To all members of the EAPS Community:

It has—intentionally—been a few weeks since my previous message but I hope that you are doing well, wherever you are, and considering the extraordinary circumstances. This summer has been intense. Many academic activities continued beyond Memorial Day, and we did not get the clear break from business-as-usual that we normally enjoy, even if there was no business-as-usual. Summer programs were cancelled or severely disrupted, and there were endless announcements of new or revised policies about teaching or lab access, or requests for information, often with short notices. The killing of George Floyd (after many others) triggered (international) protests against and renewed awareness of systemic racism, and #ShutdownSTEM called attention to lack of diversity in STEM fields, in general, and in the geosciences, in particular. And it called for action at EAPS – and act we will!

Furthermore, the announcement from US ICE of changes in the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) caused deep anxiety before we heard that it had been revoked. [It was heartbreaking to read these experiences, but I thank the international students for providing the examples of hardship that helped craft the lawsuit filed by MIT and Harvard.] And, of course, there is continued uncertainty about future plans (academic and otherwise) as we now realize that the pandemic is not yet under control and will be with us for a

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Campus police: 617-253-1212
MIT Medical COVID-19:
  Hotline: 617-253-4865
MIT COVID-19 updates: https://covid19.mit.edu
This is a lot to handle, emotionally, physically, and logistically. Indeed, if you feel that the combination of these events and ongoing uncertainties is exhausting, you are not alone! I am aware that these realities are difficult to deal with for people anywhere in the community, at any level. I, therefore, sincerely hope that you do manage to find some down time or other mechanisms to lift yourself up and recharge batteries and, also, that you continue to look out for one another and give everybody the respect and support that they deserve. Even if we know that things will be different from what we were used to and signed up for – together, we will get through this and in the process create new realities and reasons to be proud of EAPS and the community it represents.

As always, for general info I refer to the [MIT COVID19 page](https://coronavirus.mit.edu) and the near-daily updates from the Dean’s Office forwarded by Michael Richard. With this message I want to give a quick update on department specific issues.

### Summer: UROP update

To showcase all the great work of the summer research students, there will be a symposium on Tuesday 8/18 (beginning at 2pm EDT) and Thursday 8/20 (beginning at noon EDT), organized by a dedicated group of grad students, undergrads, and postdocs. Students will have the option of giving an oral talk or a poster. We encourage all summer research students to participate! More information will be circulated this week, including the registration form (due 8/7) as well as information about a workshop on how to create a professional talk/poster and a discussion session for mentors.

### Fall semester

After monitoring for many weeks the spread and increased understanding of SARS-Cov-2 and weighing medical advisories, evolving test capabilities, and many scenarios for on- and offline education and campus research and residential densities, the [MIT senior team decided](https://coronavirus.mit.edu) to optimize around a traditional two-semester model, with most classes online and selected groups of undergraduate students invited to come to and reside on campus in different semesters. To all incoming first year undergraduate and all new graduate students, we are so sorry that we cannot welcome you with our traditional FPOPs, to Yellowstone (geology) or New Hampshire (extreme weather), or a festive and action-packed in-person orientation, or meet you in the classroom. This is not what any of us expected and looked forward to, but we look forward nonetheless to seeing you online in our orientation, classrooms, seminars, Cookie Hours, group meetings, and other events as we all work our way through what it means to be apart and how best to continue to promote education and research and build community in creative ways. Stay tuned for more info about education in the fall semester from the education committee.

### Ramp up Phase 2

Last week the MIT Lightning Committee gave the green light to [begin Phase 2 of the research ramp-up](https://coronavirus.mit.edu). This is relevant for people conducting research in labs, as it makes it possible to scale-up activities and occupancy from 25% to 50%. For office use, the Covid-19
adage “whatever can be done at home, must be done at home” will remain in effect. Any questions about Phase 2, please contact Michael Richard.

Student letters and requests for action
In response to #ShutDownSTEM, our undergraduate students and graduate students got together and crafted thoughtful letters to and calls for action from the department. On July 29 Taylor Perron (Associate Head for Education), Megan Jordan (Academic Coordinator), and Rick Binzel (Undergraduate Officer), and I will meet (on Zoom) with undergraduate students to discuss their letter and decide on action. On July 7, I met with the graduate student organizers and discussed their action plan. A formal response to their 12-point list will follow after I have had an opportunity to discuss all items with EAPS faculty (which will happen when we reconvene mid-August). In the meantime, however, important conversations have been taking place (and progress made) concerning items #1 and #2 on the list: reinvigorating the Diversity Council and appointing a dedicated DEI staff for the department.

The former is in the works, and I hope that we can announce the new committee by 1 September. In addition to populating and recharging the committee I am looking for ways to bring this important work closer to the core of our department. As regards, the appointment of dedicated DEI staff, I can share that a search for a school-wide DEI officer has been approved; I am vigorously pursuing possibilities to appoint dedicated staff at the department, but this goes beyond EAPS authority and requires Provost approval. Progress on both topics will vastly change the way DEI is positioned within the department and in our continued – and accelerated – efforts to improve our culture.

