



**Annual
Report
2026**

Community Engagement

Office of the Dean, MIT School of Science

August 2026

Office of Community Engagement:

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We gratefully acknowledge the support and contributions of various teams in the Dean's Office.



Alchemist sculpture on MIT campus. Pic: MIT Media Library

Greetings! At the MIT School of Science, we are fortunate to be able to draw on the best talent in the world. The Office of Community Engagement, housed within the School of Science Dean's Office, aims to ensure that our community thrives and is guided by the values described in the [MIT Values Statement](#): excellence and curiosity; openness and respect; belonging and community. These values form the core pillars on which the work of this office is based.

This office oversees and participates in a wide range of activities and programming, involving faculty, postdocs, staff, and students. This report highlights many of these programs and activities over the past year, which include faculty and academic processes, staff engagement and inclusion, postdoctoral and student fellowships and programming, outreach, mentorship, community building, and so much more.

Our premise is simple: talented people come from all backgrounds but gaps in access and opportunity for some groups can cause barriers to participation. The recent decision by the MIT leadership to make tuition free for students below a certain income threshold reflects the spirit of inclusion that will allow us to recruit the best talent, which in turn will ensure that we continue to do the best science. In addition to scientific advancement and educational excellence, we remain committed to fostering an environment where our community members can thrive.

I want to take a moment to gratefully acknowledge the work that so many of you are doing that makes our school an even better place. Our staff, who take on a myriad of critical administrative responsibilities that keep the school functioning; our departmental leadership who navigate these challenging times; our students and postdocs with their talent and energy; and our faculty and scientists who play a critical role in advancing science and innovation and shaping tomorrow's leaders – we are grateful to you. Simply put, we would not be where we are today without each of you bringing to the school everything that you do. Together, I look forward to continuing this important work across our school.

With best wishes and gratitude,

Kuheli Dutt, Ph.D. (she/her)
Assistant Dean for Community Engagement, MIT School of Science



School of Science Advanced Degree Ceremony. Pic: Steph Stevens

The Office of Community Engagement oversees and participates in a wide range of activities, many of which have been included in this document. For convenience, these have been grouped into five categories: i) Faculty Affairs; ii) Postdoctoral Affairs; iii) Staff Inclusion; iv) Student Affairs; and v) Community and Outreach

I. Faculty Affairs

Faculty Teaching and Mentoring Awards

The Community Engagement and Faculty Affairs teams, along with Associate Deans Rebecca Saxe and Jacqueline Lees, manage the review and selection process for the [Science Awards for Excellence in Teaching and Mentoring](#). This year the nomination and selection processes were modified to reduce administrative burden on the units while expanding the pool of candidates. The awards are presented during the School of Science's annual Spring Awards Ceremony, which is organized by the Dean's Office Faculty Affairs, Human Resources, and Events teams. Learn about current and previous recipients of these awards [here](#).

Faculty Lunches and Workshops

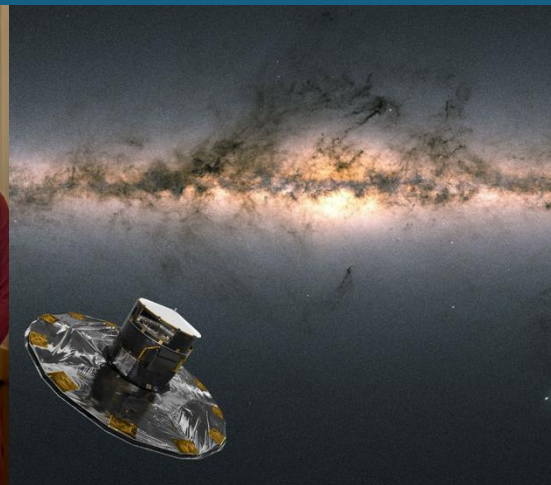
Organized by the Dean's Office Faculty Affairs and Events teams, these lunches aim to build community among junior faculty and provide an audience with the Dean and Associate Deans on key topics pertaining to career development and faculty life at MIT.

