

ANNUAL REPORT 2016-2017



Exploring ethics at the center
of science and technology

Dear friends,

"We have a problem with empathy," Sherry Turkle warned us in her presentation for our Hack Your Mind series this past April. Turkle is the Abby Rockefeller Mauzé Professor of the Social Studies of Science and Technology at MIT, and is known for her studies of the effects of technology on human psychology and social behavior. She cited Sara Konrath's 2010 finding that college students exhibit 40 percent less empathy than their counterparts of 20 to 30 years ago, as measured by standard tests of this personality trait. To explain this change, Turkle points to the rise of social media in the 2000s, which allowed people to choose instant entertainment and constant feedback over the work of creating authentic in-person relationships.

Turkle exhorted us to reverse this trend by learning to talk to one another again. She said: "There is no app for building empathy. We are the app. There is no substitute for the patience and openness it takes to have a real conversation with a real person."

In a world full of online courses and TED talks, we find that people still crave the learning that happens in conversations. Students thrive in our decision-making workshops and our ethics seminar because we create a safe space for them to hear one another and to be heard. This year we saw hundreds of people come out for day-long conferences on activism, public transportation, and nuclear disarmament. These engaged participants don't want to stay home and absorb information from their screens; they want to be in conversation, developing strategies with their fellow citizens and expert guides.

A good conversation can't be predicted or replicated; it is the unique creation of the people who gather in a particular place at a particular time to consider a problem together. Our programs come fully alive when we open the floor to the audience members, who shape the discussion with their surprising and insightful questions. While we gladly make audio and video available for those who can't attend on campus, there is really nothing like showing up.

If you attended a Radius program this year, thank you for the gift of your presence. Your ideas and insights helped create a unique and meaningful experience. If you can come to campus but haven't made it recently, we invite you to join us soon; maybe there will be a discussion this fall that is stronger because of your voice. And if you support us from afar, we offer both our deep gratitude and our hope that you are bringing the Radius spirit to conversations in the community you call home.

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Massachusetts Institute of Technology

WHAT WE LEARNED THIS YEAR:

RADIUS PROGRAMS 2016-2017

REFLECTION IS THE FOUNDATION OF AN ETHICAL LIFE

In October we hosted Sarah Moore, who led students through a thoughtful process for **Decision-Making from the Soul**. This year's **undergraduate ethics seminar** had 14 enrolled students and a number of listeners who were engaged, curious, open-minded, and open-hearted. We hosted eminent guests to discuss topics that included climate change, the future of employment and work, bias in news reporting, racism, and the role of anger in activism. All of our guests encouraged the students to ask difficult questions and give voice to their conclusions. Special thanks to Alex Prescott-Couch (MIT Philosophy) who co-taught the class.

"Very interesting topics and presenters...I also really, really enjoyed the requirement to attend campus events and write on them. It was a good source of motivation for me to make sure I was engaged with what was happening on campus."

FOR SAFETY, CREATIVITY AND CONNECTION, PUT AWAY YOUR PHONE

In our ongoing **Hack Your Mind** series on technology and mindfulness, Earl Miller (MIT Brain and Cognitive Sciences) unpacked the **myth of multi-tasking** and vividly illustrated the dangers of talking or texting while driving. Elizabeth Wood (MIT History) and Robert Plotkin '93 (host of the **Technology for Mindfulness** podcast) taught a more deliberate approach to email and smartphones in order to **protect time for thoughtful and creative work**. Peter Grossenbacher (Naropa University) led a workshop in the use of mindfulness as a foundation for **conversations across differences** in identity or opinion, and Sherry Turkle (MIT Science, Technology and Society) described the ways that online social interaction can undermine our capacity **for solitude, empathy, and real-world relationships**.

LOOK CAREFULLY AT THE FORCES BEHIND STABILITY AND INSTABILITY

Through our continued partnership with the **Emile Bustani Middle East Seminar**, we sponsored talks by David Commins (Dickinson University) on Saudi Arabia's use of sectarian anti-Shiite narratives to counter Iran's influence abroad and suppress dissent at home; by Marc Lynch (George Washington University) on the destabilizing influence of regional and global powers in the Middle East; and by Nadim Shehadi (Fletcher School, Tufts University) on the surprising stability of the supposedly failed state of Lebanon.

