



Campus police: 617-253-1212

MIT Medical's COVID-19 hotline at 617-253-4865

EAPS/MIT message archive: <https://eapsweb.mit.edu/news/2020/covid-19-eaps-updates>

MIT COVID-19 updates: <https://covid19.mit.edu>

Sunday 5/10/2020

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**To all members of the EAPS Community:**

Starting the weekend with snow flurries is perhaps befitting the extraordinary spring we are going through now. Above all, I hope that wherever you are, and whichever weather you have, you are safe and well and that you are staying in good physical and mental health in these challenging circumstances.

Today, a special shout-out to all mothers in the EAPS Community (and elsewhere, of course) and especially to those with children at home. The pandemic affects all of us, but day care or school closings create challenging situations for families with children, and often the extra work (positive or negative) falls disproportionately on mothers. We recognize the impact of this inequity on productivity—see, for instance, this [story featuring one of our EAPS alums](#)—which must be considered when evaluating academic progress and professional development. Of course, this deserves attention and care well beyond Mothers Day.

Much has happened in the weeks since my previous message, and I hope that you feel that you can stay sufficiently informed about MIT matters through the regular [communications from the Institute](#) and the “COVID19 Regular Updates” that we receive daily from the Dean’s Office and which Michael Richard forwards to the entire department. Here, I will share some information as it pertains to EAPS.

**Financial impacts:** The impact of the pandemic on the financial position of colleges and universities is in the news almost every day, and also for MIT the consequences are substantial (see, for instance, President Reif's letter of [4/13/2020](#)). You might wonder why extra expenses or shortfalls cannot be absorbed by MIT's substantial endowment, but both at the Institute and department level only a small fraction of the endowment is unrestricted and available for operations. All departments and centers have been asked to cut their general budget (GB) by 3% for FY21 (that is, from 7/1/2020 through 6/30/2021). At EAPS, we want to achieve that goal while also safeguarding our core mission (research, education, mentoring), keeping a strong community, and protecting groups that are most vulnerable.

For EAPS a 3% cut of our general budget amounts to a 50% (approximately \$250k) reduction of the non-salary component. We can do this by a combination of outright cuts and the use of fund accounts that have healthy annual incomes and balances, and which are either unrestricted or offer sufficient flexibility for creative bookkeeping. This will, of course, weaken our cash position (and ability to respond to unforeseen circumstances). To mitigate this and ensure support for ongoing and new student or community initiatives (indeed, if anything, we need extra efforts to come together, both during and after the period of physical distancing), we are looking for ways to increase our discretionary account balances.

If we all do what we can, may that be by helping rearrange certain budgets, making direct contributions, cutting non-essential expenses, understanding that certain measures are necessary, or being creative and propose affordable community activities and events, I am confident that we will not only meet the target cuts but also create opportunities for making the EAPS community even stronger.

**Returning to campus?** Not too fast ... There is still much uncertainty about the safe level of academic operation this coming fall, and a range a scenarios for teaching – from all in-person to all remote and many hybrid possibilities – is being considered by MIT. There is much at stake and like our peers, MIT is walking a fine line between giving clarity (so that people can plan) and making decisions with as much information as possible. The weeks ahead will be crucial as we learn more about the development of the SARS-CoV-2 infections, the virus itself, and the availability of and approaches for testing (and tracking). This will indicate what population density will be safe and how many students we can accommodate on campus. Along with visa, travel restrictions, and many other issues, this will be an important factor in deciding which scenario will be used for teaching this fall.

Plans for ramping up the research enterprise are being developed as we speak. Until further notice, research that can be done remotely (which is a lot!) will continue to be done remotely. Michael Richard, Scott Wade, and Brian Smith (and I) are working with our lab groups to develop plans for a gradual ramp-up of research that requires in-person presence on campus. We want to finalize this process as soon as possible so that at least some lab activity can start again before long. But please expect a cautious, gradual ramp-up, and be prepared for changes should circumstances (e.g., city or state guidelines) require them

**Summer plans – UROP, MSRP:** Summer plans have changed for most people—for a general overview of [summer options and travel restrictions](#) I refer to updates from the Office of the Vice Chancellor. EAPS has been working hard to create summer UROPs to replace lost internships and other scheduled summer activities, and I am pleased to report that, as of last Friday, the EAPS Education Office has sent 59 UROP applications to the MIT UROP office, with 11 more waiting for faculty approval. I am so proud of how our faculty rallied to come up with these opportunities for undergraduate students in our department and across the Institute, and I want to give special thanks to EAPS Committee on Education Program for their heavy lifting and fantastic work in these trying times. Our undergraduates have expressed their gratitude, and other departments have told us that we inspired them to launch similar efforts. In parallel to the UROP program, we are making an effort to match (the small number of) students who would have participated in MSRP (MIT Summer Research Program) with research opportunities in EAPS.

