

Letter from the Director, Fall 2014

To the MIT Community:

The Office of Sustainability is working to leverage the collective intelligence of the MIT community and our peers in order to explore how best to position the campus as a testing ground and model for solutions that address the unprecedented challenges of a changing planet. The intent is both to advance the practice of sustainability within our campus systems *and* to make these solutions accessible and scalable to institutions and communities across the world that face similar sustainability-related challenges. Examples of these challenges range from: how to track and assess the impact of the materials we use every day in our operations to how to enhance our relationship to the river that runs along our urban campus.

By no means is MIT starting from scratch in this endeavor. The Office of Sustainability serves as a vital connector-of-dots, helping to align related projects, initiatives, and departments, many of which have been working at the cutting edge of these issues for years. Our Office is poised to ask a new set of campus-wide questions that are meant to inspire and transform how MIT makes decisions on a daily basis – decisions that have critical short- and long-term implications for the health of people and the environment. The foundation for this work stems from the MIT ethos: “to advance knowledge and bring this knowledge to bear on the world’s great challenges.”

As a way to connect the dots and begin transforming how we make decisions on campus, [the Office of Sustainability has launched a series of working groups](#) this fall made up of staff from across the Institute and supported by faculty and student input and research. Throughout the academic year, we will be working closely with these groups to analyze current practices related to campus:

- Building design and construction;
- Stormwater and Land Management;
- Green Labs; and
- Materials and Waste Management.

After revisiting current conditions, we will explore how our peer institutions, the private sector, and leading cities are applying sustainable standards in each of these areas. Then we will develop and propose a set of recommendations to the Institute.

In these working group sessions, we are challenging our colleagues to “make the familiar strange” long enough to view the existing systems of our campus with a fresh set of eyes and to begin to reimagine more sustainable and innovative approaches. We

are asking our colleagues to reexamine how we make everyday decisions related to energy, water, land, food, air, buildings and transportation, and to identify a new set of desired outcomes. Some of the strategies that emerge during this process may come from proven case examples from peer institutions, while others may be the result of a slight tweak to a standard practice that colleagues develop around the table.

Throughout the duration of the working groups, the Office of Sustainability will not prescribe a set of solutions or “best practices,” but will facilitate a process that brings new knowledge and ideas to bear.

As the year progresses, we look forward to providing an update on the working groups’ findings and recommendations in early 2015.

Sincerely,

Julie Newman, Ph.D.
Director of Sustainability
October 2014