

MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139

June 30, 2006

Prof. S. Hockfield, President
M. I. T.
Cambridge, MA 02139

Dear Professor Hockfield,

We write to you to express our deep concern about events surrounding the recruitment of Dr. Alla Karpova, a neurobiologist, as Assistant Professor in the Department of Biology. Several weeks ago MIT made a verbal offer of a faculty position to Dr. Karpova, a brilliant young scientist who already had offers from Max Planck and Cal Tech, among others, but whose top choice was MIT. Subsequently, she had a series of interactions with Prof. Susumu Tonegawa, who strongly opposed her recruitment. He apparently conveyed to her that if she did come to MIT, he would not interact, collaborate or mentor her, and that members of his research group would not collaborate with her. Most disturbing to us is that MIT faculty and administration were not able to assure Dr. Karpova that she was wanted and welcome at MIT. Instead, subsequent discussions with Dr. Karpova left her with the impression that nothing could be done about the behavior of Prof. Tonegawa and that it would be best for her and MIT that she not accept the position. Several senior MIT faculty members in Biology and Brain and Cognitive Sciences explicitly cautioned her not to come to MIT out of concern for her future, given Tonegawa's opposition to her appointment.

It is our collective and strongly held opinion that MIT has failed in this situation. We have allowed a senior faculty member with great power and financial resources to behave in an uncivil, uncollegial and possibly unethical manner toward a talented young scientist who deserves to be welcomed at MIT. We have acted as if this young woman were the problem, not Professor Tonegawa. We have damaged MIT's reputation as an institution that supports academic fairness for young faculty and jeopardized our ability to attract the best scientists to MIT. In many respects, we have failed to uphold basic standards of academic integrity.

The damage is great. Professor Tonegawa's behavior, and MIT's failure to put a stop to it, has appalled the neuroscience community. This situation is bound to hit the press soon, with further devastating effects for MIT. We urge you to take immediate action.

Most urgently, MIT should do everything in its power to reverse the harm done to Dr. Karpova. In our view, MIT should offer Dr. Karpova a formal apology, and proceed with a sincere, concerted effort, at the level of the President, to understand and rectify the events of the past several weeks. An overture to Dr. Karpova from you, as President of MIT, would be an important part of this process.

On a longer timescale, it is important that we repair the broader structural problems that led to this situation in the first place. The recruitment of Dr. Karpova is not an isolated instance where serious structural issues within the neuroscience community at MIT have interfered with faculty recruitment and provided a less-than-ideal climate for research and academic freedom. We suggest that an *ad hoc* committee, composed in part of members external to MIT, evaluate the administrative and organizational structures that led to this situation, and that such a committee be charged with recommending structural changes to protect MIT and its faculty from similar problems in the future.

In summary, we ask you to take immediate action on these two fronts. At stake are the career of a brilliant young scientist and the reputation of a great institution.

We are available to help in any way we can.

Sincerely,

Prof. Leigh Royden
Chair, Advisory Committee to
Dean Silbey on issues pertaining
to hiring of women faculty

Prof. Paola Rizzoli
Chair, Gender Equity Committee,
School of Science

Prof. Nancy Kanwisher
Advisory Committee to
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Prof. Barbara Liskov
Chair, Gender Equity Committee,
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Prof. Joanne Stubbe
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Prof. Sally Haslanger
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Prof. Maria Zuber
Head, Department of Earth,
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Prof. Terry Knight
Chair, Gender Equity Committee,
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Prof. Nancy Hopkins
Co-Chair of the Council
on Faculty Diversity

Prof. JoAnne Yates
Chair, Gender Equity Committee,
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Prof. Lotte Bailyn
Professor of Management