

As a Boston Globe subscriber, you enjoy exclusive benefits, including events, offers, and contests. Check out the latest now.

TEXT SIZE | MANAGE ACCOUNT | LOG OUT

The Boston Globe

NEWS ▶	METRO
LOTTERY ▶	OBITUARIES ▶
GLOBE NORTH ▶	GLOBE SOUTH ▶
GLOBE WEST ▶	DATA DESK ▶
MAGAZINE ▶	INSIDERS ▶
TODAY'S PAPER ▶	

MIT mourns student found dead in dorm room

By **Matt Rocheleau**

| GLOBE CORRESPONDENT SEPTEMBER 25, 2014



4 COMMENTS

CAMBRIDGE — The MIT campus remembered Phoebe Wang Wednesday for her quirky sense of humor, her passion for music, and her curiosity.

Wang, a sophomore from Pennsylvania who was studying mechanical engineering, was found dead Tuesday in her Memorial Drive dormitory, say campus officials and Cambridge police.

“It breaks my heart to tell you,” L. Rafael Reif, president of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, said in an e-mail alerting the college community to the sad news.

Authorities did not release details, but said Wang’s death was not being treated as a criminal matter.

The death, coming so soon after the body of MIT graduate

student Austin Travis was found in his Forest Street apartment on Sept. 3, stirred anguish on the Cambridge campus. The cause remains under investigation.

The two cases have revived concerns at a school that has taken steps to bolster mental health services in past years, after students took their own lives.

“The death of a young person is always a shock, and in recent months we have lost too many of our cherished students and dear friends,” Reif wrote Wednesday. “I encourage you to take time to reach out to those around you. A sense of connection, kindness, and sympathy can make even the most difficult situations a little easier to bear.”

Since March, four other members of the MIT community, three graduate students and a professor, have died. One of the graduate student deaths was ruled an accident. The three other cases have been ruled suicides, according to authorities and news reports.

Mental health problems and suicides are not unique to MIT, though it is known to have one of the nation’s most comprehensive counseling programs.

Some of MIT’s improvements were made after a series of suicides, including that of Elizabeth Shin in 2000, whose death prompted her parents to sue MIT, saying the university did not do enough to protect her. The lawsuit was settled for an undisclosed sum in 2006.

A Globe investigation in 2001 found that the university had a higher suicide rate than peer institutions: 10.2 per 100,000 students. The national average was 7.5.

MIT officials have said those figures failed to account for several factors, including that the school enrolled a large percentage of males and engineering majors during that time frame, two groups that researchers say are more at risk for suicide.

In fall 2011, after two 18-year-old undergraduates committed suicide within the first two months of school, MIT formed a task force to examine all aspects of student life, from mental health services to living arrangements.

The school has also increased the availability of therapists and done more outreach, including screening for depression and suicide risk.

MIT officials did not respond Wednesday to questions about what the 2011 task force found and what changes were made as a result. The college did not provide updated figures about its suicide rate.

Students interviewed said MIT and other top colleges can be particularly stressful environments because of the

concentration of high-achieving students, demanding faculty, and rigorous coursework.

José Linares, a junior studying mechanical engineering, and other students said classmates often try to help one another, instead of being overly competitive. And students said MIT administrators, faculty, and staff are proactive about helping students manage stress and mental health.

“That’s why it’s even more saddening when incidents do happen,” said Ashwin Raghavan, 25, who earned a master’s in mechanical engineering at MIT and is studying for a doctorate, “because there are so many measures in place here to deal with it.”

John R. Ellement of the globe staff contributed to this report. Matt Rocheleau can be reached at matthew.rocheleau@globe.com.



SHOW 4 COMMENTS

Trending Articles

MOST VIEWED

MOST COMMENTED

MOST SHARED

1 Thomas M. Menino, Boston’s longest serving mayor...

2 Brittany Maynard’s dilemma: choosing the right ti...

3 High school scoreboard

4 [Charlie Baker acknowledges he flubbed fisherman's...](#)

5 [Vote all you want. The secret government won't cha...](#)

6 [Why do people earn what they earn?](#)

Learn more

7 [Legal Sea Foods to close Prudential Center restaura...](#)

[SUBSCRIBE](#) [BOSTON GLOBE INSIDERS](#) [EPAPER EDITION](#) [NEWS IN EDUCATION](#)

8 [That letter to the future in golden lion time capsule...](#)

[MY ACCOUNT](#)

[LOGOUT](#)

9 [Yes on Question 3: Pull the plug on flawed casino law](#)

[MY SAVED LIST](#)

[MANAGE HOME DELIVERY](#)

10 [Baker says he may have gotten some details of fishe...](#)

[MANAGE ON-PAPER](#)

[CONTACT](#)

[HELP](#)

[FAQS](#)

[GLOBE NEWSROOM](#)

[ADVERTISE](#)

SOCIAL

[FACEBOOK](#)

[TWITTER](#)

[GOOGLE+](#)

MORE

[ARCHIVES](#)

[PRIVACY POLICY](#)

[TERMS OF SERVICE](#)

[TERMS OF PURCHASE](#)

[YOUR AD CHOICES](#)

[DIGITAL JOBS AT BOSTON GLOBE MEDIA](#)

[VIEW ALL JOBS AT BGM](#)