I quickly found that my concerns were unwarranted. To a degree I had never experienced anywhere else, I felt an immediate sense of welcome, acceptance, and belonging among an extended family of curious, intense, creative individuals collaborating to advance MIT’s mission. I found my home.

In the decades since, I have been reminded again and again what MIT means as a home to so many, and why. As much as we love our classrooms, labs, residences, libraries, and courts, there’s no secret to what makes MIT so special. It’s the people. It’s the senior who helps a freshman with a problem set, the faculty member who hosts product design finals in a top hat and tails, and the alum who reaches out to a student stranded overseas. It’s every one of us, and all of us.

If you haven’t been to campus in a few years, I hope you’ll find time for a visit. Chalk up the blackboards in the new Simons building, marvel at the gleaming MIT.nano building coming out of the ground, and ask a student or faculty member what MIT means to them. We’d love to remind you that MIT’s brilliance—it’s strength—is drawn from a remarkable community of passionate, playful, and caring people working towards a common goal: to make a better world. In short, we’d love to welcome you home.
In the early 1960s, Buckminster Fuller proposed building floating cities in the shape of giant tetrahedrons, which provide a high proportion of surface area in relation to volume.

Kenzo Tange’s 1960 plan for Tokyo proposed expanding the Japanese capital across Tokyo Bay to accommodate the city’s swelling population.

Named for James Edward Oglethorpe, founder of the Georgia Colony, the Oglethorpe Plan for the city of Savannah created a balanced mix of private and public spaces.

First presented in 1924, Le Corbusier’s Radiant City project envisioned an abundance of green space and sunlight that would foster well-being.

The Strait of Hormuz is one of Earth’s most strategic transit nodes: the only sea passage between the Persian Gulf and the open ocean. Roughly 20% of the oil traded worldwide passes through the ribbon of water, 34 miles across at its narrowest, that divides Iran, the United Arab Emirates, and Musandam (an enclave of Oman). The potential blockage of tanker traffic becomes a risk whenever political tensions run high with the West or within the region, including in relation to the contested ownership of three islands: Abu Musa, Greater Tunb, and Lesser Tunb.

Two MIT researchers set out to ask, what might this regional rivalry and its landscape, shaped so decisively by oil, look like when the world no longer relies on fossil fuels? “Our project is a response to a crisis of environment and a crisis of imagination,” says Rania Ghosn, assistant professor at MIT’s School of Architecture and Planning (S+AP). Along with El Hadi Jazairy, she is a founding partner of Design Earth, a creative design practice that works to envision future built environments—with a particular focus on the Middle East. “Most of what we saw were either stale technocratic solutions or apocalyptic technophobic nightmares.”

Sponsored by the Kuwait-MIT Center for Natural Resources and the Environment and S+AP, and first presented at the Kuwaiti Pavilion at the 2016 Venice Architecture Biennale, Design Earth’s proposal, After Oil, is a series of nine speculative illustrations exploring the post-oil potential of the region. This image is one of three that wrestle to repurpose the transit choke point between Iran and the UAE into a venue for real estate competition. Its imaginary chess board spans the gulf, incorporating the disputed islands, and serving as a platform for a “greatest hits” of Western utopian urban projects. “The chess board conveys that this is a game, a game about power and domination,” says Ghosn. “In the context of the board, the contested islands and utopian visions become geopolitical features set in an abstract grid.”

While these visions of ideal cities have their provenance in the West, they find fertile soil in this Middle Eastern context. “Utopian projects tend to be realized more often in the Gulf than anywhere else,” says Jazairy, currently a research scientist at S+AP’s Center for Advanced Urbanism. “This is due both to the nature of the site, and the nature of the entrepreneurs there. They are trying to chart a new world, and using architecture to define both collective space and national identity.”

The Romans used a rectilinear street grid anchored to a central forum in building hundreds of cities across their empire.
Subjects: What seems to be the problem? Caspar: I have the feeling that people are watching me.
(a) Possibly they are watching you.
(b) I think you are right.
(c) Do you sometimes wish you were right?
(d) Every time I am wrong.
(e) Do you know anyone else who is wrong?
(f) My children tend to be wrong about a lot of things. The need to breath calmly, for example.

“‘You can still achieve things through partially automating courses, but you need a lot of human interaction that is really important. Like the interaction between you and the person you are reading. And there’s an automating that—’ says to Inside Higher Ed on September 2016.
When do students begin to think of MIT as home? Is it when they discover the dorm-selection process involves ice cream frozen with liquid nitrogen, applied knot theory, and life-sized board games—or is it that first late-night bonding over p-sets? Perhaps it’s the moment students imagine something new, then realize they’re surrounded by tools to make it and people to make it with. Or maybe it happens gradually, each time they leave the classroom or lab and the conversation keeps right on going. Students come here to learn. And the process by which MIT becomes their home is the same process that prepares them to leave it—to take what they learn out into the world, and make the world a better home for everyone.
Investing in the Other Classroom

An interview with Dean for Student Life Suzy Nelson

In summer 2016, Suzy M. Nelson became the vice president and dean for student life at MIT, where she supports students in all aspects of their MIT experience. Together with Chancellor Cynthia Barnhart SM ’85, PhD ’88, Nelson is working to ensure the Institute’s continued commitment to a well-integrated student life program that values both formal and informal learning. Spectrum asked Nelson to reflect on her first year in the role and share how MIT is working to create the best possible home for students.

How has MIT defied your expectations?
SN: Every school says its students are engaged, but MIT students are really engaged, and that was a pleasant surprise. It’s a great strength of MIT that it is aligned with the very hands-on curriculum. Students are partnering with me on a number of projects—an “architectural principles” document for the dorms, the New House renovation and West Campus residence hall planning [see page 30]—and are contributing valuable feedback for a review of our food and dining program.

You often refer to the residential experience as the “other classroom.”
SN: When students and faculty collaborate outside of the classroom around something meaningful that can be tied back to the curriculum, it can have a profound impact on learning. Consider a student and a faculty member thinking together about improving food and dining. It involves looking at research and data. It incorporates financial modeling, because you have to consider cost, quality, affordability, convenience. And all this can be applied to, say, an economics class.

“Things students learn on campus—how to communicate, how to lead, how to work as a team, how to compromise—help them grow and develop as humans.”

How does living at MIT amplify learning?
SN: A residential campus allows for human interaction, and there’s really no substitute for that. Things students learn on campus—how to communicate, how to lead, how to work as a team, how to compromise—help them grow and develop as humans. And these skills are valuable and a great strength of MIT that is aligned with the very hands-on curriculum. Important, too, are opportunities to engage with people from different backgrounds—learning more about what ties us together.

