

INTERVIEWER: Today is May 12, 2010. I am Karen Arenson. We are talking this afternoon with Philip S. Khoury, associate provost at MIT, who has special responsibility for the arts, international activities, and initiatives between and among schools at MIT. A historian who specializes in the Middle East's political and social history, he was dean of the School of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences for 15 years, although the Arts got added to the name during his tenure as dean. Phil, thank you for talking to us. Your current job seems like an interesting mix of assignments. Who dreamed it up? How was it put together?

KHOURY: It is an interesting mix of assignments, and I had something to do with it. But I was reaching the end of my tenure, at least in my opinion, end of my tenure as dean of School of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences. Really I just planned to go back to the faculty, get a sabbatical, which I hadn't had in a long while. The president and provost approached me about joining the central administration in two main capacities. One would be, would you look at the arts, and look after the arts, and try to promote them. The second, in equal time, would be to help design an international or global strategy for MIT.

I said, I certainly would not take on the arts job as simply the arts job. One, as challenging as it is, I'm not an artist. I have some knowledge of at least the music and theater world, having been dean in that school. That department reported to me, as did Creative Writing within the writing program. But I thought it would be presumptuous of me to be the associate provost for the arts. International, I do have some experience with. So I said, well, if you can bear it, and my colleagues can bear it, I would take this on for a limited period of time. So I agreed to do it for five years, and I'm getting toward the end of that tenure. I have one more year, and we'll see where things go from there.

INTERVIEWER: Do you devote roughly equal time to the different responsibilities?

KHOURY: I would say, perhaps the accent is a little heavier on the arts. I have more staff to work with, there are more demands. We actually have programs that I have direct responsibility for. We have, of course, our museum and our List Visual Arts Center, and so I do spend perhaps a little more time on the arts, though I also do a lot of international work. Like everyone at MIT, we all do more than nine to five. It's how this place runs. But I would say, the accent is a bit more on the arts.

INTERVIEWER: What about the line about encouraging initiatives between and among schools at MIT?

KHOURY: Right. So this comes from, when you're in a smaller school, and my school is, depending how you count, either third or the fourth in size, in descending order, you learn that one way to make things happen, make the world go round for your school, just one way, is to try to build bridges to larger schools, where one, there are deeper resources, both human and capital, physical, fiscal, and so I learned to do that, for better or worse. I'd like to think for better. So when I took on this job, one thing that always interested me, and a lot of the activity was in the School of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences, was around what I would call the public understanding or awareness of science and technology. So I thought that might be a leveraging point for building across boundaries, across the major learning cultures of MIT. And while it's not the principal thing I do, I have some involvement in that, and some personal interest. So I added it, really. That was my-- I was told by the president provost, craft the job and then we'll decide whether to approve it or not, the job description. I threw that in because it's important to me. I'm really thinking of my old school as being a centerpiece for the public understanding of science and technology.

INTERVIEWER: Let's talk about that international portion. Like many leading universities, MIT seems to be much more interested in global strategies and international activities than it used to be. One report said that MIT was involved in something like 700 international projects in 2008, and that number has probably grown since then. It seems like you need a spreadsheet to keep track of everything. Are there guiding principles to help determine what's worth doing and what isn't? Or does it grow like Topsy?

KHOURY: It's amusing you ask, because yesterday we had a meeting that included the vice president for research, myself our director of Office of Major Agreements, and two of our in-house counsels, lawyers, attorneys, to talk about creating, once and for all, a truly comprehensive international database for all that we do internationally. We have different kinds of databases that bring much, but not all, of what we do, but not necessarily with all the kinds of information we need to have at our fingertips, really. So we are going to go forward with that. We just made the decision yesterday. So yes, it is complicated. MIT has had a long international outlook on life. I mean, science is international almost by definition, and has been, at least modern science, for a good long while. Though they are not, the School of Science is not necessarily the most active in building the new kinds of large projects that we are doing.

The schools that are most active in thinking about building new international outreach are, of course, the School of Engineering, which is in such heavy demand, the world wants to come to the School of Engineering and get it engaged, and the Sloan School of Management. In fact, the Sloan School of Management is probably our stalking horse, or at least the organization within MIT that makes the first move, often on global issues, and has the most coherent strategy of any of the schools for how to deal with the rest of the world, and how to embrace the rest of the world and bring it closer to MIT in creative ways. In part, the School is not large, not huge, it's very centralized, and it's probably been the right organizational size in which to be a leader.

So my job is really to work with my colleagues in the leadership to try to figure out what it is and where it is MIT ought to be placing itself. Now, the world is a lot more complex than it was. When we say it, globalization is, you know, it's a metaphor for so much. But really what we're talking about, is the fact that for a good long while now, since the second world war, MIT has been, with a few other institutions in this country, the centers of science and engineering. Big science and big engineering. At least in the realms of basic and applied research in these areas. We're not into product development or such, but we create the innovation that leads to product.

