

Open Letter to MIT Faculty [Reprinted from the Website of *The Tech*]

Feb. 10, 2007

Dear Colleagues and MIT Faculty at Large:

Many of you are aware that I am currently engaged in a hunger strike to end racism in minority tenure promotions at MIT. The strike started on Monday, February 5, 2007. Based on my home scale, I have lost about 14 lbs in the past week. I wish to express my sincere thanks to those of you who have joined me in my effort to make MIT a better place and to move MIT to lead in redressing racism in the academy.

I plan to continue my hunger strike until MIT's upper administration admits that racism is a major factor in the negative tenure decision and that a corrupt investigation process ensued. I demand three specific concessions when this fact is acknowledged.

1. That tenure is granted immediately.
2. That MIT actually start a verifiable process to detect and redress racism in treatment and tenure promotion of minority faculty. The recent announcement from President Susan Hockfield (e-mailed February 2, 2007) does not even contain the word "racism."
3. That Provost Rafael Reif is censured because of his actions to obstruct me from obtaining a fair and diligent investigation of my complaint that because of racist institutional policies, the racism and improper handling of my case by the chair of Biological Engineering (BE), Douglas Lauffenburger, and improper actions by a member of the MIT Corporation, Susan Whitehead, I received a negative tenure decision.

I recognize that many faculty are uneasy with the demand for immediate tenure even if my charges are shown to be true. But there is nothing less to be done when my charges are shown to be true. There are precedents at MIT for overturning negative tenure decisions when the process is found to be corrupt. Even if my case were the weakest ever, the Institute must safeguard against the erosion of institutional integrity that comes from corrupt process. We all recognize that even strong cases often do not receive the grant of tenure at MIT; but this cannot be permitted to occur for reasons of discrimination that are outlawed in the greater society. I am not outraged that my tenure case was not advanced just because I think it was strong enough for tenure. I am outraged because of the racial discrimination and corrupt process that operated during its decision and the subsequent investigation of the process that led to that decision.

If a process shows that I am correct in my charges that led to my current hunger strike, then MIT must tenure me to provide a clear and lasting admission that racism and corrupt process were responsible, and they will not be tolerated at MIT. Only with repair of the provoking damage can there be a sound foundation for beginning effective change to end racism at MIT in minority tenure treatment and promotion. The cynical among you may advance that I have a personal motivation for this demand. But I ask you, who but the injured will bring forth a complaint of racism? And who among you would subject herself or himself to a hunger strike over something like tenure? This strike is about redressing a problem that is much bigger, racism. Racism in America harms us all. It prevents us from a society based on the ideals of freedom, opportunity, and justice for all; and it makes us destroy and waste valuable human resources. Where better but in the academy for a new movement to begin to continue the efforts that were begun during the civil rights era to end racism in America.

It occurred to me that it might bring comfort to some of you that, if you embrace this view of overturn of negative tenure decisions, you would not open MIT up to accepting a poor tenure case. Doing this succinctly is a bit of challenge, but I will give you some examples of external evidence that my tenure case, with the features that resulted from improper process removed, is of sufficient quality for tenure at MIT.

1. At the time of my tenure case review, I had national recognition in the form of an Ellison Medical Foundation Senior Scholar Award in Aging Research. I am one of 5 professors at MIT who are recipients of this award. The other scholars are Professors Robert Weinberg, Leonard Guarente, Susan Linquist, and Robert Horvitz, all tenured professors.

<http://www.ellisonfoundation.org/awrds.jsp?program=aging&type=senior&year=2003&show=100>

2. Since the negative decision, I received the NIH Director's Pioneer Award. I am one of two recipients at MIT of this \$2.5 million award for innovative research. The other recipient, Professor Arup Chakraborty, is a tenured professor, as are many, if in fact not all, of the other recipients.

<http://nihroadmap.nih.gov/pioneer/Recipients06.asp>

X3. At the time of the negative decision, my research program had and continues to have a growing international presence. This is indicated by invitations to participate in international conferences and scholarly undertakings. See examples at the end of this letter.

Finally, on the issue of the quality of my tenure case, I recognize that there is confusion about this statement from the provost's January 29 e-mailed "Message to the Faculty."

"As a result, I may not disclose or discuss the substance of the deliberations of Professor Sherley's tenure case. However, I will note that three important faculty reviews occurred between January 2005, when Professor Sherley was notified of the decision not to advance his tenure case, and December 2006, when I notified Professor Sherley that I am not going to overturn the tenure decision:"

The "three important faculty reviews" is a misstatement on the part of the provost. First, there were no faculty reviews of the tenure case other than that which was the basis for the complaint. The first proceeding was an inquiry conducted by a single faculty member to provide facts to Provost Robert Brown for his evaluation of my request for a grievance to investigate my complaint that racism, improper procedures, and a conflict of interest resulted in a negative tenure decision. The second proceeding was a grievance in which a 3-faculty member committee was charged to investigate the same charges to provide Provost Reif facts for his adjudication of my complaint. The third proceeding was a second grievance, on appeal to President Hockfield, with the same committee of 3 faculty. Although the appeal was partly based on the lack of diligence on the part of that committee, the provost insisted on retaining the same faculty members, despite my protest.