How is MIT ensuring that the student living and learning experience grows and evolves, yet remains as robust as it is now?
SN: First, we are investing in the buildings that can sustain MIT’s phenomenal residential system. We want to make sure that these crucial “other classroom” experiences are not an afterthought, which means students have well-maintained spaces where they can feel safe, secure, and comfortable, and where they can work, socialize, engage, and relax. Our students aren’t fussy. They want things like blackboards and wide dorm hallways to gather in. For graduate students, there is a real need for increased support and community building, especially for our international families. We’re thinking a lot, too, about FSILGs, our first living-learning communities. We want to ensure these students are also in safe, well-maintained, and managed facilities.

If I could look ahead 10 years, I would like to see MIT as a place where families. We're thinking a lot, too, about FSILGs, our first living-learning communities. We want to ensure these students are also in safe, well-maintained, and managed facilities. If I could look ahead 10 years, I would like to see MIT as a place where families.

Why is it so important that MIT students are active in the governance of their dorms and FSILGs [fraternities, sororities, and independent living groups]?
SN: We are so lucky to have a culture here that engenders a sense of belonging, identity, and community. Shared governance gives students agency, which makes them feel empowered, which in turn makes them happier and more invested.

In this time of aggressive expansion of online learning technologies, why does a residential campus still matter?
SN: A residential campus allows for human interaction, and there’s really no substitute for that. Things students learn on campus—how to communicate, how to lead, how to work as a team, how to compromise—help them grow and develop as humans. And these skills are valuable and a great strength of MIT that is aligned with the very hands-on curriculum. Important, too, are opportunities to engage with people from different backgrounds—learning more about what ties us together.

Setting a Place

Alumni anchor their support of student life in the highlights of their own MIT years

“I wanted to go to MIT since I was 12 years old living in Tehran.” So said Faribor Maseeh SC ’81 in 2013, recounting how those dreams were postponed. At last, when he decided to pursue a doctorate in civil engineering, “MIT was the only school I wanted to apply to.” Maseeh was sharing this story at an event celebrating the dedication of Faribor Maseeh Hall, thus named to honor his pivotal gift toward renovating the new undergraduate residence. That project, allowed the Institute to increase undergrad enrollment, was achieved through the gifts of numerous donors—several of whom were, like Maseeh, own MIT students themselves. Through the years, in ways both monumental and cumulative, MIT’s alumni community has united in generosity to enhance the lives of current students outside the classroom. Often, alumni giving reveals a direct connection to the elements that improved their own campus experience—setting a place for others at the table where they themselves were made welcome. In recent years, for example, donor Nancy Lukitsh ’78, who made lifelong friendships in the welcoming, all-female living community of McCormick Hall, created a fund to support special dorm activities. Louis Oderve SM ’76, EE ’78, PhD ’94, for whom hockey was a fortification against the demands of academics, is spearheading an effort to ensure the sport’s permanence on campus. And John Helfrich ’70, SM ’71, who embraced the Institute’s hands-on culture, is helping to put the tools of MIT’s growing network of makerspaces into the hands of the current generation of students.

A supportive community
The first student Nancy Lukitsh met upon arriving at her new home in McCormick Hall in 1974 remains one of her closest friends today—and that’s just one of several dorm mates still in her life. She remembers McCormick as a place of support and mutual respect. “Whether it was conscious or unconscious, I really liked being in a women’s dorm at an institution that at the time had fewer than 20% female undergraduates,” Lukitsh says.

When Lukitsh, a regular annual donor, thought about increasing her MIT giving, she realized that she wanted to bolster something that had been so integral to her own life there. She went back to McCormick to meet then heads of house Charles Stewart III and Kathryn Hess, and found it “a bit like stepping back in time,” she marvels. Lukitsh is a member of the Council for the Arts at MIT, and serves on the Visiting Committee for the Pappalardo Lab (economics).
John Helferich has an unusual perspective on then-and-now MIT. In 1979, when the men’s ice hockey team switched from varsity to club level, he was a member of Theta Chi fraternity. Now, he is VP of its Alumni Corporation. “I’ve not only returned to my educational base but my living base,” he remarks, “which is interesting after 40 years.”

With a long career in R&D at the Mars candy company under his belt, Helferich will be looking for a way to apply his doctoral expertise to continued research in the food industry. But he is also about to open a brewery in Andover, Massachusetts. “So I’m splitting my days between research and teaching, and dumping malt in the tanks and brewing and cleaning equipment,” he explains. For someone steeped in MIT’s “mind and hand” philosophy, that feels about right. Helferich arrived on campus already well versed in carpentry and plumbing, thanks to his grand- father and father. Realizing he enjoyed tinkering with the equipment the electrical engineering department with bachelor’s and master’s degrees in zoology, he found he had to pour extra effort into picking up the fundamentals underlying his coursework. “Hockey made it easier to balance everything. Sometimes when you’re stuck thinking something through, it helps to take a break and go do something completely different for a while and let the old subconscious work on the problem. That was one of the roles that hockey played for me when I was at MIT.”

Balance on the ice
Perhaps unsurprisingly for a native Canadian, Lou Odette felt right at home on MIT’s outdoor ice hockey rink, joining the varsity team soon after he began his graduate degree. “All that time in the lab and the classroom could get to be too much after a while. Then we’d get one day off, and keep going. It was always a shock when we got to the end of February and had to stop,” he recalls.

Despite the enormous investment of time the team required, Odette believes it was a critical ingredient in the academic success that started him on the path to founding seven companies during his four decades in the Boston area, followed by his philanthropic investments, through the Massiah Foundation, are driven by a vision of intellectual infrastructure that gave me and others a chance to succeed.”

Now, hockey is one of the things that keep Odette connected to MIT. He is a frequent player in annual East and West Coast alumni games. When the men’s ice hockey team switched from varsity to club level in 2019, Odette and fellow alumni set up a group called The Friends of MIT Hockey, Inc., and he has led the way in endeavoring to fund that team’s future. “I think we all want to see hockey available to as many people as want to play at MIT,” Odette says, and to “support the students to go as far as they could possibly go, not just in the lab, but also on the playing fields.”

A yen for building

Professor of Political Science, used the fund to match student need at any point in time. Stewart, who is the Kenan Sahin Distinguished Professor of Aeronautics and Astronautics, and Flavia Cardarelli, a staff member at the MIT Portugal Program—have continued each semester. When Lukish reflects on her time at MIT, she recalls the rigor of her coursework in meteorology, from which she pivoted to business school and an investment management career. But just as vivid are her memories of McCormick camaraderie, along with her involvement in the student TV station and a theater group. “The academic skillset with which I came away from MIT, the problem solving and the analysis, the discipline of the science and math, made me a stronger professional,” she says. “But what I did outside the classroom made me a more well-rounded person.”
Habitat
MIT students share their favorite spots on campus

SIDNEY PACIFIC
MULTIPURPOSE ROOM
Sungil Kim, graduate student, Course 6
(Electrical Engineering and Computer Science)
When I stop by the SidPac multipurpose room, I always find familiar faces. As a resident and outreach chair here, I’ve made tremendous friends through the community’s activities: weekly coffee hours, monthly brunches, outings to the movies, volunteering at a shelter, and scholarly seminars. We cook together in the common kitchen and talk about our lives and the uncertain future. The most important thing we have in common is that we embrace diversity, and we support each other. That makes SidPac feel like home.