But the fact of the matter is, the world is getting so complex, and there is enormous talent out there, some of which we have always brought to our campus. If you look at our faculty, nearly 40 percent of the faculty are foreign-born, and they bring something special to this campus by the mere fact that they grew up in another culture, for the most part. Not everyone comes from the UK or Canada, or English-speaking Canada, in any case. The largest number of international faculty we have actually come from India. So we tap into that all the time, and have for good long while. That number is increasing, by the way. It's not decreasing.

But there is talent out there that no longer can either afford to come to us, that we really want to partner with, and integrate with, and do collaborative work with, or they are developing their own institutions at home, that say, why come us. We're finding, what we're really looking for, where are the hubs of innovation today? What cities, what countries? It's not always the country, but it's really the city where the action is. We're trying to identify the six, seven, eight places that we really ought to be concentrating our resources. It's a bit of a gamble, as always. Because if you've, if the place is already very established, well, I mean, they may not need us as much as we think they do, or ought to. So what we're also trying to figure out, is where the future hubs of innovation are, and see if we can hit the ground running in these countries, always thinking about, how do we get some of that talent to come to our campus, to become part-time or permanent members of our community. But also, we know we're going to have to spend more time with them.

INTERVIEWER: How systematic is that search? I mean, do you take 100 or 200 countries, and go down them one by one, or does somebody simply say, boy, they're doing this, we ought to jump on it, or how does it proceed?

KHOURY: It's a mix. It really is a mixed profile. If you look around, most of the interesting projects we've concocted with other countries start at the faculty level. It is the faculty that are most creative. It is not the upper administration, in these cases.

That doesn't mean that the upper administration, in its movements around the world, don't come across opportunities. We try, in our way, from the president, to the provost, to myself, to others, to bring back these opportunities and present them to the faculty. Sometimes the faculty grabs onto them. It will never work, of course, if the faculty don't embrace them. I mean, just, there's no way the upper administration, most of us are members of the faculty but spending more time doing academic administration than the normal jobs of the faculty, teaching and carrying on primary research.

So what we try to do is figure out, are these projects worthy of MIT, and try to make the case to the faculty. Those are the top-down initiatives, and we've had a few of them. The Cambridge-MIT exchange was definitely a top-down activity. Some of what we do in Singapore, which today is the country we actually have our largest projects in, have been top-down. Not all of it, but some of it. Sometimes they reflect the nature of how those countries are organized. Some of them are very top-down, and so that's how you end up, the top comes to talk to the top, and then we go down further into rungs of the faculty to see what happens.

INTERVIEWER: I can remember some time back that MIT and other universities were criticized in Washington for giving away too much of our know-how to foreign students, who would go home, maybe, and compete with the US. Is that a theme that's coming up again as MIT gets more international? Is there criticism either from the inside MIT or from outside along these lines?

KHOURY: I think there is. The big scare that I recall, and it was my first years as dean, really was with Japan. It was at a time when the Japanese economy was just thriving, and the US economy was not doing as well. There was this great scare, and sometimes, I hate to say it, sometimes the scare was presented in racial terms, or racist terms. I found it very offensive, as did others. But it was this notion that Japan was here, it was investing in MIT, and it was investing largely because it knows, this is where the talent is, these are the crown jewels of technology, and they were here to basically take those home and adapt them and what have you, and we were giving those away for a pittance.

That was the way it was portrayed, and the *New York Times* actually wrote about us in that way on occasion. Probably a bit unfair. Of course, the Japanese economy began to plateau, and went into one of the longest recessions in modern history. Still may be in a form of recession today. That scare went away, pretty quickly, frankly. Today-- because the media helped to put some of this fear in the minds of people, the threat, so-called threat of China, will China, which controls so many US dollars, will they in a way eclipse the United States?

I mean, these are all reasonable things to ask. We have a kind of empire, an empire of knowledge, and will we be the only players in this empire of knowledge forever after? We've never been the only players. But whatever monopoly we've had in certain areas is likely to be broken apart and divvied up in certain parts of the world. That's why our international strategy is to figure out, look, how can we get the best out of China, how can China benefit from us, because they don't want to really play with us or partner with us unless they're going to benefit. But we need to benefit. The same with India.

These are huge, long-term investments we're beginning to make. Some find it very frustrating, working with their bureaucracies, or their democracies, in the case of India. It is frustrating. It's a lot easier, frankly, to work with a little country that's fabulously well-off called Singapore, which has the funding, and knows more or less what it's trying to do in order to survive into the future, and how MIT can play that role. But we know the long-term investments will not be just Singapore, they'll be these major countries.