For more information about all of our programs, check out the program archive and blog at our website: radius.mit.edu

A GLOBAL THREAT REQUIRES A GLOBAL COALITION

This year we supported a series of programs with **Nuclear Weapons Matter**, a student group led by Luisa Kenausis and Jake Hecla, including a screening and discussion of *Dr. Strangelove*; an introduction for students to the theory and strategy of nuclear weapons and nuclear disarmament; several lunch discussions; and an October conversation with MIT Professors Scott Kemp, Kerry Emanuel, and Jim Walsh about the presidential candidates' positions on nuclear arms and climate change. Also, in March, in partnership with the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), we hosted Dr. Reiner Braun, Co-President of the International Peace Bureau, who shared his experience **combating right-wing nationalism and nuclear proliferation** in Europe. In May, we joined with Mass Peace Action, the AFSC, and the Future for Life Institute to offer a comprehensive day-long program on **Reducing the Threat of Nuclear War**. This conference drew more than 200 attendees and an impressive line-up of speakers, including Ernest J. Moniz (MIT Physics and former US Secretary of Energy) and US Representative Barbara Lee. Kudos and thanks to Jonathan King who worked long and hard on this substantive conference!

THE BENEFITS AND COSTS OF SCIENTIFIC ADVANCES SHOULD BE SHARED BY ALL

With the MIT Communications Forum, we co-sponsored a talk by Janelle Bouie (*Slate*) on **strategies for journalists to report fairly on racial issues in politics** without creating a platform for hate groups, and a discussion with Sarah Ballard (MIT Kavli Institute for Astrophysics and Space Research), Ahseen Ghorayshi (Buzzfeed), and Evelyn Hammonds (Harvard University) about **sexual harassment and the struggle for gender equity** in scientific fields.

We also encouraged students to reflect on the influence of media and the roles of gender and cultural differences in education through discussions of the **Central Square Theater's** productions of *The Return to Morality* and *Paradise*.

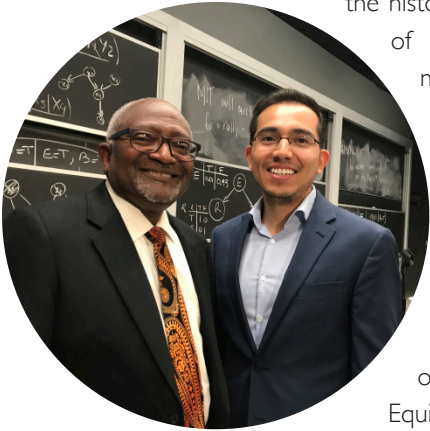
Ehsan Zaffar (George Washington University and *Stand With Me*) hosted a conversation about the **disproportionate effect of security technologies and policies** on Muslim Americans and other minorities.



Luisa Kenausis, right, with (left to right) Scott Kemp, Kerry Emanuel, and Jim Walsh at October's Nuclear Weapons Matter event

ENGAGE THE COMMUNITIES MOST AFFECTED BY ENVIRONMENTAL HARM

As co-sponsors of the **Forum on Racial and Environmental Equity**, we hosted Robert Bullard from Texas Southern University (left, with Josué Lopez, G) who explored the history and fundamental principles of the environmental justice movement; and Alexie Torres-Fleming (Access Strategies Fund), who presented a striking case study of environmental justice work in the South Bronx.



Our partners for the Forum on Racial and Environmental Equity are Fossil Free MIT, the Black Graduate Student Association (BGSA), the Black Students' Union (BSU), the Environmental Policy and Planning Group (DUSP), the Latino Cultural Center (LCC), MIT Philosophy, and the Institute Community and Equity Office (ICEO).

A TRIBUTE TO AL WILSON '38

Al Wilson '38, our good friend and loyal and generous supporter, passed away on December 24, 2016. We will miss Al for so many reasons, not least for his mischievous and playful sense of humor and his deep and abiding commitment to bringing ethics to the fore at MIT. In a letter from March 2000, Al wrote, "Without a strong moral and ethical foundation, all that we do is incomplete." When Al discussed the creation of an endowment to the Technology and Culture Forum (now Radius at MIT) in the Fall 2003 issue of the MIT publication *Spectrum*, he expressed a wish that people would set aside time to ask, "Why am I here? What's the purpose of my life?"

