September 2012

Dear MIT Graduate,

More than 30 years ago, I came to MIT as a new faculty member. I was full of hope for the future, thrilled at the opportunity to work with such brilliant faculty and students, and coming from Venezuela, a bit worried about the snow. With MIT’s commitment to meritocracy, integrity, and excellence and with its instinct always to take the high road and do what’s right, the Institute was like no place I had ever seen before. I quickly came to feel that MIT was my home. I even got used to the snow.

Today, I am still growing accustomed to the idea that I have been asked to lead the people of MIT. In field after field, they simply lead the world, and it is humbling to hear our faculty and students talk about their work and their ambitions. After seven years as provost, with primary responsibility for managing the MIT budget, I can tell you that their ability to act on their boldest, most pioneering ideas depends in no small part on the generosity of our alumni, parents, and friends and particularly on the unrestricted funds that give us the nimbleness to support new work.

The flexibility to support bold ideas

For example, the earliest projects that led to MITx — the Institute’s groundbreaking online learning initiative — sprang to life because MIT was able to fund them when they were too small and experimental to secure outside grants. Today, it is already clear that MITx will enrich the campus learning experience for our own students, reach a community of learners worldwide, and help us learn about learning itself.

Foundational support for our brilliant faculty

Your generosity also provides the consistent foundation of support that allows our faculty to achieve consistent standards of excellence. For example:

• Professor Hugh Herr, director of the Media Lab’s Biomechatronics Group, is developing artificial limbs so advanced that they may one day offer amputees a mechanical advantage over standard human limbs.

• Thanks to the leadership of Maria Zuber, professor of geophysics and planetary science and first woman ever to head a planetary spacecraft mission, twin NASA spacecraft currently orbiting the Moon have discovered evidence of ice, challenging widespread assumptions about lunar history.

• Sloan Professor Andrew Lo, named one of Time’s most influential people this year for his contributions to financial engineering, is engaging in new research that uses artificial intelligence tools to explore how individuals make financial decisions.

Helping our students thrive

With faculty dedicated to such intriguing work, it is no surprise that MIT continues to attract remarkably able and passionate students. For instance, two undergraduates won Truman Scholarships this year, in part because of their commitment to applying new knowledge to important real-world problems. After working on youth empowerment projects in the United States, Jamaica, and Mexico, brain and cognitive
sciences major Victoria Temitope Okuneye ’13 now hopes to become a physician-scientist to improve mental health services for disadvantaged youth. With a double major in nuclear engineering and physics, Cameron McCord ’13 has already worked at the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, on his way to a career in nuclear energy safety and nuclear nonproliferation.

Our graduate students are equally remarkable; this year, for instance, three of the world’s top seven doctoral graduates in economics hailed from MIT. Gabriel Carroll PhD ’12 studies the use of strategic incentives, Melissa Dell PhD ’12 examines the Mexican drug trade, and Nathaniel Hendren PhD ’12 analyzes the role of information in insurance markets.

In helping such young people reach their fullest potential, your gifts to the annual fund truly touch the future.

MIT has much important work ahead of it, and thanks to your generosity, we can think and act with the creative freedom the times demand. As I begin my first academic year as president, it gives me great confidence to know that we can count on the generous support and encouragement of so many alumni, parents, and friends around the world.

Sincerely,

L. Rafael Reif

LRR/dtp
Enclosures