LATINO CULTURAL CLUB LOUNGE
Stephanie Melo Sanchez ’18, Course 1 (Urban Studies and Planning)
When I first visited the lounge and saw the walls-covered in the most beautiful mural, along with pictures of LCC members and flags of Latin American countries— I immediately felt a connection to my life back home in California. Having this space in addition to La Casa has made dealing with homesickness a lot easier. I’m able to maintain a connection with my Latina identity while forming strong connections with others in the Latino community.

GELB LAB
Rachel Husein ’17, Course 16 (AeroAstro)
While I was part of the Design/Build/Fly group, I spent a lot of my time in the Gelb Lab. Working on planes down here with the club, with music blasting, is one of my favorite things I’ve done as an MIT student. The first time I walked into the space, I remember feeling a little intimidated because everyone else seemed to know so much about building planes already. I never would have thought that two years later I would have absorbed so much information, or that it would be me leading the club.

HAYDEN LIBRARY
Colin Gray, graduate student, Course 14 (Economics)
The chairs facing the windows, overlooking the river, are the best chairs on campus. I used to go here almost every day when I was taking classes, usually in mid-afternoon. The bright atmosphere keeps me awake in the sleepy part of the afternoon, but the environment is calm enough to enjoy a good study session. It’s crowded enough that you don’t ever feel alone, but it’s still a quiet place that feels like home.
SIMMONS DINING HALL
Molly Brennan ’18, Course 10
(Chemical Engineering)
I eat dinner here almost every day. It’s nice having a dining hall right in my dorm, to come home and be able to check in with friends and laugh after a stressful day. It’s also been great to get to know the people who work here; I’ve become friends with the guy who does stir-fry most nights. The dining hall is usually more relaxed than the rest of MIT, and Simmons itself is a really welcoming place. You can always find a group of people you fit in with.

ZESIGER CENTER AND DUPONT ATHLETIC CENTER
Jeffrey Zhang ’19, Course 18
(Mathematics) with Computer Science
During water polo season, when I’m investing around two hours per day for practice and strength conditioning, the pool and locker room at the Z Center are like a second home. Off-season, my friends and I started an informal basketball league and we’ve played countless games at duPont. Athletics has definitely shaped my experience at MIT for the better. It is a great stress reliever in the face of so much coursework, and it has introduced me to some of my closest friends whom I might not have met otherwise.

SITEMAN DINING ROOM AND ROBERTS FAMILY FORUM
Jayesh Kannan, graduate student, Course 15 (Management)
This cafeteria means much more to me than just a spot to grab a bite. Spending time here gives me a sense of belonging to the Sloan community. I stop by at least twice a day. It’s a place where I meet classmates for team project discussions, grab coffee with visiting prospective students, or sometimes even make new friends. The space also plays host to poster presentations, or to tables that market new courses. In fact, we just had a flash mob here to promote a Sloan community event.

W20 CERAMICS STUDIO
Simona Dalin, graduate student, Course 7 (Biology)
The studio is a peaceful place, filled with friendly people. Usually there’s music on in the background, mixed with the sound of the wheels turning and the teacher giving tips. There’s an almost meditative focus on creating. I can get messy with clay and make real things with my hands, which is a great break from my lab work. I study vulnerabilities that tumors develop when they become resistant to chemotherapy, and I enjoy research and analyzing data, but sometimes I need to get out of the lab and actually see the product of my work.
Live, Learn, and Lead

How an address becomes a community

Those unfamiliar with MIT’s housing system might be surprised to know that undergraduates select their own living situation when they arrive on campus and may choose to remain in the same place for multiple years. This choose-your-own-adventure approach has shaped MIT’s unique undergraduate residential culture: the distinct character and lore of each dorm or group and the affinity its members feel; and the connections forged among students of different years, and even with live-in faculty and grad students, that can only come from the day-to-day business of sharing a home. Spectrum asked five undergraduates and three house staff for an inside view of their living communities.

ALIXANDER: I wanted to put my fingers on the pulse of what’s going on with students at MIT, outside of the classroom, by joining a house team. Once you get tenure as a professor, I think you reach a sort of existential moment where you want to shape how exactly you situate yourself in the place that you may end up working in for the rest of your life. I felt like this opportunity would enhance my teaching in the classroom and enlarge my experience of MIT through active participation in a vibrant community.

HULLIN: Before I was faculty, I was an MIT undergraduate myself, and I lived at East Campus [EC]. So I have an affection for this particular dorm, and for how student-centric MIT’s housing system is in general. A crucial part of EC’s identity is user modifications. For example, we have a hall-wide stereo system, like a juke box, with a scrolling LED display in one of the lounges that tells you what song is playing.

HUBBARI: I became a Mashey GRT [graduate resident tutor] through a matching process: you interview at multiple dorms and rank them, and they rank you. What I like most about Mashey is the inclusive environment. Our motto says it all: “Be you with us.”

Making connections

MOLN: One of my favorite things about MIT housing is that freshmen and upperclassmen live together. I’m thankful that as a freshman I got to know upperclassmen who were able to help me with my p-sets, talk to me about their majors, and be positive role models for me—and each year, I get to be that for the new class of freshmen.

ANAGBOGU: When choosing where to live, I was motivated more by the people than any other factor. At Chocolate City [a brotherhood of students who identify with urban culture], I’m surrounded by people who understand me on a level deeper than others on campus, and it truly feels like my home at MIT. Coming back to Chocolate City is one of the most cathartic things I feel in a day.

HANSFORD: I had heard through alumni that joining a fraternity would be beneficial to my overall experience at MIT. After going to Sigma Chi during rush, I knew instantly it was a good fit—there was a diverse range of interests, including athletic (squash and lacrosse have been a large part of my MIT experience). Over the past three years, after a long day at MIT, nothing was more enjoyable than crossing the bridge to come home to 354 Beacon Street. I tried to make a point of keeping campus a study-focused area, and the house a more living-focused environment.

AYELEW: What makes Burton Conner feel most like home is how inviting everyone is. It becomes such second nature to bazaar around between suites that my friends and I joke that we spend more time in each other’s suites than our own.

GROW: One stereotype is that Simmons is very easy to get lost in, but I think that architecture is conducive to our sense of community—many lounges span two floors and some sections have short hallways that make it easier to get to know your neighbors.