Al's support of Radius was part of his larger commitment to moral leadership. He believed that leaders must put the interests of others first, living with honesty, integrity, and love. "Character," he said, "is crucial... Integrity is a quality that is diminishing in our lives and culture as we get so busy we don't have time to reflect on it. But technology can be dangerous without an ethical foundation... If you live your life to make the world better for others, you will have a better life yourself." Amen to that.

Al, thank you for all you did to make the world a better place.



photo by Susan Wilson Photography

GOOD INFORMATION INSPIRES ACTION

We partnered with the MIT Vice President for Research and a team of concerned faculty and students to present a forum in November on the **role of universities in responding to climate change**. In May, the 11th Annual **Youth Summit on Climate and Sustainability** with the Boston Latin School's Youth Climate Action Network gathered over 225 young people from around New England for workshops on climate science and strategies for activism.

In December, Michael Dukakis (Northeastern University, former Governor of MA) and Fred Salvucci (MIT Civil and Environmental Engineering, former Secretary of Transportation of MA) gave the keynote addresses at **Subways Not Submarines**, a day of substantive conversations about social and environmental benefits of public transportation and strategies for reviving transportation policy and funding. Under Jonathan King's leadership, this event drew over 300 participants.

We hosted a breakfast and gathering place for MIT community members before they set out for the **Stand Up for Science Rally** in Boston in February, and in April we joined a wide coalition of MIT departments, centers, and organizations to offer the **MIT Day of Action**, a well-attended program with over 60 workshops designed to educate and inspire action on the pressing issues of our times.

BUILDING COMMUNITY AWARD

This spring Patricia-Maria Weinmann received a **Building Community Award** from MIT's Division of Student Life. This award affirms Trish's commitment to helping students reflect on their ethical choices by organizing programs, co-teaching our undergraduate ethics seminar, and mentoring student activists.

One nominator observed, "Trish's special magic is helping people see their own value, to identify what's important to them, and to stay focused on that."



Congratulations, Trish!

Trish, left, with Sid Pai, G and Keely Swan, PKG Public Service Center, at the Scale-Up Development Venture conference in April



STEERING COMMITTEE & STAFF

STEERING COMMITTEE 2016-2017

Samuel M. Allen, *Materials Science and Engineering*
 Nazli Choucri, *Political Science*
 Leo deCastro, '18
 Sally Haslanger, *Linguistics and Philosophy*
 Alison Hynd, *Public Service Center*
 Henry Jacoby, *Sloan School of Management*
 Jay Keyser, Emeritus, *Linguistics and Philosophy*
 Jonathan King, *Biology*
 William R. Leitch, '56
 Ruth Perry, *Literature*
 Robert Plotkin, '93
 Balakrishnan Rajagopal, *Urban Studies and Planning*
 Bishwapriya Sanyal, *Urban Studies and Planning*

STAFF

The Rev. Thea Keith-Lucas, *Coordinator*
 Patricia-Maria Weinmann, *Associate Coordinator*
 Christina English, *Communications Coordinator*

RADIUS SUPPORTERS

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 Albert Wilson

Visionaries

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 John Suhrbier
 Jay W. Forrester
 Campbell Searle

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 Linda Anthony
 Harold Clark
 Alan Davidson
 Jeremy Johnson
 Jay Keyser
 Tracy Lively
 Richard Mobley
 Jeanne Paradise
 Robert Plotkin

Sustainers

Aron Bernstein
 Nazli Choucri
 Subrata Ghoshroy
 Willard Johnson
 Bishwapriya Sanyal
 Merritt Roe Smith
 Brigitte and Stephen Steadman
 Leon Trilling
 Kristen and Christopher Wendell

Special thanks to Bill Leitch, Cam Searle and the rest of our loyal donors and friends for their generous support.



Jay W. Forrester, a decades-long supporter of the Technology and Culture Forum (Radius), professor emeritus in the MIT Sloan School of Management, founder of the field of system dynamics, and a pioneer of digital computing, died on November 16, 2016. We are honored to have counted Professor Forrester among our loyal friends.

A full house at the 11th Annual Youth Summit on Climate Change