Faculty Search Process

The Community Engagement team supports the faculty search process by providing guidelines and resources on [Promoting Inclusive Faculty Searches](#) to integrate equity and inclusion. Additionally, briefings by the Office of General Counsel ensure compliance with federal regulations. The Community Engagement team additionally serves as the Equal Opportunity Representative for all faculty searches within the School, providing search analyses to units to help them attract the broadest pool of qualified applicants.

Mentorship Evaluation

Led by Associate Dean Rebecca Saxe, this initiative is aimed at normalizing a culture of outstanding mentorship within the School of Science, and entails including information about mentorship in the faculty promotion process. This also includes ensuring transparency to faculty about the promotion process in general, not just the mentoring portion of the process.



School of Science Postdoctoral Fellows Presentation Event. Pic (left): Kuheli Dutt; pic (right): J. Speedie presentation slide, pic by ESA/Gaia/DPAC

II. Postdoctoral Affairs

School of Science Postdoctoral Fellowship

This highly competitive three-year cohort-based postdoctoral fellowship program, sponsored by the Dean of Science, seeks to recruit outstanding postdoctoral talent to the School of Science. The focus is on cross-disciplinary research and innovation, with fellows having the flexibility to pursue the research that inspires their passion. The selection committee comprises faculty representatives from each department and is chaired by Associate Dean Rebecca Saxe. In addition to the scientific focus, this program also includes an academic leadership module with a focus on capacity building and leadership-focused programs, including programs like the [School of Science LEAPS](#) leadership program as well as workshops from [MIT Career Advising and Professional Development \(CAPD\)](#). Additionally, cohort-based meetings and activities promote connections between the six fellows. Fellows also attend the School of Engineering monthly postdoctoral fellows lunch to build connections. The Fellows Presentation event was jointly hosted by the Community Engagement and Resource Development teams. Learn more about our inaugural cohort of fellows [here](#).

Postdoctoral Inclusion and Community

The School of Science has more than 500 postdoctoral scientists. The [MIT Quality of Life Survey](#) results show that postdoctoral scientists tend to report higher levels of isolation compared to other groups. With the goal of promoting connection and inclusion among postdoctoral scientists across the school, a standing postdoctoral committee was convened this past year. This committee comprises 11 postdoctoral representatives across all six of our departments. Topics of discussion and activities include professional development (such as creating teaching opportunities for postdoctoral scientists, and workshops from [CAPD](#)) and community building (such as using the School of Science Quality of Life Grant program to build connections among postdocs).

Postdoctoral Coffee Hour with the Dean

To create a channel of communication with the Dean's Office, every semester we host a coffee hour for all postdoctoral scientists across the school to meet with the Dean. During this coffee hour, postdocs share their feedback and/or concerns impacting them, along with larger discussions and ideas for supporting postdocs.



School of Science GEMS launch event for administrative and support staff. Pics: Kuheli Dutt

III. Staff Inclusion

GEMS: The [MIT Quality of Life Survey](#) data reveal that staff in administrative and support roles often experience isolation and challenges around inclusion and belonging, including the ability to connect with staff across units. A collaboration between the Community Engagement and Human Resources teams, the GEMS program (an acronym for Growth, Engagement and iMPact for Staff) promotes staff inclusion. GEMS aims to engage staff across the school and identify ways to best support various needs ranging from community building to professional advancement. Staff across the school lead the three GEMS subcommittees:

- i) **Catalyzing Connection: Connecting Staff to Navigate and Succeed at MIT:** Examples of possible activities: onboarding support; social and networking events; coverage support; improving awareness of MIT resources; advice to manage workload; and revitalizing the staff mentorship program.
- ii) **Pathfinders: Cultivating Opportunities for Staff Career Growth:** Examples of possible activities: Hosting career panels, creating transparent skills-based career ladders, practical professional development and apprenticeship opportunities, outreach to managers and manager trainings.

- iii) **Value and Recognition: Uplifting Staff Value and Visibility at MIT:** Examples of possible activities: Outreach to SoS communities; staff newsletter; recognition or “thank you” events; involvement in visiting committees; Meet-Your-Dean lunch.

GEMS Events and Activities

So far, GEMS events and activities have included:

GEMS Launch Event: This was attended by more than 60 administrative and support staff across the school and provided an introduction to the GEMS program. Each subcommittee presented posters on their proposed activities.