“Whene choosing where to live, I was motivated more by the people than any other factor.”
Taking responsibility for leading your hall or your dorm really prepares them for autonomy. I think it's funny now to think about putting on makeup and grunt a lot."

"It's the experience of working with a team on a complicated construction project to be great training for the future. "It's been one of the most creative projects I've worked on at MIT," says Stern, who plans to pursue sustainable building design after graduation this year. "It's funny now to think of building houses for me!"

Michael Blanding
Ankur appreciates the community in this building—the families here rely on each other.

### Housing a Growing Graduate Population

**GRADUATE STUDENT ENROLLMENT AT MIT**

- 1,992 single students
- 6,804 married students and families

**CURRENT POPULATION OF ON-CAMPUS GRADUATE HOUSING**

- 1,925 single students
- 408 married students and families

**GRAD STUDENTS LIVING OFF-CAMPUS WHO WOULD PREFER CAMPUS HOUSING**

- 12% of all grad students
- 22% of grad students with children

To learn about MIT’s plans for a new graduate housing in Kendall Square, see page 3D.

**4MA: 2016 Survey**

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### A Day in the Westgate Life

**For a resident grad student, the campus encompasses work, family, and community**

#### 6:34 am
Ankur Choudhury, 34, fumbles for his glasses and rolls out of bed. He yawns a good morning to his wife, Sarah Andries. He exits the bedroom and bounces into his four-year-old son, Leonidas usually gets up first, but he’s not supposed to wake his parents up prematurely (or else she can’t watch her TV show about cars). The 40-year-old Ankur—a PhD candidate in the Technological Innovation, Entrepreneurship, and Strategy Management Group at MIT Sloan School of Management—gets dressed and tidies up. A few minutes before 7, he knocks on the kids’ bedroom door to rouse his eight-year-old daughter, Dido. She groans.

Ankur is Belgian, and considers eating chocolate anytime, all the time, to be her cultural heritage—so it’s no surprise that her daughter darts her bowl of Cheerios with chocolate sprinkles before wolfing it down. Once Ankur runs Dido to the school bus stop across the street at 7:10, he’s back in the kitchen pouring cups of coffee for Sarah and himself.

Ankur, Sarah, and Leonidas sit down for breakfast, and as Ankur eats his eggs, he looks around the apartment. Toys and books are everywhere. The kitchen is decorated with Dido’s drawings of mermaids and ponies and a page from Leonidas’s Hot Wheels coloring book. This is the third floor of Westgate, an MIT residence for graduate students with families. Ankur appreciates the community in this building—the fact that, say, the parents here babysit each other’s kids. The families in this building rely on each other.

Sarah drops Leonidas off at Westgate’s childcare facility before heading up to Salem, Massachusetts, where she works as a public defender. Ankur grabs his backpack, unlocks his bike, and starts pedaling.

#### 8:31 am
Ankur lowers himself into the pool at MIT’s Zesiger Sports and Fitness Center. He’s taking a beginner’s swimming class, and today the instructor is reviewing the forward crawl.

#### 9:35 am
Ankur hops off his bike and enters E62, MIT Sloan’s newest building. He grabs the elevator to the fourth floor and walks into the office he shares with two other graduate students. Ankur has the spot near the window. On his desk, scattered notebooks and papers intermingle with books like Statistical Inference and Mostly Harmless Econometrics. Next to his computer screen is more of his kids’ artwork and a framed family photo in which he and Dido are competing for the biggest smile.

Ankur sifts through his emails from the night before, and then opens a statistical analysis program on his computer and tumbles headfirst into his dataset—a sea of information he thinks about all the time. These are the cases, rows, and ratings of many of the pilot episodes and full seasons aired by major television networks from the 1940s until the present. Ankur’s interested in how innovation happens, broadly, and he’s using these data from the entertainment industry to figure it out. A recent discussion with his advisor got him thinking about a different way to organize his data, so he’s shifting the numbers around now, getting them in place to answer a new set of questions.

#### 10:32 am
Ankur sits at the front of his applied econometrics class. His professor—Joshua Angrist, a world-renowned economist—fires up a video clip. It’s an ABC News special report, anchored by a young Peter Jennings, about the fall of East Germans. Once it’s over, the professor immediately starts firing questions at the class. He wants to know why the clip is relevant to the paper “Once it’s over, the professor immediately starts firing questions at the class. He wants to know why the clip is relevant to the paper they’re discussing today. A student responds that the paper compares the earnings of those who served in the military to those who served in the military. The class continues at a rapid clip, professor and students working their way together through the math and analysis in the paper.

#### 12:27 pm
Ankur heads to the Sitman Dining Room in E62’s Roberta Family Forum, picks up a falafel pita sandwich, and joins five other graduate students in a conference room to discuss a paper on entrepreneurship.

#### 1:35 pm
Ankur is back at his desk working through his dataset, sipping a mug of ginger tea. He glances over at that family photo—Sarah and himself. The families in this building rely on each other.

#### 5:08 pm
Ankur is back on his bicycle, whistling west along the Charles River.

#### 6:37 pm
Back at Westgate, the whole family is gathered around the table for dinner: roasted carrots and asparagus with barley, and vanilla yogurt with—yes—more chocolate sprinkles. Dido shares details of her day at her Chinese immersion school in Cambridge. Leonidas wants to talk about “duck buses,” the amphibious World War II-era vehicles that now give tours of Boston on land and in the Charles River.

After dinner, Dido and Ankur bring out their guitars. Dido picks out single notes while Ankur strums a “Mean Mr. Mustard” while Ankur sings along and strums the chords. Then Ankur cracks open a fantasy book called Quest, and Dido and Leonidas struggle up on either side of him while he reads aloud.

One by one, everyone heads to the bathroom (where glow-in-the-dark sea creatures parade across the walls) to brush their teeth. Dido and Leonidas settle into bed. Ankur and Sarah share a bit more about their days, but it won’t be long before they’re asleep as well—recharging to do it all over again tomorrow—**Ankur Daniel PhD ‘08**

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**Ankur picks up Leonidas from MIT’s Westgate Cooperative Preschool, on the ground floor of their apartment building. Photo: Sarah Ballesta**
A graduate student analyzes MIT’s physical pathways of collaboration.

I am from California, and one of the first things people (unconsciously?) ask is why I ended up in the north. If you were here during the winter of 2014, I would bet that you asked yourself the same thing.

Once we entreat at MIT, we migrate to Cambridge, and then trek to campus almost every day. We spend our hours in these buildings—despite that an entirely successful dissertation year could probably be spent in pajamas, from the comfort of an IKEA Føåmy mattress.