Short remarks:
- I am pleased to share with you that one of our fellowship donors has asked us to use their new fellowships specifically to help recruit URM students.
- I am in the process of organizing a town hall meeting with John Dozier (ICEO; Institute Community and Equity Officer) and Tim Jamison (Associate Provost) so that they can hear our needs and explain their plans. Date and time TBA.
- Just to make sure you know about this: On 5 Aug MIT will hold a Day of Dialogue on race and anti-racism.

Searches: Climate (current) and Planetary (new)
As a brief update on faculty renewal, I am pleased to share with you that the current search in “Climate” (writ large) has yielded several superb candidates. It will be a challenge, in part because resources are more limited because of the pandemic, but we are looking at the exciting opportunity to make multiple hires to strengthen our efforts in atmospheric chemistry and dynamics and also improve the diversity of our faculty. Furthermore, we have received permission to start a search in “Planetary” (writ large), hoping – of course – that our financial position will remain sufficiently robust in the face of ongoing uncertainty.

Building updates
Southern Environment Pavilion: Much has been accomplished that merits a heartfelt
**Earth and Environment Pavilion** Much has happened since I last reported on this, but to keep this update fairly concise, I only mention that (1) the gift of $10M that I referred to earlier has been confirmed, bringing us to within $4M—$5M from our goal; this gift comes along with a commitment from MIT to use this space for at least 25 years for studies of climate and effects on environmental change; (2) President Reif has given permission to go from *concept design* to *schematic design* and in the process has expressed a strong preference for a particular choice for the façade of the Pavilion; (3) design is expected to continue through spring 2021, with construction to start in summer 2021, and occupancy in 2023 (recall *Taskforce ...*). Over the next months, the architect firm will engage with the broader community, so please stay tuned for more activity on that front. Angela and I are now working hard to bridge the fundraising gap so that in November MIT’s Executive Committee can approve moving forward without delay. As a reminder, gifts such as these are generally restricted by donors and can only be used for the intended purposes, but the intent is, of course, that the Pavilion will not only improve our visibility on campus (especially in the context of *Health of the Planet*) but also provide better student and common space and catalyze many community efforts.

**Lecture Hall (54-100) naming contest**

Many of you have participated in one way or another in the unique and historic opportunity to help choose the name for 54-100, one MIT’s premier teaching halls and a prime space in our building – even more so after the renovation and integration with the Pavilion. The naming contest kept being pushed back, first in the face of the academic response to the pandemic and then because of other (and way more important) events this summer, but the first of three phases finally got underway on June 23 (see my community email that day):

- Phase I (nomination of names) closed at midnight 7/13 and yielded 54 unique names from about 100 complete nominations for 54-100 (I did not make this up …);
- Phase II (public discussion, community vote to select the top seven most popular names) closed 5pm on 7/22 and yielded ballots (i.e., ranked lists of up to seven names, each) from 156 member of our community, which is about 45% of the entire department (awesome!);
- Phase III (Selection Committee discussed the seven names and determined the order in which they will be submitted for vetting by the MIT Building Committee and Shell legal office and, ultimately, approval by MIT. This meeting took place on Friday 7/24.

I regret that we cannot yet share with you the outcome of Phase III, because the final name cannot be announced until vetted and approved by the MIT Building Committee, but I am thrilled to say that the process worked incredibly well, with so many of you participating, and that it yielded a name that we can all be very proud of.

I will do this more extensively later, and in a different place, but I want to take this opportunity to thank a few people and groups: Shell for the gift that makes the renovation possible and for enabling the community naming contest; The group of students and faculty who throughout the process served on the ad hoc committee as an invaluable sounding board; Jen for setting up the contest survey and for her mastery of the ranked...
Sounding board; Jen for setting up the contest survey and for her mastery of the ranked choice voting algorithms; Tavneet Suri (Applied Economics, Sloan School) for advice on the voting systems; the anonymous members of the final Selection Committee (five from EAPS, two from Shell); and – of course – all of you who nominated, discussed, and ranked name in Phases I and II.

Of course, the process of this contest highlighted that there are many more people that deserve recognition than there are venues to be named. In the conversations during Phase II we have already identified a few very exciting opportunities to honor others for their many contributions to earth sciences at MIT and beyond—many of whom have historically been overlooked and their celebration is overdue. So, in many ways, this contest is proving to be a catalyst for new activities to make EAPS a better, more cohesive community—much like we all envisioned during the Taskforce 2023 retreat earlier this year.

More soon, as we start the fall semester in a couple of weeks. But until then, please stay safe and well, get some rest, and—as always—please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions or comments.

Rob
Head, EAPS

Contacts:
Rob van der Hilst, for faculty and general matters
Taylor Perron and Megan Jordan, for matters related to education/teaching
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Jen Fentress, for all matters related to communication and online teaching