It's not surprising that today the provost is taking off to go speak with Russia at the highest levels about how MIT could get back in with Russia. We actually had more activity with Russia, on this campus and in Russia, during the Cold War, than we've ever had with Russia after the Cold War. There are opportunities, maybe, to partner with Russia in building new universities, in setting up new kinds of research projects. Russia, we tend to forget, still has the strongest base of science outside of the United States probably in the world. Maybe with the exception of the United Kingdom and Germany. They're ahead of China, they're ahead of Japan, and ahead of India, in many, many areas. In the physical sciences, even in the biological sciences. Yet we're spending all our time talking about India and China, as is the world. So could MIT get ahead of the game, get out in front with Russia and do something really interesting.

And Brazil. The BRIC countries, that would complete the BRIC if we do build in Brazil, and we're about to launch a new program there. It's very, very exciting. So we are picking big targets, not just little targets. But the other criticism isn't simply, you know, are we giving the crown jewels of MIT away? I don't believe we are. But we need to be cautious about that. It's not that we shouldn't be conscious of how that could happen if we're not careful. Are we doing it cheaply? OK, that's also a big criticism.

But the biggest criticism on this campus about what we do internationally is, one, who are we partnering with, are these places really hubs of innovation or is it all about the money? Here the Middle East looms large, but not just the Middle East. The other is, can our faculty afford to be bouncing around the world, doing these projects, when their first obligation must be to our students, who are among the most brilliant students in the world, a number of whom are international, as we know? But can the faculty afford to be away and still do what the faculty is paid to do, which is to deliver the best learning culture possible to our terrific students? That is a real tension, and it's not going to get any better. We need to figure out ways of bringing the world more to our campus than our faculty going out to the rest of the world and spending quality time abroad. So that tension is there.

INTERVIEWER: You talked about the internationalization of the faculty and the large portion who were born in other countries. I think the graduate student population is quite similar in that respect. But the undergraduate population isn't. Is that a matter that's come up for discussion lately, and where is MIT headed on that?

KHOURY: Well, it's hard to know where we're headed. I have co-chaired with the vice president for research, Claude Canizares, for the last three years, the International Advisory Committee. Which is the committee that is designing the strategy, or trying to design, if we can really say that, strategy for how we should operate for the next 10 to 20 years globally. We've issued a report that sorts some of that out, but certainly not everything.

In our report we recommended that MIT seriously consider increasing the number of international undergraduates, non-US citizens who would come to our campus. Right now we actually maintain a quota. It's about 8 percent. We say 8 percent, we're actually quite explicit about it. Quotas worry me, for all kinds of reasons, but we do say it. Part of it has to do with the pool of American students coming out of high school that remain robust, very strong, but we turn back many more than we can possibly accept. MIT is very self-selective in the sense that if you're not really good at math and science, you're going to have trouble here getting through our system. Because students have a core curriculum they must all go through, as everyone knows, and it's a very special core curriculum. It's rigorous, that's for sure. So a lot of the young people who apply to us, from this country, are qualified to come here. So, it's a great opportunity. It's a, what do you call it, a buyer's market, as it were. So why do we need to go abroad? For graduate students, we have no quotas that I know of. The total number of international or non-US citizen undergraduates is approaching 40 percent. Very high, and that number is likely to grow as well.

The other issue with undergraduate financing, is that it is a very different kind of financing system from what we do with graduate students. Here we provide a lot of financial aid to our undergraduates, many of whom really do need this to be able to come to MIT. I mean, we're a high tuition, high financial aid organization, much as Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and Stanford, and a few other institutions, are. Those who can afford to be.

We know that taking on an international student here, we must treat them by our rules. So far our rules say, they need to be treated just the way American students are. So we need to know what their financial background is. It's very hard to get good information. What we do know is that it costs more to bring an international student here. More of them need financial aid, that is, if you look at it on a per capita basis. The amount of money we need to dole out to them is higher than we would dole out to your average American student. So it's an expensive proposition. Right now, in the financial crisis, our timing probably wasn't the best. We've decided to stay with 8 percent, with the hope that when things stabilize, we could come back to this.

Between us, I think it's no secret. It's no secret that we could have even a stronger undergraduate class if we increase the number of international students. I'm told Yale has gone to 12 percent, but Yale's financial aid program may be different from ours, how we do business. Harvard is still hovering around 9 percent or 10 percent. We proposed, at least early on, going from 8 percent to 12 percent. Which is a 50 percent increase. But that has been tabled for a while. But it's been seriously discussed, I'm happy to say.