There must be a certain magnetism that drew us to campus. It’s an air that we’ve been breathing from day one, co-creating with some of the brightest minds of our generation and previous ones. We brush shoulders with our peers and mentors and heroes—that’s the magic of being here. It’s large enough for a panorama of ideas, perspectives, passions, and proficiencies, but close enough for a spark of serendipity—in this intellectual density, you can’t help but stumble upon people doing wildly fascinating things. Discovering these ideas causes you to reconsider your own work in a new light, and in some cases, redirect your course. Whether implicitly, explicitly, or by proxy, we are all experiencing this richness of the campus ecology.

Campuses have formed around for a long time. It’s an effective spatial unit for collaborative knowledge. Cambridge (the older one) has been a university for over 800 years, and for most of that history, productive knowledge was communication almost exclusively in person. The campus was necessary. Participating in and advancing human knowledge meant making a pilgrimage, of sorts, to the mecca of academia.

And what about today? I can take any MOOC online or Skype any collaborator or VPN my way into any library archive, from anywhere in the world. It’s usually easier to schedule a meeting by phone than down the hall. In short, the question that motivates my research is, what is the importance of the campus in a digital era? To answer this, I set out to empirically map how physical space defines collaboration at MIT.

What seems at first like a qualitative observation, in fact, has quite a bit of data behind it, and analytical tools to fight it. I had the opportunity to work with the Office of Institutional Research, the office of facilities, and the MIT Data Warehouse to bring together bibliographic (papers and patents), directory data (affiliations and office numbers), and spatial data (campus GIS maps). With these datasets linked together, I applied statistical analysis (to understand departmental and building-level patterns), spatial analysis (to define the individual and relative positioning for each person), and network science (to understand collaboration).

The topology, or community structure, of the collaboration network reveals a proximity bias for working within the MIT community. Heterogeneous teams from multiple disciplines tend to form within the same building. When it comes to co-authoring papers, however, there is more of an affiliation bias: co-author teams tend to be of a single discipline. This suggests that co-inventors collaborate around projects, benefitting from a breadth of expertise or assets like specialized equipment, while co-authors collaborate within domains of scholarship, working to advance the knowledge of a particular subject.

The second interesting result is an exponential relationship between proximity and collaboration. You could think of it like dandelion seeds—there is a higher likelihood of finding a seed close to the flower, and the likelihood decays exponentially as the distance increases. MIT faculty are more likely to find a collaborator close by. This “collaborative pollination” model is consistent for papers, patents, and for specifically cross-disciplinary work.

Returning to that first intuition about the campus—the magnetism that brought us here—it’s clear that proximity and space influence scientific collaboration. The campus defines our community structures and the way knowledge is produced. This research is a first step toward understanding science in space—and could ultimately point to new policies and spatial planning that support collaborative innovation. We were drawn to this campus, and now we’re entrenched in its knowledge network.

Matthew Claudel is a PhD candidate in MIT’s Department of Urban Studies and Planning, the inaugural Innovation Scholar at the Lab for Innovation Science & Policy, and head of partnerships for DesignX, MIT’s new entrepreneurship accelerator for innovation in design and the built environment. This essay originally appeared as part of the “Grad Life” series on the MIT Alumni Association’s Slice of MIT blog (slice.mit.edu).

Acquaintance by Algorithm

When Yuksui Albani SM ’14 and Mohammad Ghassemi launched MIT Connect in 2014, their goal was simple: to connect people on campus who otherwise might not meet. Neither co-creator imagined how quickly the program would catch on.

Participants fill out a basic form at connected.mit.edu with their interests, availability, and lunch preferences. Albani and Ghassemi, both grad students in the Department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science, developed an algorithm to match individuals for lunch encounters. Introductory emails set a time and place, and even offer conversation starters.

Fueled by grants from the Office of the Dean for Graduate Development and the MindHabitsHeart Innovation Fund, with additional development support from MIT Sandbox and the Legatum Center for Development and Entrepreneurship, MIT Connect has been a resounding success: more than 90% of users—many of whom participate weekly—have given it positive feedback, and around half report they’ve formed lasting friendships through the program. Now in its second year, it continues to thrive on campus, where the 800-plus users are a mix of undergraduate and graduate students, postdoctoral researchers, faculty, employees, and alums.

The program is also rapidly expanding in other directions. After being approached by Boston area universities, Albani and Ghassemi opened participation in MIT Connect to people at nearby schools such as Harvard, Boston University, and Tufts, and they recently launched their first out-of-state program at Ohio’s University of Toledo. They are currently working on adapting MIT Connect for tutoring programs on campus.

“There are so many people who could teach us things,” Ghassemi says, “but what makes us ultimately receptive to learning from these people is a match not only between the skill set we need, but also the personalities of the people involved.”

After a year and a half of working behind the scenes, Albani recently experienced the power of MIT Connect firsthand. She was matched with a fellow PhD student, and the pair met for tea. They swapped research stories, uncovered a shared passion for ceramics, and discovered that for the past five years, they’ve been working in neighboring buildings.

“Even though she’s right across the street from me,” says Albani, “under any other circumstances I don’t think I would have had the chance to meet such an interesting person.”

Matthew Claudel SM ’16


Michale Pagano Claudioe

Strengthening Connections: Student Support and Well-being

In 2016, Chancellor Cynthia Barnhart SM ’85, PhD ’88 announced the realignment of key student support organizations into the Division of Student Life. “Our network of support is strong but I believe it can be further strengthened, particularly for students who need specific assistance. We must make it easier for students to access support resources; we must strengthen the connections between residential life and student support; and we must proactively reach the students we know are more likely to need our help.” The reorganization enables closer collaboration among Student Support Services (SSS), Violence Prevention and Response (VPR), Student Disability Services (SDS), and Community Development and Substance Abuse (CDSA), united under the leadership of senior associate dean for student support and well-being, David Randall.

Behind the acronym, some key points:

• A new “CARE” (Coordination, Assistance, Response, and Education) Team will become the thread woven through the support network. For students experiencing acute difficulties such as hospitalization or a family tragedy, the CARE Team will serve as their central MIT point of contact, coordinating as needed with appropriate services such as MIT Medical, Mental Health and Counseling, Undergraduate Education, Student Life, and the Office of Dean for Graduate Education (ODGE). Support can range from retrieving clothes and study materials, to connecting campus resources, to working with families, to tracking follow-up care—all while providing emotional support to the affected student. Randall emphasizes that students remain in control of the process: “We prioritize trust and transparency.”

• Student Support Services serves almost 70% of undergraduates at least once during their MIT experience. Grad students receive similar support via ODGE. S3 handles approximately 6,000 student contacts per year. In this broad space, from a brief email to help and referrals on a range of issues, Randall says, but one issue above all. “What MIT students care about first and foremost is the community, the people around us, a sense of belonging, a group that can disrupt coursework. S3 has developed solid relationships with professors so it can advocate for students in cases where they must step away from academic progress and well-being.

• Faculty are requesting more guidance on how to support students. Says Randall: “We are developing a handbook for faculty on how to recognize and respond to students in distress, along with online training modules. I want to create a menu of options for academic departments to educate their faculty in a way that’s kept current with the Institute’s processes.”

