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After recent deaths, MIT calls for moment of reflection

By **Matt Rocheleau**

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MIT is asking students, faculty, and staff to collectively pause and reflect Monday after the death of an undergraduate this week, the sixth death of a member of the university community in as many months.

“The community here at MIT is in pain,” chancellor Cynthia Barnhart said by phone Friday. “We’re asking everyone at MIT to do something we [often] don’t do here, to stop.”

She said that at noon Monday the university has scheduled a first-of-its-kind, campuswide event called “All Doors Open.” Everyone affiliated with MIT is asked to pause for about 15 minutes to remember those who died and to reflect on how the community should respond.

“We urge you to open your doors, literally,” said an e-mail to the campus Friday, signed by Barnhart; faculty chairman

Steven Hall; Kendall Nowocin, president of the Graduate Student Council; and Shruti Sharma, president of the Undergraduate Association.

“Gather together — or get up, walk around, and engage the people nearby, those you know already and those you don’t. If you prefer, we hope you will take the time for focused private reflection.”

Officials at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology hope Monday’s event will spark further discussion. The school has also created an e-mail address, we-are@mit.edu, where campus members can send thoughts and ideas that will be reviewed by Barnhart and Hall, who will report to the community about the feedback.

Barnhart said Friday that e-mails have been pouring in. In typical MIT fashion, she said, many of them include links to relevant research papers.

“The message is: ‘What can we do? How can we help?,’ ” she said.

Phoebe Wang, a sophomore from Pennsylvania who was studying mechanical engineering, was found dead Tuesday in her Memorial Drive dormitory, officials have said.

Although they have declined to release details, authorities have said that Wang’s death was not being treated as a criminal matter.

It is the second death at MIT this semester. The body of graduate student Austin Travis was found in his Forest Street apartment on Sept. 3. The cause remains under investigation.

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

Suicide and mental health issues affect colleges around the world. MIT is known to have one of the nation’s most comprehensive counseling programs, in part due to improvements the school made after a series of suicides over the past two decades.

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Correction: An earlier version of this article had the wrong name for MIT’s campuswide event.



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