

## Office of the Associate Provost for International Activities

The [Office of the Associate Provost for International Activities \(OAPIA\)](#) supports and develops international engagements that contribute to MIT's mission of advancing the frontiers of knowledge, educating tomorrow's global leaders, and bringing forefront knowledge to bear on solving the world's great challenges.

The associate provost for international activities oversees the international activities of the Institute. The associate provost advises the president and the provost on existing and new international policies and programs, consults with faculty on the development of international activities, helps to shape major new international initiatives involving multiple MIT units, works with MIT administrators to design and implement these activities effectively and efficiently, and works with the faculty and administration to evaluate the risks of new international engagements.

The associate provost sponsors the International Advisory Committee, co-sponsors the International Coordinating Committee, and coordinates the work of the Senior Risk Group (on which he serves together with the vice president for research and the general counsel), which oversees the Institute's engagements in elevated-risk countries. He serves on the governing boards of the Singapore-MIT Alliance for Research and Technology and the MIT Portugal Program, and on the board of trustees of the Skolkovo Institute of Science and Technology (Skoltech). Programs overseen by his office include the Institute's collaboration with Skoltech and the Singapore University of Technology and Design.

### Accomplishments

#### MIT China Strategy Group

In February 2021, the chair of the MIT Faculty and the associate provost convened a small group of senior faculty and administrators with expertise on China and US scientific and technological competitiveness to develop a set of principles and recommendations concerning US research university interactions with China. The group prepared an interim report on the roles and responsibilities of the universities and the federal government designed to contribute to the current national policy debate on this subject. The report was shared with key members of Congress and the administration in July 2021 and calls for a comprehensive dialogue between US research universities and the federal government on this issue. The report will also be used to catalyze a wider discussion of these issues on the MIT campus in fall 2021.

#### Climate Grand Challenges

The associate provost, working with the vice president for research, launched the MIT Climate Grand Challenges initiative in the summer of 2020. Climate Grand Challenges is mobilizing the entire MIT research community around some of the most challenging unsolved problems in adaptation and resilience, carbon removal, climate science, climate policy, human impacts, and greenhouse gas emissions reduction. Together, we are

setting our sights on the research and innovations that will deliver accelerated, game-changing advances in the world's efforts to address the climate challenge.

Phase I of the initiative generated nearly 100 letters of interest with almost 400 MIT faculty and senior researchers participating. All five schools, the MIT Stephen A. Schwarzman College of Computing, and 90% of departments were represented, demonstrating broad and enthusiastic engagement by the Institute's research community. To facilitate collaborations and proposal development, we hosted 16 workshops in the fall with approximately 1,200 participants in attendance. In Phase II, based on the recommendations of a faculty review committee, 28 teams were invited and funded to develop comprehensive white papers due in September 2021.

The white papers will be evaluated during the fall/winter of 2021; based on the results of this process, a portfolio of flagship Climate Grand Challenge research projects will be selected. For these projects to be successful, strong partnerships will need to be built with other universities, companies, impact investors, entrepreneurs, governments, and nonprofits.

### **International Strategic Plan Implementation**

The Office of the Associate Provost published *A Global Strategy for MIT* in May 2017, which included recommendations for strengthening MIT's international engagement. Most of these recommendations have now been implemented. Two remaining core activities center around the Global Partnerships project—to promote and coordinate collaborations in China, Africa, and Latin America—and the Expand the Global Classroom project. As part of the Global Partnerships project, the MIT-Africa Distinguished Visitors Program was launched in spring 2021. The Global Classroom project is in a multi-year implementation phase. The new communications campaign and website will be developed by September 2021, and the other initiatives around lowering barriers to participation, improving global operations, and expanding programs will continue.

### **MIT Africa Distinguished Visitors Program**

The Office of the Associate Provost and the MIT Africa Faculty Steering Committee (led by Professors Gabriella Carolini and Elfatih Eltahir) will launch the MIT Africa Distinguished Visitors program in fall 2021. The program will bring African leaders in education, research, policy, business, innovation, and the arts to MIT to build new connections between the MIT research community and counterparts across the African continent. These visits will help strengthen the MIT-wide community of faculty, staff, and students whose work is motivated and informed by challenges, problems, and opportunities of particular significance to African societies.

In April 2021, the Office of the Associate Provost and the MIT Africa Faculty Steering Committee sponsored the online symposium *Movements and Change: Race and Justice across Africa Today* as part of a broader MIT program of action and engagement around the global movement to end racism.

### **MIT Indonesia Seed Fund**

The MIT Indonesia Seed Fund was established in fall 2019 with funding from the Indonesian government to support innovative projects between MIT and Indonesian researchers on important technological and socioeconomic issues relevant to Indonesia. All 40 joint MIT Indonesia seed projects have been completed this year. MIT and its Indonesian partner are exploring the possibility of developing a follow-on joint research program.

### **Communications and Website**

OAPIA launched a new Global MIT website in March 2021. A global support resources website will be launched in the fall of 2021 to help the MIT community plan and implement international activities.

### **Administrative Initiatives**

#### **Review Process for “Elevated-Risk” International Proposals**

In April 2019, the vice president for research and the associate provost for international activities announced a new review process for “elevated-risk” international proposals. This effort was launched to strengthen MIT’s internal processes for evaluating and structuring international engagements that may pose special risks to the Institute and that merit additional faculty and administrative review by the International Coordinating Committee, the International Advisory Committee, and the Senior Risk Group. For now, this includes all engagements with China, Russia, and Saudi Arabia. For the period covered by this report, 116 international projects and proposals were reviewed as part of the elevated-risk process, of which China/Hong Kong represented 77%, Saudi Arabia 19%, and Russia 4%.

#### **International People Placement**

International People Placement (IPP) is a central support mechanism for reviewing and facilitating the assignment of MIT employees internationally. It is coordinated and staffed by the OAPIA and includes a team of subject matter experts from Human Resources, the Office of the Vice President for Finance, the Office of the Vice President for Research, and the Office of the General Counsel. In fiscal year 2021, the volume of placement requests (historically about 50 per year) continued to increase in response to inquiries from the MIT community requesting to work abroad for an extended period of time due to Covid-19. The IPP team tracked and reviewed over 250 Covid-related requests through June 2021, including approximately 80 requests in January and February for faculty and staff to remain abroad after guidance from the provost that all employees should return to the United States by the beginning of the spring semester. The team coordinated closely with the assistant deans, provost, and the Deans Council to develop a review system for all exception requests and to communicate the resulting recommendations to departments, labs, and centers. This coming year, the team will continue to solicit input for and then finalize an updated IPP process and work to transfer administrative oversight of that process to another unit.

## **Personnel Information**

Professor John Ochsendorf was appointed as co-director of the International Design Center (IDC) for the final year of the IDC collaboration with the Singapore University of Technology and Design.

**Richard K. Lester**  
**Associate Provost**