• Redefining “help” is a part of the process. MIT students, says Randall, “like to solve problems on their own”—whether these are engineering challenges, or bumps in life’s road. One of his office’s goals is to frame that inclination. “The message that we try to get across consistently to the students is that reaching out for help is a sign of strength,” he says. “We understand something that we all need to do.”

Nicole Entwistle Taylor

Innovate MIT Ed.
A startling experiment, a cross-disciplinary hunch—how MIT researchers discovered a potential new Alzheimer’s therapy

When graduate student Hannah Iaccarino saw her results, she didn’t believe them. She’d induced brain waves at a rate of 40 oscillations per second in mouse models of early stage Alzheimer’s disease. According to her analysis, the intervention had cut by half a toxic protein associated with the disease.

The reduction was just too dramatic to be true. So she repeated the experiment. Others did, too. The results remained the same.

“We’d thought it was a fluke,” says graduate student Anthony Martorell, who worked with co-first author Iaccarino on the study in the lab of MIT neuroscientist Li-Huei Tsai, director of the Picower Institute for Learning and Memory and the Picower Professor of Neuroscience. “It’s been very hard to reduce any Alzheimer’s disease pathology at all in mouse models or in humans, so our results were really surprising.”
The effects of ordinary ocean waves on ships, beaches, and shoreline structures are well known, but there’s another kind of huge, slow, underwater wave that’s almost undetectable at the surface. Associate professor of mechanical engineering Pierre Lermusiaux and his MISEAS group (Multidisciplinary Simulation, Estimation, and Assimilations Systems), along with researchers at the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution (WHOI), are part of a team that has modeled the motion and interactions of these internal waves. As reported by MIT News, the team has successfully predicted the speed and direction of movement of internal waves near the US Atlantic Coast as they are generated off the shelf break—a seaward feature where the ocean bottom suddenly drops off—and interact with the Gulf Stream and other ocean features.

These internal tides may be hidden, but their effects are not. The applications of the research are deep:

- **Sound accuracy:** When a ship emits sonar waves, the echoes aid navigation by revealing contours of solid objects and the sea bottom— but internal tides are one factor that can distort the echoes. “If you know how those [underwater] waves mostly evolve, and you know something about their uncertainties and probabilities, you can get better sonar performance,” Lermusiaux says. MISEAS is also working on a real-time forecasting, simulations, and analyses of undersea sound speed variability to develop underwater GPS.

- **Deep-sea oil rig stability:** The large, slow waves can interact with currents at the same frequency and create resonance, which exacerbates a vessel’s potentially destructive effects. Even in the absence of storms, internal wave and current action of varying strengths and directions can cause damage to rig structures and underwater pipes.

- **Insight into marine ecosystems:** The waves in internal tides, which can be hundreds of feet high, are also instrumental in moving water from the depths of the ocean to areas closer to the surface. That movement delivers deep-sea nutrients for phytoplankton and zooplankton that in turn attract fish that feed on them. More quantitative understanding of this dynamic ocean cycle could be particularly useful to fisheries, says Lermusiaux.

- **Climate science:** Because some internal tides travel a long way without dissipating much, they carry energy over long distances. “As those waves get created, where they interact, break, and ultimately dissipate is important for climate because that’s where their energy goes,” Lermusiaux explains. -Elizabeth Doughty

He even suggested a method: Shine flickering light into the eyes instead of piping it deep into the brain. “Up to that point it never occurred to me to go this one step further to try out noninvasive stimulation,” says Tsai. “We decided to give it a shot.” Brown’s idea had precedent. Neuroscience experiments done years ago—and considered classics in the field today—had shown that the visual cortex adopts the activity patterns of light signals entering through the eyes. “This has been known for decades,” says Tsai about postdoc Chinmayarkumar Adhikari, who joined the project midway. “But to use it to amplify aberrant oscillations in the Alzheimer’s brain was an interesting idea.”

Boyden’s team used their engineering expertise to fashion a controlable flickering LED. Tsai’s team studied the effects of the stroke on the visual cortex. “At this point, the project had become very multidisciplinary,” says Tsai.

The intervention not only halved amyloid levels in mice with early stage Alzheimer’s—it also reduced plaques that form in later stages. This finding, which was published along with the team’s other results in Nature in December 2016, makes the intervention potentially relevant for humans. Alzheimer’s symptoms typically do not appear until after plaques have formed. “Most human patients will have plaques in their brains already,” says Tsai. Looking forward, the researchers have many avenues they’d like to explore. First, though, they’d like to determine how long the effects of the intervention last and whether other modes of sensory stimulation, such as sound or touch, have similar effects on the regions of the brain that process those inputs. Ultimately, the goal is to find multiple ways to noninvasively stimulate the brain so that someday, gamma waves propagate strongly throughout it, “if we can activate gamma in many different brain regions, perhaps we can get a huge area of the brain involved,” says Tsai. “Treating the whole brain will be important for people with Alzheimer’s disease.” -Elizabeth Doughty

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*PHOTO: BASTILLE*
Breakthroughs and Insights

Catherine Turco investigates social puzzles. This may not be surprising, Catherine Turco analyzes a managerial Harvard undergraduate, then worked as a technology-focused investment

embed myself in a social world that I want to study as deeply as possible.”

more in common with Margaret Mead than with Wall Street. “If you think about an anthropologist going off and living in a remote village, think about an anthropologist going off and living in a remote village, or an industry.”

However, as the company grew to employ several hundred people, workers

then worked as a technology-focused investment

one of such embedded research stint. She spent almost a year observing an anonymous firm (which she labels “TechCo”) in the book that year aimed to reinvent its own management structure, transitioning from a hierarchical chain of command into something more transparent and adaptable. She also observed TechCo’s ongoing efforts to assimilate the unique expectations of its millennial employees.

One thing that intrigued Turco was the unexpected conflict between TechCo’s two goals. “There has been a ton of talk for years in the press about millennial workers not wanting rules and hierarchy,” Turco explains, “yet in these 25-year-olds [at TechCo] were often telling me, ‘I just want more hierarchy.’

TechCo’s efforts to resolve this apparent paradox informed Turco’s theory of a “conversational firm.” Neither a traditional top-down bureaucracy like such 20th-century corporate giants as GE or Ford, nor a radically “flat” organization such as game developer Valve (whose boss-less employees produced the blockbuster Portal game series), TechCo combined aspects of both. The executives maintained a traditional decision-making hierarchy while also instituting a culture of radical transparency for internal communications.

In Turco’s words, TechCo separated its “decision rights” from its “voice rights.” Employees weren’t expected to democratically ratify every corporate decision, “like communes in the sixties where consensus was key,” says Turco. But they weren’t shut out of the conversations that drove those decisions, either. In fact, every employee was invited to participate in them in an ongoing manner, through channels ranging from an internal wiki to all-staff Q&A sessions.