INTERVIEWER: One thing that keeps coming up when the United States looks to partner with other countries are questions about their values, and things like human rights. There's a lot of debate back and forth about, should we be working with this country or that country? Do those issues surface here? In other words, as MIT looks to get involved with a whole range of countries, do people sit back and say, hm, do they have the same values we do? Or do they do things in human rights that we're not happy with, that would prevent us from going in? Do they even come up?

KHOURY: They definitely come up. They are debated seriously, more seriously than ever. In large part because two of our larger sponsors these days happen to be countries in the Middle East, which have very different systems, cultural values than we have, and Singapore. Really, we've been in Singapore for over a decade now, and that debate has always been there every time we begin something new.

In the end, we ask ourselves, do we, should we prevent faculty, on an individual or small-group basis, from having arrangements in countries whose values we may not share? But if the faculty feel there is something to learn and to gain, should we allow them to do it anyway? So one debate point is, should we call things that are controversial, countries that are controversial, should we ever institutionalize it, such that the name of MIT is there an institutional way? So the program is the MIT Program, we'll say, Saudi Arabia. Let me take perhaps the most controversial. We've decided that if the faculty really want to do it, and they need to check things out, and that means we're interested in what, not just what white males have to say, we're interested in what females have to say, what gays have to say, what others have to say, who might be particularly vulnerable to discrimination in any one of these countries for a whole host of reasons.

We've found that more often than not, you will find faculty, including women faculty, in the case of Saudi Arabia it was proved, that women faculty went there and felt, including the leaders of the mechanical engineering department's case, that they should do collaborations with Saudi Arabia, with a particular university there that was all-male. But this caused a small firestorm at MIT, as you can imagine. A lot of controversy around it. We decided in the end that it wasn't an institutional relationship, it was between a department and a center within a department, and that was OK.

But frankly, and here's the problem, is that any time MIT faculty do anything in any country, the name of MIT is there. Because it's not the individuals, but our name, our brand name with Harvard's, probably the two strongest brand names in the world in higher education research today. I can probably document that. There's an inverse rule of some kind, the further you go from MIT, the better our reputation is, the stronger our reputation is. So when people or countries say, we're collaborating with the mechanical engineering department, it is always with MIT, and mechanical engineering second or third in line.

So we have to figure this out, but we do not have a policy on this, frankly. Other than we will not put the stamp of MIT officially on agreements or contracts if we feel that it's inappropriate. In the case of Saudi Arabia, we did not do that.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think there will be efforts to hammer out and shape a policy, or is it one of the things that people see as better left ambiguous for the moment?

KHOURY: I think, better left ambiguous. I would say that the majority, and it may be a small majority, of those who have some knowledge, and really I'm talking to those with international experience more than any others, they would feel, I think, that-- not let sleeping dogs lie. Always watch what you're doing. Always make sure. For instance, with the Saudi project, which is a clean water, clean energy project, and the center is located here, not in Saudi Arabia, with very little time actually spent on the ground by our faculty center, we have a women's project, as well. To bring Saudi women here for a special kind of education. We're talking about doing something even larger on this front. That was introduced by our administration as a prerequisite for going forward with an agreement. That there had to be something more that MIT was doing.

There is a problem with that, and let me just very quickly state it, and that is, should MIT be in the game of changing the cultures or social policy, it reminds me of the Bush administration saying, we're bringing democracy to Iraq. Should MIT be bringing the values of whatever, of our country and of our institution, to countries and try to superimpose those values on those societies or on those institutions? That's a tough issue, but it's one we're always arguing about. That's healthy. At least we're arguing at home. But I don't think we have a hard and fast policy.

INTERVIEWER: Has the faculty really engaged with those issues, or does it tend to be a handful of interested people?

KHOURY: Like so much at MIT, it's a handful. More than a handful. There's professor Jay Keyser's notion that it's the same 20 percent that do everything. I mean, every committee-- it's a bit of an exaggeration, but it's remarkable. There are these loyalists to MIT. I don't know where they find the time. But you can find them serving on this, that, and the other committee at all time. So it's that community. It's a minority that is debating these issues. However, when they come before the faculty, and they're known to be controversial, the faculty comes out of the woodwork, which it rarely does, to debate these matters. That's a healthy thing.

INTERVIEWER: Can you tell us where the Singapore project stands at this point, and whether it's expanding, or what's happening?

KHOURY: It is definitely expanding, and it's really in three parts, like Gaul, in a way. It started with what we call SMA-1, or Singapore MIT project one, which was an educational project with some research. Then there was a second iteration of it which will wind down in 2013. That has been going now for a good 10 years, or will have gone 10 years when complete.