To all supervisors and mentors, please check with your students to make sure we know how they are doing and to help them navigate the uncertain academic landscape for summer and fall.

I am pleased to share with you that for recent PhD graduates MIT has created a new appointment type, Research Specialist, to allow graduate students to earn their degrees and remain at MIT (with salary and health care coverage). I realize that this does not remove concerns about, for instance, the job market, but I am glad that we can at least provide some safety net.

**Building and construction:** As I mentioned before, as a consequence of a moratorium on construction, the construction of labs on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor of Building 4 and the work on deferred maintenance of Building 54 are incurring delays. We hope that this work will resume as soon as the City of Cambridge decides that it is safe to do so, and with a bit of luck we can reduce overall inconvenience by finishing some of this work before we return to full occupancy.

All this does not mean that there is no activity – Scott Wade has been working hard to do what can be done in the current circumstances, which includes renovating the undergraduate lounge on the 8<sup>th</sup> floor, and we are working to prepare office space on the 5<sup>th</sup> floor for the arrival of two Assistant Professors, Drs. Camilla Cattania and William Frank, this summer.

In the meantime, the design and selection process for the “Earth and Environment Pavilion” has continued, but I have no news compared to my [previous message](#) and I will get back to you all as soon as I have further information that can be shared.

**TASKFORCE 2023:** At the end of January 2020 the department came together to hear, discuss, and refine recommendations of TASKFORCE 2023. This was only just over three months ago, but it feels like it happened in a different era. To some extent, it did. The

months ago, but it feels like it happened in a different era. To some extent, it did. The response to the pandemic used all our bandwidth, but the plans and ideas have not been forgotten. In order to proceed to a plan for action, I have asked the Steering Committee to pick up the pace (respecting the circumstances of course) and finalize the Executive Summary of the TASKFORCE 2023 process and initial and final recommendations. Some upcoming events (such as faculty meetings, town halls) will be devoted to these recommendations. Even if the pandemic slowed down the process, I am happy to say that in the meantime substantial progress has already been made on so-called 'low hanging fruit', including education, mentoring, general exam structure, and space issues (such as, replacement of some office furniture, plans for new community spaces, and the already mentioned renovation of the undergraduate lounge). Further updates soon.

**Upcoming events:** The end of term is always busy, and this year is no different except that all events will be done online. There is a lot going on, but I would like to call your attention to three events this week (for Zoom info, please click the links):

- *Senior Thesis Presentations Day 1:* [Tue 5/12, 3:30 - 5:00 EDT](#)
- *Senior Thesis Presentations Day 2:* [Wed 5/13, 10:00-11:30 EDT](#)
- *EAPS Town Hall:* [Thu 5/14, 2:30-4:00pm](#) (Rohini Shivamoggi and Julia Wilcots are working on the agenda)
- *MIT Faculty Meeting:* Wed 5/13 May. (Of interest for EAPS, so I encourage faculty to Zoom in)

Furthermore, Jen Fentress, Maggie Cedarstrom, Brandon Milardo, and many others have been busy finalizing plans to take the [EAPS graduation celebration online](#). While we're all sad to not be able to see our graduates beaming in their regalia alongside friends and family, and to raise a glass in person to toast their hard-earned success, they've come up with a plan to extend the celebrations across the entire week, and bring the community into your homes far away. Each day of commencement week will feature a new video premiere at cookie hour, with messages from staff, faculty, and students, and culminating with a reading of the names of each of our graduates—with a virtual hooding and diploma "ceremony". And we will top off the week with a live Zoom cookie hour toast on Friday the 29<sup>th</sup>. Stay tuned!

That's it for now. Let me end with a word of courage and a realization that we are about to enter another phase in the process. After de-densifying campus and transitioning to online activities—from teaching to job candidate lectures to PhD thesis presentations to e-EATS and peer hour Zoom trivia to our first (and hopefully last) Senior Thesis Zoom presentations and graduation ceremonies—we face the end of the semester and summer months with much uncertainty about what is to come. Online lectures and thesis presentations are hard enough, but at least they gave structure, purpose, and regular connection. I realize that the weeks and months ahead will be challenging, and we will continue to think about ways to stay connected (especially over the summer). Together we have already come a long way, and I have never been prouder of our department. And together we will persevere – you make EAPS and EAPS will be there for you.

As always, please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions or comments –

wherever you are, we love to hear from you, and we will help if and where we can!

Stay safe and well, and good luck to all of you still having to complete end-of-term things (not to mention exams ...)!

Rob  
Head, EAPS

Contacts:

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Michael Richard, for all matters related to staff and general building issues

Jen Fentress, for all matters related to communication and online teaching