Pathfinders Event: This professional development event included a presentation on Career Development at MIT, a review of resumés, and the opportunity to get professional headshots.

Lunch with the Dean: This event was aimed at thanking the GEMS members for their significant contributions to GEMS and the school.

GEMS Mailing List: A mailing list has been created that reaches all administrative and support staff across the school, to keep them informed about GEMS updates and activities.



MIT Solar Electric Vehicle Team (SEVT) with Gemini, their first multi occupant solar car. Pic: MIT SEVT

IV. Student Affairs and Engagement

Dean of Science Graduate Fellowships

In collaboration with the Office of the Vice Chancellor and the Office of Graduate Education, the School of Science Dean's Office offers the [Dean of Science Fellowship Program](#). These three-year fellowships are supported by the Dean's Office, the Office of Graduate Education, and individual departments. Via these fellowships we recruit outstanding talent to our school. The Dean's Office also provides up to two summers of funding to fellows who request it. In collaboration with the Dean's Office Events team, we hosted our first Dean of Science Symposium. Visit our [Dean of Science Graduate Fellows](#) page to learn more about our fellows, their research, and the symposium.

Community Service Graduate Fellowships

This initiative is aimed at recognizing extraordinary service contributions of graduate students in support of their community. These fellowships provide graduate students financial support (tuition, stipend, and health insurance) for one semester. These awards acknowledge a range of activities, including but not limited to: mentorship, application assistance, leadership roles on student committees, outreach and education, and community building.

Student Engagement

We continue to be amazed by the talent, creativity, and dedication of our students. Some student initiatives supported by this office include:

MIT Science Bowl

Now in its tenth year, [MIT Science Bowl](#) is based on the [National Science Bowl](#) hosted by the U.S. Dept. of Energy. MIT Science Bowl remains the largest and only student-led regional host in the country, even with the rise in invitational tournaments hosted by other universities. Middle and high school teams from across the country compete on MIT campus in a fast-paced session covering science and math. MIT Science Bowl serves as a regional qualifier for the National Science Bowl.

MIT Solar Electric Vehicle Team (SEVT):

"Driven by passion. Born by fire. Powered by sun."

This slogan captures the essence of the [MIT Solar Electric Vehicle team](#), which competes in the American Solar Challenge (ASC), which states: "We oversee the toughest solar car competitions on the planet to foster the development of next-generation leaders through experiential learning, innovation, and teamwork." MIT SEVT has won this competition twice for their single-occupant vehicle. They have now built Gemini, a multi-occupant vehicle.



School of Science Advanced Degree Ceremony. Pic: Steph Stevens

IV. Student Affairs and Engagement (Cont'd)

MIT Science Olympiad

Mirroring the high standard of the National Science Olympiad, the [MIT Science Olympiad](#) is a highly competitive tournament run by MIT students. The 2026 tournament brought together 70 teams from high schools across the country, including local schools and schools as far away as Hawaii. Over 1,000 students had a chance to run experiments in MIT laboratories, measure their builds against teams from around the country, and put their scientific knowledge and reasoning to the test. More than 150 volunteers and event supervisors helped with over 2 dozen events across a wide range of science and engineering disciplines. High school students were able to connect with peers who shared their passion for science while gaining hands-on experience in a world-class academic environment.

Graduate Student Leaders Coffee Hour

Graduate student leaders across our school gather over a coffee hour with the Dean every semester. Aimed primarily as a communication channel between student leaders and the Dean's Office, the discussions at these meetings gives us an insight into the needs, concerns, and experiences of our students at a school level.

Graduate First Generation Low Income (GFLI)

[GFLI@MIT](#) is a student-led group that supports first-generation college graduates across MIT graduate programs. GFLI students are typically the first in their families to earn a bachelors degree and/or come from low-income households and/or received a Pell grant. Key GFLI activities include: mentoring undergraduate first-generation low-income students to decrease structural barriers of higher education; community building events to promote connection and networking; and workshops offered by GFLI alumni to provide advice on navigating graduate school at MIT. An annual awards dinner recognizes GFLI students who are graduating that academic year.