This fusion of decision control with open-ended communication allowed TechCo to adapt to seemingly paradoxical pressures. For example, the executives resisted instituting a human resources department because they felt it made TechCo operate less like a nimble startup. However, as the company grew to employ several hundred people, workers began demanding more internal clarity and support. “You had this millennial workforce assuming for an HR department, which was not necessarily what I expected to walk into on the first day,” Turco recalls. “The executives didn’t want to do it because they thought it was going back on their commitment to running a non-hierarchical company. But the commitment employees cared about was to them having voice. And they were using their voices to call for an HR department because they felt it was now necessary.”

Turco believes this conversational mode can improve any organization, not just a tech company—precisely because it allows an idea that is explored further in Queer Theory builds on a body of research Perreau began as a PhD student in political science at the Sorbonne in the late 1990s. In the late 1990s, beginning of the 21st century, why do we still need to pretend we make decisions that are mimetic of nature?”, he says. “The more I delved into studying adoption, the more I discovered how important this fantasy of nature is in the way France imagined its own identity,” he says. Perreau examines another aspect of French identity in Queer Theory: Noting that protesters of gay marriage characterized the bill as an “invasion” of France by an American academic theory, Perreau says Queer Theory points out that “playing the anti-American card” resonated, even though the theory in question is actually rooted in a late-20th-century French philosophical movement called post-structuralism.

What these stories have in common, Perreau asserts, is an “imagined Frenchness” that is monolithic and thus not up to reinvention—an idea that is explored further in Les défis de la République: Genre, territoires, citoyenneté (Presses de Sciences Po, 2017), a volume of essays Perreau co-edited with Joan W. Scott on the challenges that minority agendas pose to the French foundational belief in universal equality. The book’s eight contributors address the impact of demands for voting rights for noncitizens, gay rights, and gender parity in access to political office.

The takeaway point, Perreau says, is that efforts to expand the social contract to include new groups challenge the status quo and therefore require new ways of thinking about major provision of French democracy both in France and in the United States. “Majority rule is made possible by the principle that supposes that if you delegate your voice, you think your voice will survive in the person to whom you’ve delegated it. If you are a minority, this is not that obvious,” Perreau says. “Something needs to be reinvented.”

Efforts to expand the social contract to include new groups, says Perreau, require new ways of thinking about majority rule.

Radical Transparency

Catherine Turco analyzes a managerial experiment from the inside out

Catherine Turco investigates social puzzles. This may not be surprising, given that she appears to be one herself. Turco launched her career on a business-world fast track—she ran a thousand-employee company as a first-year undergraduate, then worked as a tech venture capital investment banker at Morgan Stanley—before pivoting to earn her PhD in sociology. Now Theodore T. Miller Career Development Professor and Associate Professor of Work and Organization Studies at MIT’s Sloan School of Management, Turco still describes herself as having “a quantitative mindset,” even while her ethnographic style of research seems to have more in common with Margaret Mead than with Wall Street. “If you think about an anthropologist going off and living in a remote village, I do that inside companies or an industry,” Turco explains. “I try to embed myself in a social world that I want to study as deeply as possible.”

Turco’s first book, The Conversational Firm: Rethinking Bureaucracy in the Age of Social Media (Columbia University Press, 2016), is the product of a specialist in critical theory, gender studies, and French politics, Bruno Perreau examines the messy work of democracy, where majorities rule and minorities fight to be heard.

The Cynthia L. Boyd Professor of French Studies and Language in MIT’s Global Studies and Languages section, Perreau particularly works in the political conflict contemporary France has faced over gay marriage, adoption, and bioethics. The mirror he holds up to his home country is based on the year

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The Foundation of Democracy

Bruno Perreau examines challenges to the status quo in his native France

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The evolution of Kendall Square is the story of a once-thriving industrial and commercial area that has transformed into a vibrant hub of innovation and industry. Kendall Square is a unique environment where academic and research institutions meet with businesses and startups to foster a culture of collaboration and discovery. The neighborhood is home to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), a leading research institution known for its contributions to science and technology.

Kendall Square has undergone a significant transformation over the years, driven by the needs of both academia and industry. The area has evolved from a once-thriving industrial and meeting rooms. It will welcome the public to a new childcare center to benefit the entire MIT community. A purpose-designed building will provide 200% more programmatic space for the MIT Museum, including galleries, classrooms, and offices. The building will be a model for the design, construction, and programming of new and renovated residential and academic buildings.

The Division of Student Life and Office of Campus Planning has commissioned a new residence tower—which will be the tallest building on the MIT campus—will feature roughly 450 living units; a host of common areas including study spaces, a playroom, and a terrace; and a range of activities and programs designed to support academic and social development. The tower will provide a flexible pavilion for admissions program and Office of Campus Planning Working Group to help develop conceptual design options for the dormitory.

Why do thousands of alumni and friends devote their hours to building engagement with MIT? Four standout volunteers explain what drives them.

INSPIRED BY CLASSMATES: Brenna Barry ’12
Throughout my time at MIT, I was able to participate in so many opportunities, MIT Dance Troupe kept me sane. The Electric Vehicle Team taught me important life skills—the willingness to ask for help, the desire to iterate, and how to be involved. However, I need to look no further than Facebook for my inspiration to volunteer. My classmates are my inspiration. To give a few examples, which don’t even scratch the surface: Gabe Blanchet ’11 co-founded Open Source Ecology, which helps teach hydroponic farming and makes it easier to grow your own garden at home. Ashli Davis-Polanco ’12 cofounded Gique, a nonprofit that inspires STEAM education. Many others are influencing their communities and their networks. MIT is amazing because, while you leave the edifices and the grounds, you get to take lifelong connections with you.

INVENTING TRADITION: Jennifer Yang ’97
I always knew I’d stay involved with MIT, just not to what extent. I was very active as an undergrad—with the Undergraduate Association, Alpha Chi Omega, the track team, even Charm School. During our senior year, a classmate joked, “Why wait five years for a reunion? How about 35 years from now?” Well, the comment stuck, and the class officers thought, “Let’s do it!” I chaired the planning committee, and it turned out to be a bigger event than we set out to do. Keep in mind, when we graduated, social media wasn’t prevalent, the Internet was nascent, and email was a new thing. The Class of 1997 was the first to ever have a Reunion. And the tradition was renewed beginning about 20 years ago, when the class of 1997 held its first Reunion in Cambridge. The Reunion is now an integral part of the alumni experience. We didn’t expect this to become a legacy.