The third dimension grew up two years ago, and it is called the Smart Center, which is MIT's largest activity abroad. This is a Singapore-MIT research center, fabulously well-funded, if I may say so, by the Singaporean government, that does require MIT researchers to be on the ground for certain periods of time over the first five years of what will doubtless be a 10, and perhaps 15 or 20 year project, we'll see. This project is fundamentally about research. There are small educational components, but it really started off and will always be a research project in the area of remote sensing, water research, of various kinds of nanotech, and so on-- and transportation now. There will be a fifth major thrust area coming up, which still has not been settled on. It's in its second year, and again, it's mainly the School of Engineering that is involved. The center hierarchy, or the administration, reports up to the vice president for research. It does not report to the dean of the School of Engineering, interestingly. So it's not just engineering, and the hope is more scientists will get involved in this, and some have.

Just recently, last January, our president went off to Singapore to sign the latest agreement with Singapore, which is perhaps the most unusual thing we've ever done. That is, we are going to help Singapore design their fourth research university called the Singapore University for Technology and Design. So it is a chance for our engineering School and our School of Architecture to become deeply involved in developing new curriculum, curriculum but we will transfer to Singapore for this new university, but also develop for our own. I'll come back to that in a second, because it's so important for us. There's a reason for why we're doing this.

We will help them to pick their new faculty. We're already beginning to do that, and then we will bring the new faculty, once hired by the Singaporean University of Design, Technology and Design, we will bring them to campus and they will shadow our faculty for a year, and learn about this curriculum development, learn our methods for research-- by the way, some of them will be MIT PhD's and they won't have to learn a heck of a lot, they'll just extend their learning. Then they'll go back and become the new faculty.

The doors will open for this new university in April of 2012, to the best of our knowledge, and the first and founding president is the former dean of Engineering, Thomas Magnanti. He will do that for a period of time, and I'm sure, relinquish the position to whomever else they would like. This is a huge project. The reason we're doing it is not all for the money, as many people think, though again, it's very generously funded. We feel MIT has the best factors of production for design of any research university in the United States and perhaps in the world. Our peer rival, Stanford, gets a lot of credit for its work in design. We probably have the stronger faculty, but we've never figured out how to get our act together.

The Singaporeans are helping us, through their funding, OK, through their vision, which we've helped to craft for them, or with them, a chance to build up and organize ourselves in the world of design, between engineering and architecture, principally, and we should emerge out of this, and that's the prediction, and we'll see if we're right, as the leading place, not just in reality, but in terms of reputation, around education and research on design. We will have a fabulous new laboratory, a center, really, around international design on our campus, which the Singaporeans are paying for. There'll be even a larger version of it on the new campus in Singapore, so there will be mirror sites, as it were.

So it's a long-term investment, and we're not paying for it. We're paying in our labor, in our intelligence, in what we transfer to them, but we'll be transferring to them what we really plan to use here.

INTERVIEWER: Is there a public price tag on any of this? Does anybody know what it's going to amount to?

KHOURY: Well, I can't tell you what the cost of the university will be, because then you have all these scholarships for students which we have nothing to do with, we're not picking the students, incidentally. We're just picking the faculty, with their help. Picking, that is, helping them to choose. They will have to decide who the faculty are. We'll just recommend, and we've done this elsewhere, by the way, it's not the first time we've helped on that front. I would say on the order of about \$170 million, most of which is expendable money over X number of years, plus a \$20 million endowment, is coming to MIT. In fact, the first tranche of the endowment, half of it, has already arrived. So Singaporeans are very good about paying on time. They also expect deliverables on time. They're highly organized and demanding. As they should be. They're paying a pretty penny for this. The Smart Center is even more funding. Yeah. So it's enormous. It's the largest, it is what Japan was to MIT, Singapore is now.

INTERVIEWER: After that was announced, after president Hockfield went to Singapore, did other countries come knock on the door and say, me too, me to, come help us?

KHOURY: Other countries have come since, but countries came before. I mean, this is not the first time. I should explain that I don't think we would have dared to take on this new Singapore University of Technology and Design, the SUTD, had we not had a decade of experience in working with Singapore. De novo, just jumping in with them and doing this, would have been, I think, a disaster for us. I hope it will not be a disaster for us. I mean, proof's in the pudding. But we at least have some knowledge of the place, the culture, the leadership, and the vision.

INTERVIEWER: One of the other very large and expanding international efforts is MISTI, which I think stands for the MIT International Science and Technology Initiatives, that grew out of, I think, the School of Humanities and Social Sciences. Can you talk a little about how it started, and where that stands now, and how much more extension there'll be on that front?

KHOURY: Sure, and I'll be brief. So this program actually grew up on my watch as dean. The first iteration of it, before it was called MISTI, actually began in the early 1980s, and it was exclusively with Japan. A very gifted professor, Dick Samuels in our Political Science department, who heads, now directs the Center for International Studies and has for a good long while, former department head, was a Japan specialist.