Lab Mentoring Compacts

Feedback from our graduate students suggested that they place a lot of importance on lab mentoring compacts – that being one of the factors they consider in their decision on which research group to join. Accordingly, we created a guidance document on [Lab Mentoring Compacts](#). These compacts range from as little as 2 pages to as much as 12 pages, covering topics from identifying mentor-mentee expectations, being a good lab citizen, regular check-ins, group meetings, etc.



Stars Wars Day in the Mathematics Department. Pic: Mihaela Rusu

V. Community and Outreach

Quality of Life (QOL) Grants

The Science Quality of Life Grant Program offers small grants and has the following goals: to build community and foster a sense of inclusion for all; to provide community members opportunities to interact and socialize outside of research; to integrate academic and social aspects of life within the school; and to build collaborations and connections with other groups. Some recent grants awarded include:

Seminar Series and Writing Retreats: Grants have been awarded to fund writing retreats and/or seminar series for early career scientists.

Student Connections: Various projects create connections among groups, e.g., *BioPals* where new students are connected to senior students.

Appreciation Events: Grants for events to appreciate various groups including *lab technicians, administrative staff, departmental headquarters, facilities staff, and postdocs.*

Cooking and Baking: Projects include: *Cooking Together: Community Wellness + Food Security; BioGrad Dine & Dish; McGovern Team Bonding.*

Plants and Gardening: Projects funded include: a *Community Terrace Rooftop Garden* and the *Adopt-A-Plant* lending program.

Arts and Crafts: Various projects for painting, knitting, and crocheting events were funded. Also, the *Artist Collective* focuses on science-meets-art; and *Beneath the Great Wave* combines Hokusai's art with the science of tsunamis and earthquakes.

Physical Activities and Wellness: Grants have been awarded for various physical activities and wellness such as: running clubs; pickleball; yoga; acroyoga; meditation/mindfulness; and others.

Bridging Scientific Groups: Grants awarded to build bridges between different groups: *Quantum Nuclear Exchange; Bridging Research Group Silos; Bridging Theoretical Physics Community.*

Book and Journal Clubs: Book/journal clubs include: *Neutrinos and Dark Matter Journal Club; BioGrads Beavers Book Club; and Exoplanet Tea.*

Fun Events: Some fun activities include: *Bldg. 46 Duck Hunt; Math Dept. Star Wars Day; BCS Board Games Night; and the Great BCS Bake-Off.*



School of Science Excellence in Teaching and Mentoring Awards Ceremony. Pics: Steph Stevens

V. Community and Outreach (Cont'd)

Community of Practice

Originally created during the time of ICEO, this initiative is now led by Wyoming McGinn, our Program Coordinator. The focus of these meetings is to promote a useful and supportive network of individuals working in community engagement at MIT. These meetings are attended by staff across different schools and units, including SoS, SoE, SHASS, SA+P, Sloan, Alumni Affairs, and others.

MITES

We continue to invest in the [MITES program](#) focusing on K-12 education in STEM and building a foundation for middle and high school students from underserved backgrounds. MITES creates new pathways for students and helps them develop the skills they need to succeed in STEM.

Navajo Nation Math Circles

We continue our collaboration with the [Navajo Nation Math Circles \(NNMC\) Project](#). In collaboration with our Math and Physics departments, we sponsor teacher training workshops for NNMC teachers. Participation in NNMC is open to all and includes a range of backgrounds and identities.

SACNAS

We work closely with the [Office of Graduate Education](#) and [Director of Outreach \(Biology\)](#) to participate, as part of a larger MIT-wide presence, at the [SACNAS National Diversity in STEM Conference](#), with the aim of attracting talented students to MIT, many of whom are first-generation and/or low-income students.

Food Security

We have partnered with the [Division of Student Life](#) and the [Food Security Action Team](#) at MIT to support food security among graduate and undergraduate students via the newly created Retail Swipe Share Program, which donates meal swipes to students in financial need.

Broader Impacts Statement for NSF Proposals

In collaboration with the [Office of VPR](#), we have created a resource [Guidance on Broader Impacts Statements](#). This offers guidance to Principal Investigators (PIs) on NSF proposals not only on how to craft the Broader Impacts statement, but it also lists a wide range of MIT programs and resources that could be potential areas for involvement and/or partnership for PIs writing such proposals.

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Along the Charles River Esplanade. Pic: Mary Shertenlieb