidence otherwise. Prof. Hutchinson provides no such evidence in his discussion of the open letter. ■

Kieran Setiya is Peter de Florez Professor of Philosophy (*ksetiya@mit.edu*).

¹ <https://dearprofessorbyrne.wordpress.com>

² <https://web.mit.edu/abyrne/www/DearColleagues070325.pdf>

³ <https://opa.hhs.gov/gender-dysphoria-report>

J-WAFS: From an Idea to a Program

Remarks by Professor John H. Lienhard V at the 10th Anniversary Celebration of the Abdul Latif Jameel Water and Food Systems Lab (J-WAFS)

IN 2005, I BEGAN READING about water scarcity around the world. The problem was widespread, extreme, and growing. I saw then that my background in transport phenomena could be applied to water purification technologies. And not long after that, our department started a research collaboration with King Fahd University in Saudi Arabia. Water supply and desalination figured prominently in that program. By that point, I was building a research group on desalination, and I was looking around MIT to see who else worked on water supply. In each of several departments, I spoke to faculty who would say something like “I work on water, but I’m about the only person at MIT who does.” With such fragmentation, more coordination was clearly needed.

Those meetings led me into discussions about an Institute-wide program on water, with Phil Khoury, Dara Entekhabi, Jim Wescoat, and others. The conversations continued for several years. That work included the 2011 *Rethinking Water* symposium and a 2012 proposal for a major environmental program at MIT. But large-scale funding did not materialize.

Later in 2012, Provost Rafael Reif asked Maria Zuber and me to meet with faculty across the Institute. We interviewed more than 100 professors. We asked what large-scale environmental activities might be initiated, outside existing efforts like the MIT energy initiative. Our report covered several topics, among which water and food were prominent. We had expected water, but food was a surprise. At that point, Maria became vice president for research, and I went back to my day job in Mechanical Engineering.

About a year later, Rafael (now president) asked me to discuss the report with Mohammed Jameel, a CEE alumnus and the benefactor of J-PAL. I spoke to him. Mohammed was inspired, and he wanted to endow a lab focused on water and food. We drafted a vision for that work, and within a couple of months Mohammed gave the endowment that now supports J-WAFS.

My mother used to tell me: “Be careful what you wish for because you might get it.” I was appointed as director of J-WAFS, an entity that now needed to be created from scratch and which had no staff. Several constraints were clear immediately. Existing programs had their own sponsors and goals, and they had no desire to “become part of J-WAFS.” Departments and PIs generally had their own objectives and rewards as well. And the vision of J-WAFS as an Institute-wide entity covering both water and food implied that our research program would be diverse, with a portfolio structure rather than any single, specific target.

Still, individual PIs are always happy to be funded. And MIT has a world-class faculty. That provided the path forward. My own experience in water was an example: faculty can apply their disciplinary expertise to new topics that they haven’t worked on before. Water and food are each very broad, system-level, cross-disciplinary problems. They can be approached from many directions. So, J-WAFS mobilized the diverse expertise of the faculty through our seed grant program and other competitive awards.

Given the breadth of water and food, we still faced the question of what kind

work to do. Now, no one at MIT has ever had the goal of being “almost as good” as the program at the University of Elsewhere. Our PIs aim to lead, using their unique strengths, and our peer reviewers, who are mostly MIT faculty, insist on top tier research. Those factors strongly favor work in areas where MIT has an “unfair advantage” over other institutions...to borrow a phrase from my late colleague Professor Ronnie Probst.

So, what has been the result? We’ve funded groundbreaking work in plant biochemistry and genomics, reflecting MIT’s growing strength in plant biology. One ongoing project targets the RuBisCO enzyme, which catalyzes CO fixation during photosynthesis. That work is driven by machine learning. The newly-found evaporative photomolecular effect is being applied to solar desalination. J-WAFS’ partnership with Xylem, Inc. led MIT machine designers to invent a variable volume pump that holds high efficiency under shifting loads. Economists have developed a new framework for weather-indexed crop insurance. Social scientists are preventing water shut offs in low-income US communities. Chemists and chemical engineers are developing alternatives to the Haber-Bosch process. Atmospheric scientists have quantified climate change risk to food crops in Africa. Soil scientists are using bacteria to free up phosphorus for plant growth. Thermal engineers have developed combustion systems that produce carbon-rich fertilizer from post-harvest waste. New water purification technologies have been invented, and sensors have been created to

[continued on next page](#)

J-WAFS: From An Idea to a Program

Lienhard V, from preceding page

spot PFOS in water and to find spoiled food.

