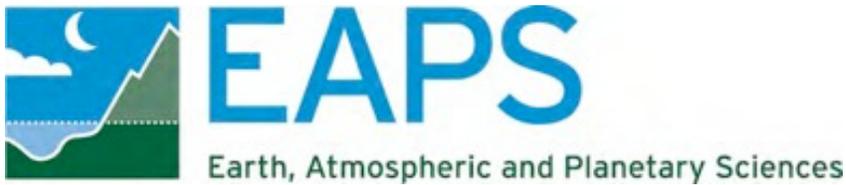


**From:** Robert D van der Hilst [hilst@mit.edu](mailto:hilst@mit.edu)   
**Subject:** EAPS Community update, COVID-19 (25 May 2020)  
**Date:** May 25, 2020 at 9:02 AM  
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RV



Campus police: 617-253-1212  
MIT Medical COVID-19:  
Hotline: 617-253-4865  
Updates: <https://medical.mit.edu/news/2020/01/2019-novel-coronavirus-updates-1>  
MIT COVID-19 updates: <https://covid19.mit.edu>  
EAPS/MIT message archive: <https://eapsweb.mit.edu/news/2020/covid-19-eaps-updates>

Monday 25 May 2020

- General comments: Memorial Day
- Summer 2020
  - Commencement and graduation
  - UROP and other student activities
  - Graduate students
  - Research ramp-up
  - Faculty meetings
- Fall 2020
- Staff recognition

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

Good morning EAPS! As usual, I refer to the MIT COVID site and daily messages from the Dean's Office for general updates and add here comments for our community.

Memorial Day. The unofficial start of the US summer season and a federal holiday for honoring and mourning military personnel who died while serving in the United States Armed Forces. This year, Memorial Day also marks the grim milestone of exceeding 100,000 COVID-19 deaths in the United States. The case and fatality numbers in Massachusetts are high, but they would no doubt have been even higher without collective action. By distant socializing you have all helped to slow the spread, save lives, and put us all in better position to come out of the lock-down. The social, emotional, academic, and economic toll for doing this has been high, and the growing desire to ramp up and transition to a new normal is understandable. But while the days are (still) getting longer and the improving weather is inviting us to spend more time outside, and lower our guards, we are not nearly out of the woods yet. So, please continue to be considerate and act responsibly, not only for your own health and safety but also for that of others. Distant socializing and wearing masks do help. Please stay safe and well.

SOCIALIZING AND WEARING MASKS DO HELP! Please stay safe and well.

### Summer 2020:

Memorial Day 2020 heralds a summer season that will be rather different from previous years. But I hope the various activities will not be less meaningful, satisfying, and rewarding.

**Commencement and graduation:** To all graduating EAPS students: I very much regret that we cannot get together in person to celebrate, but while we are sad not you see you, I can assure you that in spirit we will be together as never before. Maggie, Brandon, Jen, and many others, have been working hard to make the 2020 graduation a memorable experience. Please check the [EAPS 2020 Commencement Program](#). Starting tomorrow, each day this week will feature a new video premiere at cookie hour, with messages from staff, faculty, and students, 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>. Please join the festivities and special events in honor of our wonderful students.

**UROP and other student activities:** Thanks to the fantastic response by our faculty, researchers, and graduate students, the hard work by Megan and Taylor, and the generous financial support by Mike Sipser, Dean of the School of Science, EAPS is offering summer research opportunities to more than 70 undergraduate students from all over the Institute. (In a normal year, the number of UROPs at EAPS would be 15-20.) We are working hard to create something special and ensure that this "class of 70 undergrads" will have a terrific experience at EAPS, with lectures, regular group meetings, and other cohort-building activities. In addition to supporting students, it is also a unique opportunity to show what EAPS is all about – a caring community of people doing exciting and important research.

**Graduate students:** Over the summer, many current and new students will return or start at MIT, insofar possible in view of travel restrictions and visa issues for foreign students now abroad, a safe on-campus residential capacity, and—of course—ongoing uncertainty about how the fall semester will look like (and possible deferrals associated with that). For the latest information I refer to the [20 May 2020 update](#) by MIT Chancellor Cynthia Barnhart and others.