THE DYNAMIC DUO: Doug Bailey ’72 and Riccardo Di Capua ’72
BAGLEY: The friendships I formed in my living group, Sigma Chi, the oldest continuous Fraternity at MIT, kindled an enduring appreciation of MIT and its community of exceptional people. Those early fraternity bonds have lasted for nearly 50 years. My collaborators in all things volunteer, Riccardo, is a friend for life as well. He is a true gentlemanners, a mentor, and someone who can always be counted on to deliver. I hold him in the same regard as if he were my brother, yet I liken him to my father: the humble skill that they both share is the rare ability, when in conversation, to make you feel that you are the most important person in the room.

DI CAPUA: Many alumni want nothing else to do ever again with their nemesis MIT courses. Instead, I’ve taken some too debug MOOCs, mostly in math and physics. When I mention this at alumni gatherings, inevitably, the other person is surprised I would choose to voluntarily take on those courses ever again! Doug and I have had the pleasure of working together over the decades on many MIT volunteer projects. We spend considerable time together discussing overall goals and the right strategy. I’ve learned that our minds operate identically; Doug and I being “interchangeable” when it comes to anything to do with MIT. A unique friendship and shared experience that’s grown over the past decades—and more to come in the future!
From MIT to Biotech and Back Again

As a high school senior in Skokie, Illinois, Brian Daniels ’66, SM ’67, was thrilled to receive an MIT acceptance letter in 1971. Decades later, he considers his MIT years a pivotal time in his life. “The rigor and academic demands made MIT exceptional,” he says, but the personal dimension was also important. “Forty years later, my MIT classmates are still some of my best friends.”

After completing MIT degrees in biology, and nutritional biochemistry and metabolism, Daniels followed his growing interests in biology and medicine to Genentech, then to medical school at Washington University, St. Louis. After training as a rheumatologist/immunologist, he had a 20+ year career in biotechnology. He helped develop innovative treatments for cancer, HIV, diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis, and other serious conditions. In 2014, he retired as a senior vice president at Bristol-Myers Squibb. “I’ve traveled a lot in my professional life,” Daniels observes, “and I’ve seen that MIT is recognized all over the world for excellence.”

When asked about the connections between MIT and the biotech industry, Daniels describes the path of powerful ideas, from inspiration to the patient’s bedside. “We often focus on final outputs, like new drugs or better medical devices, but before each output there’s a long journey.” That journey, he notes, requires investment. “It all ties back to basic scientific research and technology advancement,” Daniels says, and MIT’s making two irreplaceable contributions: powerful technology advancement, and the way in which it could help prevent scientific thought.” The Dutch artist would go on to make a meaningful presence in the Cordovers’ life. After acquiring a number of Escher’s pieces, the couple built a wide-ranging art collection from which they regularly lend works to exhibitions around the world.

In the other reminiscence, Ron describes an educational “aha” moment from his time as a PhD candidate researching atomic spectra under the late visionary physicist Charles H. Townes. Addressing a particularly complex concept, Townes sketched a “beautiful” drawing of the atomic phenomena rather than using words or formulas. This reinforced for Ron the notion that “artistic visualization can be a critically useful element for processing information.”

These examples are just two of many, Ron notes, that illustrate how championing the integration of science and art come to be “a kind of purpose” for him and Barbara. Ron is also an overseer at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, where he and Barbara sponsored an exhibition of a unique 17th-century Flemish cabinet painting that celebrates the moment when science began to replace ancient dogma as the methodology to understand our universe. Additionally, they have provided important support for Science Gallery International, a worldwide network of university-based exhibition centers that aims to excite young people about the intersection of science and art.

Ron and Barbara believe strongly in art as a vehicle for broadening the experiences of students and deeply acknowledge that, more than ever, creative activity is flourishing at MIT. To help encourage this development, they established an arts-focused MIT scholarship fund in the 1990s, and are longtime supporters of both the MIT Council for the Arts and the MIT Museum. The latter, Barbara remarks, has continued to perfect its mission, and is a “very special place.”

As the museum prepares to move from its current location to a custom-built space in the heart of Kendall Square, part of MIT’s expansion and reimaging of the neighborhood, the Cordovers have given a significant gift to contribute to the facility’s next chapter. Excited that the museum is poised to become a major presence in the new gateway to MIT’s campus, the couple hope that their gift will enhance what they view as the museum’s principal purpose—“to present complex and critically important research in a way that is inspirational for the students and faculty doing the work, and to make it accessible to the public at large.”

Barbara, who has a background in fine art and education, notes that in directing their support, she and Ron considered a number of worthy people and projects at MIT but decided that the museum could best realize the spirit of their gift. Ron offers that “if the MIT Museum, in its presence in Kendall Square, can be a beacon to communicate the aesthetic beauty and the inherent relevance of science, it would make us very happy for all who would benefit.” —Tracey Lazos

The Art of Understanding

While a student at MIT, Ronald H. Cordover ’74 BS, SM ’75, PhD ’79, an electrical engineer by degree and a lover of science and technology by nature, came to understand the power of art to communicate big ideas to the world.

Ron—who with his wife, Barbara, has generously given to the Institute, including important support for the MIT Museum—shares two relevant anecdotes from his student days. In one, he was a freshman thrilled by the work of M.C. Escher during the artist’s 1960 visit to MIT. As Ron recalls, Escher’s intricate, mathematically inspired designs generated “an amazingly sympathetic appreciation for graphic art, and the way in which it could help present scientific thought.” The Dutch artist would go on to make a meaningful presence in the Cordovers’ life. After acquiring a number of Escher’s pieces, the couple built a wide-ranging art collection from which they regularly lend works to exhibitions around the world.

Next Stops on the Better World Tour

The momentum continues as alumni and friends come together to celebrate MIT, our vibrant global community, and our mission to build a better world.

President L. Rafael Reif has already shared his vision on the Better World Tour, MIT Sloan alumni are invited to join Dean David Schmittlein for additional events that will highlight the school’s impact in the world. After gatherings earlier this year in New York, San Francisco, Hong Kong, London, Tel Aviv, Los Angeles, Mexico City, and Washington, DC. And that’s just the beginning. The tour continues this fall with a stop near home in Boston, then heads west.

A special invitation for MIT Sloan alumni

Building on the Campaign for a Better World tour, MIT Sloan alumni are invited to join Dean David Schmittlein for additional events that will highlight the school’s impact in the world. After gatherings earlier this year in San Francisco, New York, and Boston, MIT Sloan is crossing the ocean this fall:

São Paulo 9:13:17

London 12:6:17

Learn more

alumni.mit.edu/campaign/events

QUESTIONS

alumni@mit.edu

442.333.6243

PHOTO: MIT
A group of MIT students came together on campus this winter to construct bamboo bikes—the basis of a community organization the workshop’s instructor, graduate student David Wang, founded in Beijing. By working side by side, exploring sustainable materials, and building with their own hands, participants ride away with a greater sense of ownership over their mobility. Bonus: no two frames are the same.