Further, J-WAFS has leveraged MIT's entrepreneurial culture, helping to spin-out 12 companies. They do pesticide management, portable solar desalination, advanced filters for safe water, bacteria sensors for meat packing, and more.

Clean water and safe food are humankind's most essential needs, and yet we struggle to ensure their availability to all. These are *MIT-hard* problems. Megacities in the developing world often lack functioning water and wastewater systems, and may never have the capital to build piped infrastructure. How can we deliver safe water to the millions of city-dwellers who need it? Crop productivity in the developing world lags far behind industrialized farming in the developed world. Even a modest increase in fertilizer use could double yields. How can we get affordable fertilizers to smallholder farmers? Almost 40% of Earth's land is used for food production – how can we intensify agriculture

to limit further growth of this footprint, or better, to reduce it? How can we mitigate the environmental costs of fertilizers, of large-scale monoculture farming, and of overfishing? How can we address the worldwide depletion of aquifers? And how can we better detect and remove pathogens from water, especially to protect vulnerable young children?

Among large-scale challenges, the acceleration of climate change is the most terrifying. Since I founded J-WAFS, the planet has warmed by more than 0.4°C. In 2018, we held a workshop on climate and agriculture. Experts described how global warming and rising weather variability impair crop growth. These effects are now apparent even to casual observers. While fossil fuels are the primary driver of climate change, the food system itself generates a third of global greenhouse gas emissions. We urgently need adaptation strategies, such as drought-tolerant crops, and mitigation strategies, such as policies to drive sustainable agriculture. Much important work lies ahead of us.

For me, directing J-WAFS has been an unparalleled opportunity to sample the

diverse research activities of MIT. I have read every proposal, every review, and every progress report ever submitted to J-WAFS, apart from my sabbatical year. The excellence of our PIs was unmistakable. I've often said that my job was like working in a candy shop and sampling the goods all day.

In closing, I'd like to thank several people. First, Rafael Reif, who saw the importance of water and food and who had confidence in my leadership. Second, Mohammed Jameel for his generosity and for his belief that MIT is uniquely positioned to make a better world. And finally, Renee Robins, my primary partner in building J-WAFS and herself a strong leader and strategic thinker. Of course, thanks also go to J-WAFS' staff, our PIs, our donors, and everyone else who has supported the development of this unique program. And I offer all my best wishes and support to my successor, Rohit Karnik.

Thank you all!

John H. Lienhard V is the Abdul Latif Jameel Professor of Water and Mechanical Engineering (lienhard@mit.edu).

letters

What's In A Name?

To The Faculty Newsletter:

IT IS INTERESTING TO NOTE that a distinguished member of your faculty suffers from a condition not unlike my own, nominal neurosis. My own forename carries with it the burden of a sanctified delinquent reformed by the vision of a stag on his way home from a night of debauchery, or the connotation of a faded member of the French or German aristocracy. This association pales in comparison with that of Franz Josef which recollects either the slain Emperor of Austro-Hungary; or perhaps, for those old enough to remember, Franz Josef Strauss,

an unapologetic former member of the Waffen SS and a leading and somewhat disreputable right-wing politician under Adenauer.

