Actions being taken regarding the encampment

May 6, 2024

Sally Kornbluth, President

Dear members of the MIT community,

The war in the Middle East continues to cause anguish and conflict here at MIT. Some have expressed their views through the encampment on the Kresge lawn. My team and I, as well as many faculty members, have engaged in extensive conversation with these students and have not interfered as they have continued their protest. However, given developments over the past several days, I must now take action to bring closure to a situation that has disrupted our campus for more than two weeks.

My sense of urgency comes from an increasing concern for the safety of our community. I know many of you feel strongly that the encampment should be allowed to continue indefinitely – that the protest is simply a peaceful exercise of the right to free expression, and that normal rules around campus conduct shouldn’t apply in the face of such tragic loss of life in Gaza.

But I am responsible for this community. Without our 24-hour staffing, students sleeping outside overnight in tents would be vulnerable. And no matter how peaceful the students’ behavior may be, unilaterally taking over a central portion of our campus for one side of a hotly disputed issue and precluding use by other members of our community is not right. This situation is inherently highly unstable.

What’s more, the threat of outside interference and potential violence is not theoretical; it is real: We have all seen circumstances around encampments at some peer institutions degenerate into chaos. As recently as this weekend, we were presented with firm evidence of outside interference on US campuses, including widely disseminated literature that advocates escalation, with very clear instructions and suggested means, including vandalism.

Our own campus has seen a variety of actions involving people from outside MIT, including a series of rallies organized by people who have no MIT affiliation. An outside group is planning another campus disruption here this afternoon.

Many of you have sent me messages noting that the two large rallies – which brought many people from outside MIT to campus last Friday and shut down Massachusetts Avenue – occurred peacefully. But this apparent equilibrium required extraordinary preparation and enormous effort by hundreds of staff, faculty, and police, including, as the rallies were winding down, expert work by MIT Police to defuse several tense confrontations.

In short, this prolonged use of MIT property as a venue for protest, without permission, especially on an issue with such sharp disagreement, is no longer safely sustainable. I note that the faculty-led Committee on Academic Freedom and Campus Expression (CAFCE) recently concluded

We have directed students to leave the encampment peacefully by 2:30 p.m. today. We’ve provided them with a letter from Chancellor Nobles that gives as much clarity as possible about the choices they have, and the pathways associated with each of these choices. You can read this information below my signature.

I hoped these measures could be avoided through our efforts to engage the students in serious good-faith discussion. But recent events, and my responsibility to ensure the physical safety of our community, oblige us to act now.

MIT can and should continue to be a place where we can discuss and seek to address contentious issues. But we are also a community of doers—of people with the skills and drive to make the world better. And no matter our political beliefs or our position on this war, we can all recognize the immense suffering unfolding in Gaza. I believe our best contribution would be to focus our collective efforts on projects that bring MIT’s expertise to bear on the humanitarian crisis in the region. I’ve begun discussing this idea with faculty leaders.

Sincerely,

Sally Kornbluth

Excerpt from Chancellor Melissa Nobles' letter to students involved in the encampment

“Our goal is to bring the encampment to a peaceful end. Below are the choices you have:
I. For those who leave the encampment voluntarily by 2:30 pm:

1. If you have not been sanctioned by the COD [Committee on Discipline] and do not have any pending COD cases related to events since October 7, and you have not contributed significantly as a leader or organizer of the encampment, this letter serves as a written warning. You must swipe your ID as you leave the encampment, and the written warning, together with the time stamp from your exit swipe showing you departed by 2:30 pm, will be kept on file with MIT. A written warning means you are on notice that any further violation of MIT policies and rules could lead to a more severe sanction. The written warning will be the only disciplinary action for participating in the encampment.

2. If you have been sanctioned by the COD or have a pending COD case related to events since October 7, or have contributed significantly as a leader or organizer of the encampment, you will be referred to the COD, but your voluntary departure from the encampment by 2:30 pm today will be a significant mitigating factor when the COD reviews your case. You must swipe your ID as you leave the encampment, and we will keep on file the time stamp from your exit swipe showing you departed by 2:30 pm.

II. For those who do not leave the encampment voluntarily by 2:30 pm:

1. If you have not been sanctioned by the COD and do not have any pending COD cases related to events since October 7, but choose to stay in the encampment past the deadline, you will be placed on an immediate interim academic suspension lasting at least through Institute commencement activities, and you will be referred to the COD. This means you will be prohibited from participating in any academic activities – including classes, exams, or research – for the remainder of the semester. You will also be prohibited from participating in commencement activities or any co-curricular activities. During the period of your interim academic suspension, you will be permitted to reside in your assigned residence hall through the end of the semester, use your meal plan at MIT dining halls, and utilize services at MIT Health. Continued additional protests or disruptions that are not authorized will be considered an aggravating factor in the COD review of your case.

2. If you either have been sanctioned by the COD or have a pending COD case related to events since October 7, but choose to stay in the encampment past the deadline, you will be placed on an immediate interim full suspension lasting at least through Institute commencement activities, and you will be referred to the COD. This means you will be prohibited from participating in any academic activities – including classes, exams, or research – for the remainder of the semester. You will also be prohibited from participating in commencement activities or any co-curricular activities. You will also not be permitted to reside in your assigned residence hall or use MIT dining halls. You must leave campus immediately, but you will continue to have access to services at MIT Health. Continued additional protests or disruptions that are not authorized will be considered an aggravating factor in the COD review of your case.