He felt that Japan was coming to these shores, and sucking up lots of knowledge and information, and taking it home. Part of it was that they were bothering to learn our language, they were learning our ways, and they were figuring out how they could take this back. Legally, perfectly legal. Yet the United States had very few ways of reversing the knowledge drain, as it were. Or gathering what the Japanese do so well. We thought if we trained students who are highly scientific and technical, as our kids are, in Japanese language and culture and politics and economics, and send them there, they will, not only will they learn about a foreign society and culture and imbibe of that, but they will bring back some of the crown jewels, or some jewels at least, from Japan.

That started back in the 80s and did very well. It was a single individual who kind of thought it up, and it grew and it grew. Then another colleague, more senior to Dick Samuels, Suzanne Berger, said, you know, we could replicate this in many other places. Including Europe, China, and India. She decided to develop this vision for a larger MIT-Japan program that became MISTI. We are now, I believe, in 10 countries. Israel and Brazil are our latest MISTI programs. Brazil is just about to start up. Israel is thriving after a year and a half, it's amazing how well that program is doing. Lots of excitement.

We're all over the world, basically training and educating students in the ways of these countries, helping them to learn the language, getting them up to, at least, some level of confidence. I don't want to exaggerate, they're not always fluent in all these languages. Some of them are very tough to learn. Chinese, Japanese are. Then they go off and spend three months, six months, up to a year. We figure out how to fund them. Sometimes we rely on companies, we've raised a considerable amount of endowment. They have, this is for them, what an internship ought to be. It's not a junior year abroad, or junior semester. Really, they're down in the trenches, in laboratories, at companies, on university campuses and the like. They come back different. I'll tell you. They come back different. Now this is where I'll stop on MISTI.

In that MIT is a tough place. I didn't go to MIT. I can't imagine what it's like, having taught students here for 30 years, what it's really like to go through this system. Which is a grueling, tough, demanding, excellent education. These students come here at the top of the heap. They're the best students in their high schools. Whenever they arrive, valedictorians, this and that, star students, prize-winning Olympians, and they come in and they find that MIT is a great equalizer, and it isn't as easy to be number one any longer. If it ever was, it's no longer that way. And we're tough on our students.

When they go away, they work alongside other young people, and what they discover-- this is not just globally or internationally, down in Washington when they do this, or when they go to New York as interns, or to California-- they come away realizing that they really are talented. That they have strengths that are extraordinary. They come back with their egos not stroked, but feeling a lot more self-confident about what they can do, and how the future could unwind for them in the right ways. So I think these programs are as good as you get, and they're perfect for MIT.

INTERVIEWER: Is there any kind of goal perhaps to raise participation among the undergraduates to half or three-quarters of the student body, like the UROP program-- KHOURY: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: --which reaches so many. Is there a timetable, or do people articulate this, and is it a question of funding, or what?

KHOURY: So the dean for Undergraduate Education had a commission that looked into the future of international education for undergraduates a couple of years ago, two or three years ago now, and they came out with the model of UROP. You're absolutely right that 85 percent of all undergraduates imbibe of UROP. Could we set out as a goal 85 percent for the rest of this institution for undergraduates? In fact, the Department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science, which, I said earlier Sloan has probably the most advanced in terms of having a strategic vision globally, that department also has a strategic vision. It is our largest department. It is larger than the Sloan School, in fact. So in their document, which they came out with a couple of years ago, they put an 85 percent figure out there as a goal.

OK, this is an aspirational goal, right? I mean, right now we're probably somewhere on the order of 25 percent to 30 percent of young people, undergraduates here, having some meaningful international experience when they're here. That number has grown fairly significantly. MISTI is the largest player in that cohort, no question, and it's likely to be even larger as time goes by. But it hasn't been easy, frankly, to get numbers up. Students are also on financial aid, and they have work obligations in the summer. They have to produce a certain amount of money to come through the four years here, so how can they take a summer off to go to Japan, or China, or France, or what have you? We're trying to sort through that. So our aim, I think, if we could get to half, 50 percent of our undergraduate student body in the next five to seven years, we will have really broken through, and it'll be quite amazing.

What we don't want is academic tourism. We're really against the idea that when our students go abroad, they're really just going on the Grand Tour of the 19th century. This is not what it's about.

INTERVIEWER: Have there been any studies comparing those students who participate in MISTI with those who don't, both what, you know, who chooses to go, and among those who make it, how are they different when they come back, from those who would have liked to have gone, but didn't make it, or something?

KHOURY: So honestly, I don't know if we have any systematic studies of that. I think people have, some of it is anecdotal. I think we all, as I observed earlier, as I mentioned earlier, internships no matter where they are tend to change our students in fundamental ways. That probably is the greatest dividend of these programs.

INTERVIEWER: But this is the internship plus being exposed to a foreign culture, a different culture.