**Research ramp-up:** While the Governor has announced measures and guidelines for a [step-wise opening up of the State \(full report\)](#) – also attached summary – MIT has started to ramp up the on-campus research operations. This will be a gradual, and slow, process, balancing dual objectives of public safety and reigniting an important part of our research engine. For more information I refer to the [recent writings of MIT's Vice President for Research](#), our own Maria Zuber, and, in particular, last Friday's [town hall](#) (which is still viewable on line).

**Faculty meetings:** The weekly (business) meetings of our faculty, lecturers, and senior researchers will continue through June 18, with a range of important items on the agenda,

including the current (faculty) climate search, the onset of so-called 360 reviews for leadership development and improvement of mentoring and group cultures, the executive summary of Taskforce 2023, and the report of the 2020 EAPS Visiting Committee.

### **Fall 2020:**

There is still much uncertainty about teaching schedules/modalities and the nature and intensity of campus life this fall. Several scenarios are being considered—we are all [invited and encouraged to help think through the options](#) – and it may take a few more weeks before the Institute will make decisions. Many people are working ‘round the clock to ensure a high quality, MIT-worthy academic experience, even if it is – most likely – in many ways different from business-as-usual.

While we await guidelines and directives for research ramp-up, teaching, and on-campus housing, we already know a few things:

*Pre-orientation programs (FPOPs)* that require travel before 31 August 2020 will not happen, which means that our traditional DEAPS trips to Yellowstone and New Hampshire will not happen as planned. Please stay tuned for further updates and possible alternative offerings.

*Seminars and guest lectures* are important for academics and for community, but until further notice we should assume that they will be done online. This includes DLS (Department Lecture Series). The reasons are obvious and manifold. It is unreasonable to ask speakers to travel for in-person presentations or members of our community to attend. Moreover, with social distancing guidelines, the audiences that could be permitted to attend would necessarily be small anyway, and entertainment such as group lunches and dinners are unlikely to be possible. Instead, with what we have learned over the past three months (great job, Maggie, Brandon), we can ensure high quality experiences for online lectures and seminars. As a bonus, we will save travel, accommodation, and other expenses. Since, in general, online lectures work better when there is familiarity between speaker and audience, we could consider tapping into the rich pool of recent EAPS graduates who are now early career scientists in their own right and would love to share their research and post graduate experiences.

The traditional *reception at the AGU Fall Meeting* will be cancelled in view of FY21 budget cuts and the fact that the meeting itself is likely to be held (mostly or all) online anyway (see [AGU updates](#)). Likewise, in view of the restrictions for on-campus activities it seems unlikely that we can go ahead with a traditional fall PAOC retreat. Instead, I would suggest to pool with other departmental resources and organize a 1-day EAPS-wide retreat/event in the spring of 2021, to celebrate that we are all on campus – if, indeed, this is possible.

### **Staff recognition:**

In the past two months the department has come together in unprecedented ways in our response to the pandemic. I have been very impressed by how our resilience, togetherness, patience, camaraderie and collegiality, and nimbleness combined to make the transition to

where we are now much less painful and chaotic than it could have been.

As I have mentioned in earlier EAPS-wide communications, we are blessed with a fantastic staff, at all levels. All have stepped up the plate, and many pivoted on a dime and did what needed to be done even if it meant changing what they would normally do, and even when their own personal circumstances were challenging. From keeping in touch with students and ensuring an orderly end-of-term and exciting summer programs; to keeping us all informed and helping us all transition to a successful online experience for lectures, meetings, and thesis presentations; to developing online commencement activities; to sorting out access plans and overseeing the ramp-down and now ramp-ups; to keeping all financial trains running; to keeping postdocs appointed and solving all visa issues that could be solved; to keeping in touch with donors and even securing some new gifts in these challenging times; to working with MIT and WHOI to keep our Joint Program students informed and organized; to keeping PI groups running and healthy ... And so much more!

We owe this fantastic team a great deal of gratitude, and in my book, they all deserve an award! I am, therefore, very pleased that we now have an opportunity to [recognize these heroes](#) (please take a moment to do so; deadline tomorrow).

That's it for now – more soon. The weeks and months ahead will be challenging, and we will continue to think about ways to stay connected. Together we have already come a long way, and I have never been prouder of our department. And together we will persevere and (as a community) come out stronger!

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!

Rob  
Head, EAPS

Contacts:

Rob van der Hilst, for faculty and general matters

Taylor Perron and Megan Jordan, for matters related to education/teaching

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

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



Mass Guidelines  
COVID...1].pptx