During the grievance investigation, I requested that the committee be disbanded, because, again, their investigation lacked diligence. The provost again refused to replace them. Conflicts of interest also abounded on the committee. One committee member had a potential conflict of interest due to his relationship with one of the subjects of the investigation, but the provost ignored this concern. Also, the provost appointed the chair of the committee as chair of the MIT faculty during the investigation, ignoring how such an appointment would compromise the work of the committee.

So, all should be clear now, that my tenure case has only been reviewed by a group of MIT faculty once, for less than an hour after the BE faculty had already advised Douglas Lauffenburger to advance two other faculty member's cases for tenure. They did this without a committee to assemble my case and select referees, conduct an in-depth look at its merits, and present it to the rest of the faculty. They did this after Lauffenburger had allowed them only one week to review the case in his office. He told them what to do, and they did it. They enabled MIT's racist policies that discriminated against me when I started at MIT, and they enabled the racist practices and improper actions of Douglas Lauffenburger that enabled him to achieve a negative decision. Surely, when my charges are shown to be true, the MIT faculty can endorse that the corrupt negative decision must be overturned with all speed. Such a just action will not injure the sanctity of tenure at MIT. Instead, it will preserve it, and at the same time move MIT closer to the ideals that we hold for it.

Sincerely,
James Sherley

Evidence for International Presence of the Sherley Research Program (from current faculty personnel report)

6c. Invited Lectures: INTERNATIONAL, ACADEMIC (Bold Date = Meeting Plenary Lecture)

September 2003, "Mechanisms of Genetic Fidelity in Adult Stem Cells," Department of BioTechnology (DIBIT), Istituto Scientifico San Raffaele, , Milano, Italy

May 2004, "Investigations of the Molecular Basis for Immortal DNA Strand Inheritance in Cultured Mammalian Cells," Mammary Stem Cell Workshop, The London Institute, London, United Kingdom

May 2004, "A Carpenter's Rule of Genetic Fidelity in Adult Stem Cells," Mammary Gland Biology Gordon Conference, Lucca, Italy

September 2004, "Asymmetric Cell Kinetics: The Mark of the Adult Stem Cell," Symposium in Stem Cell Repair and Regeneration, Imperial College London, London, UK

October 2004, "Investigation of the Molecular Basis of Immortal DNA Strand Segregation," Stem Cells & Telomerase: Targets for Transformation & Therapeutic Applications, Antalya, Cyprus, (presented by Graduate Student, Janice Lansita)

May 2005, "Non-random Chromosome Segregation Associated with Adult Stem Cell Kinetics," Alan Wolffe EMBO Conferences on Chromatin and Epigenetics, Heidelberg, Germany

May 2005, "Towards Methods for Routine Ex Vivo Expansion of Human Hematopoietic Stem Cells," Dept. of Medicine, University of Heidelberg, Heidelberg, Germany

May 2005, "Why Deterministic Asymmetric Cell Kinetics?" Stem Cell Math Lab 2nd International Workshop, Leipzig, Germany

October, 2005, Keynote Speaker for "Molecular Mechanisms Influencing Stem Cell Behavior," "A Suppression of Asymmetric Cell Kinetics (SACK) Technology for Selective Expansion of Post-Natal ("Adult") Stem Cells" Canadian Chemical Engineering Conference, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

September, 2006, "Validating Stem Cell Technologies," Federation of Catholic Medical Associations, Congress on "Stem Cells: What Future for Therapy," Vatican City, Rome, Italy

October 2006, "Cloning and Human Embryonic Stem Cells: What We Are Not Being Told," University of South Wales, Canberra, Australia Capital Territory, Australia

October 2006, "Cloning and Human Embryonic Stem Cells: What We Are Not Being Told," New South Wales State Library, Canberra, Australia Capital Territory, Australia

October 2006, "Cloning and Human Embryonic Stem Cells: What We Are Not Being Told," University of Melbourne, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

January 2007, "Biotechnology: Scientific and Ethical Considerations on Cloning, Genetic Engineering, Nanotechnology, and Stem Cell Research," The 2007 International Conference on Bioethics and the Family, Mandaluyong City, Philippines

International Scholarly Work - Book Chapters

Sherley, J. L., "Asymmetric Self-Renewal: The Mark of the Adult Stem Cell," in Stem Cell Repair and Regeneration, N. A. Habib, M. Y. Gordon, N. Levicar, L. Jiao, & G. Thomas-Black, eds. Imperial College Press (London) pp. 21-28, 2005.

Sherley, J.L. "Mechanisms of Genetic Fidelity in Mammalian Adult Stem Cells," in Tissue Stem Cells, eds. C. S. Potten, R. B. Clarke, J. Wilson, and A. G. Renehan, Taylor Francis (New York) pp. 37-54 (2006).