KHOURY: Yeah. So many of these young people will work, and they may not work in the foreign culture they have spent time in as a MISTI intern, or as another kind of intern. But the fact that they've had some experience will strengthen them. But in a globalized world, they're likely to spend some of them at least, a good portion of their lives working in companies abroad. Maybe they'll be American companies or multinationals with homes in New York or California. That has to work to their advantage.

INTERVIEWER: Do they get credit, or I thought some of them earned money while they were working in these post--

KHOURY: No, they don't, really. They're not supposed, we make it possible for them, you know, to get by, by helping with their housing and airline trips, and stipends for the three months or whatever. Most of them are on three-month internships. That's the minimum. But the companies are not paying them. Should not be paying them salaries, yeah. So we're paying them. We get companies to donate money, so in a way the money is being circled back into the system, but there's no salary. That's the problem. If they were earning salaries doing this then they would have to give those funds back to MIT for the work part of what they need to do.

What we don't want to do, and I really need to be careful here, what we cannot do is penalize students at MIT who wish to participate in this program, undergraduates, because of the financial aid situation they're in. Everyone has to have the same chance, if they wish for it. That's what we're struggling to accomplish.

INTERVIEWER: Most of the postings sound like they're in laboratories, science, engineering. Can humanities students participate, or is it really not for students who are studying, I don't know, economics or political science or theater?

KHOURY: Yeah, that's a great question. It is, it replicates kind of the distribution of majors, the MISTI program at MIT. It's almost one to, I mean, the correlation is very strong. The numbers of students who major in engineering and science tend to be the, more or less the same numbers, who participate in MISTI. With the Sloan School, incidentally. You could ask, I mean the Sloan School, what is it there? But of course, companies are interested in having our very highly analytic, mathematically strong undergraduates working for them. As, by the way, Washington government likes to get our undergraduates as well. For their technical skills, for their science policy understanding and so on.

INTERVIEWER: OpenCourseWare is another newish thing that falls under your bailiwick, I think. How's that progressing, and what are the questions on the table now, if any?

KHOURY:

Yes. No, there are big questions on the table. So OpenCourseWare's actually in its eighth year now. It's only been reporting to me a little over a year, so I've learned quite a bit in the last year. The fabulous new director of the program, Cecilia d'Oliveira, she's an MIT alumna and brings all those talents to the job. She had been the technology director, and was selected in a very vigorous search, rigorous search, really, to become our new director. So I work closely with her, though to say that I'm actually doing anything would be preposterous. She and her staff are making the world go round. So the biggest issue for us, is we declared, eight, ten years ago when we went for this model, that this is MIT's gift to the world. Putting its entire curriculum, albeit in different forms of development, on the web for anyone who can access the internet, and for those who can't, we'll make disks and send them into sub-Saharan Africa so students and young people can, and older people can have access to it.

I've discovered that not only is now 60 percent of those who access OCW, OpenCourseWare, on the internet are international, live abroad, and that number is increasing, not decreasing. It's often, I mean, the largest number of people who do so, are not affiliated directly to universities or to industries, but they're doing this, really, at home as extra learning, whatever you want to call it, adult learning, if you will. This is an opportunity to extend their knowledge. Lifetime learning, call it. It's very interesting who's picking up on OCW. We get 1,000,000 unique hits on our website each month, which is tremendous, right?

When I tour the world, as I do, the two names apart from MIT, which as I said, the further you go away from MIT the more people know and love us, and admire us, the two institutions within MIT that get most of the attention, name recognition, are OCW and the Media Lab. OK? It's interesting, those two organizations within MIT.

So our biggest issue now, is how can we financially sustain this model, which is a very expensive gift to give the world? We have 1975 courses online, and we have a program that allows us, every several years, to renew, refurbish, those courses that are already online that we still offer, and we're always adding new courses as new professors come online, as it were, join our faculty. That's an expensive proposition.

So we have brought in Bain consultants, on a pro bono basis, I'm happy to say, with some MIT alums among them, to work with us to design different models for how we might package some of what we put online for free, for executive education, for distance learning, and the like, things that MIT frankly are, you know, both ahead and behind on in the game of using new technologies, and we've done it, I think we could be ahead of everyone if we wished to, but we've not chosen that route, because we are very pleased on, about how we deliver education to our students, whether they're full-time or executive ed students, or what have you.

But so we're looking very seriously at these models, certificate programs, which will be controversial. We're not talking about degree programs online, which some institutions have begun to do, including Harvard, through Harvard Extension, is putting, you know, increasingly an online dimension to that. We have not gone that route. Certificates will be controversial. In these financial times, this may be the best time to raise the issue of would we put certificates out there for courses taken, and how would we evaluate the students who took these courses so that they could earn a certificate, saying, they completed 511 or 3091 or whatever. Integral Equations, or something.