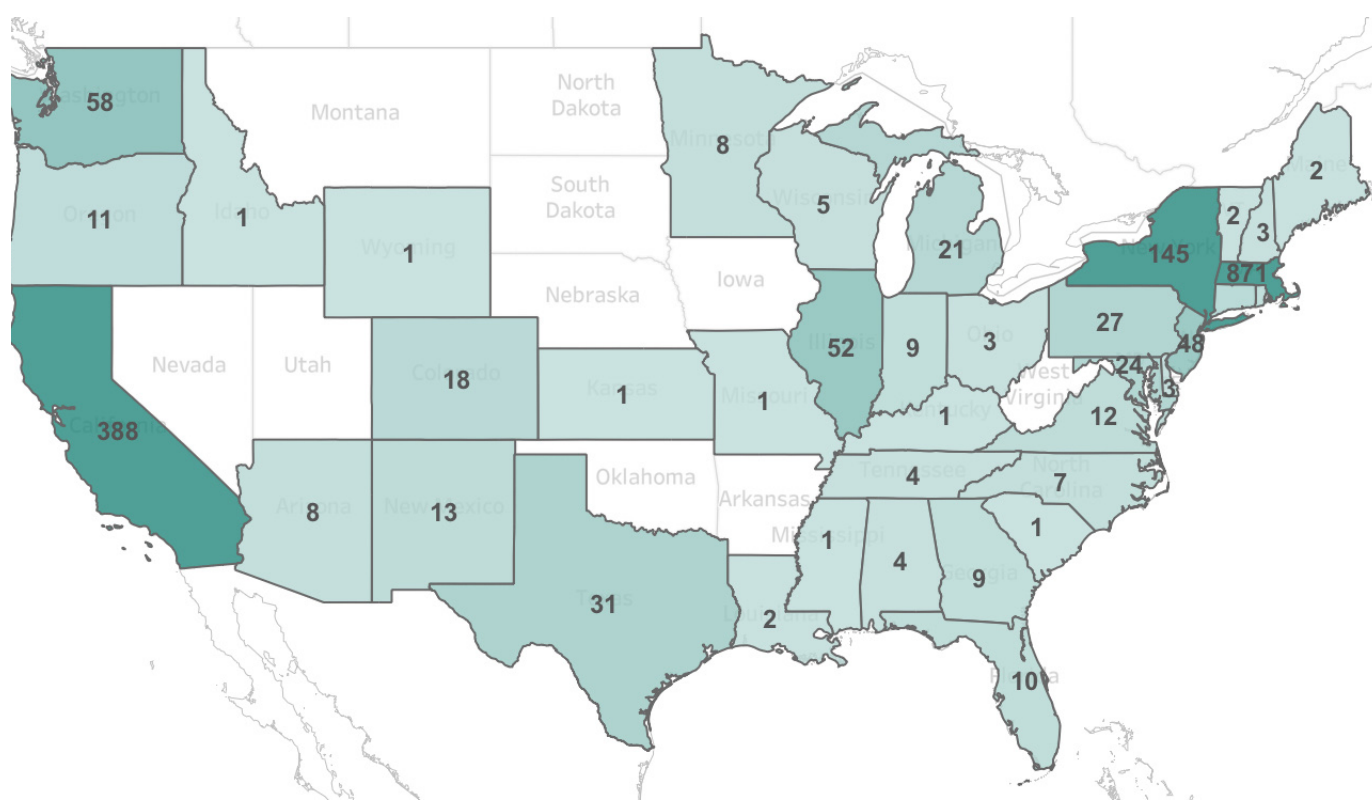
As Professor Ulm relates his story [[“How Kafka, Not Newton, Saved My Life”](#)] he was running late for a plane departing Tel Aviv, his anxiety rising on the way there with each checkpoint encountered. At the final hurdle, a soldier recognizes the name from his passport and says something like “Josef, like Kafka”. Delighted with this novel (but somewhat enigmatic) name association, Professor Ulm makes a gentle correction: Josef is the name of the innocent ‘K.’; Franz, the name

of the novelist. I should like to adduce that the soldier at the checkpoint was an educated and literary man who had read the novel – and perhaps read into Professor Ulm's anxieties about missing his flight, the plight of Josef K – but it may only be that he had just heard on the news about Kafka's papers having been acquired by the State of Israel. Whatever the interpretation, the learned professor encapsulated for us a point of humanist contact succinct enough for him not to miss his flight.

Hubert Murray Faia

former adjunct professor, Architecture

MIT Numbers
First US Destination of New MIT PhDs Over the Last Five Years



Source: Office of the Provost/Institutional Research