So we're looking at that. We're also looking at advertisements on these courses, and on department sites. Whether our faculty colleagues would accept that. We think they will. I mean, so far the polling suggests our faculty are willing to go ahead. The knowledge, the information and knowledge in these courses, belongs to the faculty. They own it. So they would have to agree to allow us to advertise these, and to earn money to help support the program so we can continue to deliver the free good, freely, to the world.

INTERVIEWER: Is there any kind of release time when a faculty member puts a course online, in other words, the assumption being that it probably takes some time and effort, or does it really take very little at this point?

KHOURY: We try to minimize faculty time on this. One, it would be too expensive, frankly. We have a terrific staff, a number of whom are MIT alums, graduates, who are working with the School of Engineering, or SHASS, or Sloan, or what have you, trying to renew and refurbish courses, and add courses. So it is really the labor. It's very labor-intensive. The OCW staff, who are about 18 in total number, maybe 16, I can't recall. It's really their task, and we try to minimize the taxation of our faculty on this. That's why the faculty like it. Frankly, I think if the faculty were having to do all this themselves, they might have rejected it. Or they'd reject it today.

INTERVIEWER: There were a lot of accolades in the beginning, when it was announced. But did the faculty generally talk about getting something out of it, other than sort of a good feeling helping the world, or--

KHOURY: I think the financial crisis of the last year and a half has gotten the faculty to look at different models. Begin to look at different models. We had this major task force that involved over 130 or 140 faculty, most of whom are leaders on our campus, to look at how MIT could, one, figure out ways to be more efficient, tighten the belt, but also revenue-enhancing ideas. I happen to co-chair the Revenue Enhancement Committee, so I followed this very closely. I was impressed with our faculty's willingness to think more outside the box than we have about ways of bringing new resources to the table, that is, to MIT, to help solve our financial issues, and do interesting things with them.

So I think you're right, in the beginning and for most of the period of OCW's existence, it has been a very feel-good thing. As long as it's not labor-intensive falling on the backs of the faculty, they love the kudos. They love the fact that hundreds of thousands of people may be accessing their course in, if I may say so, Introduction to Philosophy, which for a good long while was the first or second most popular course after Intro to Computer Science. I don't think that's case yet, but just maybe who got out first and got their course up online.

INTERVIEWER: You're talking about online education, and it occurs to me that Singapore is actually one of the areas where MIT has worked on distance education. It's certainly a different model from the OpenCourseWare, but are there some lessons coming out of that? How has it worked, and is that model changing?

KHOURY: You know, I don't know enough about whether it's changing quickly enough to allow us to adapt OCW to it. I will tell you that we have introduced into the budget for the new Singapore University of Technology and Design an OCW component, and we expect that some of the materials we'll have will be massaged in a way, that is, some of our courses, to be used or mounted as design subjects that can be delivered online, with OCW getting at least some direct funding to help support what it does. But it is, it's making us quite nervous, to be honest with you. To the president's credit, she did not create OCW, it happened on the last president's watch, it was partly his vision and his courage to do it, and raising the money with the big foundations that helped us, Mellon and Hewlett. She has been helping to lead the effort, trying to find major donors who will support us in one way or another. Because she believes in OCW. It's hard to argue against it. Just, can we afford it?

INTERVIEWER: Another part of your portfolio is the arts. What role do the arts play at MIT? So the arts do have, at some levels, a professional coloration to them. But they are mainly there, I would argue, as part of the general opportunity for students to engage in the creative processes. They're not alone in this. I mean, they do this in their science courses, I would argue in their humanities courses as well. But the arts, it turns out that we get a huge number of applicants who are admitted to MIT at the undergraduate level, who have significant talent in the arts. Mainly in the performing arts, which plays to the great strength of our Music and Theater department, which is a fabulous teaching department, also in the areas of research, from musicology to composition to performance.

KHOURY: So we are getting a number of students who apply here, are students who would be accepted at Julliard, or at Curtis or at Peabody, or the New England Conservatory, but their parents say, no way. You're going to MIT because one, you're going to get a comprehensive education, and you're also going to have a job at the end of it all. So we know there's that tension among a number of the young people we get.

The visual arts actually have graduate programs. They're not trust for undergraduates. Those are professional programs, and I don't mean just simply architecture, which of course is a professional program, and the oldest in the United States. but I mean Visual Arts. So we have graduate students who come to do the visual arts, I'm very pleased that there's been a new reorganization of our visual arts academic programs, there's been a merger of our Center for Advanced Visual Studies, which I would call the research arm of our Visual Arts academic program with the Visual Arts program, which is the academic program. They're now called ACT, Arts, Technology, and Culture, A C T. They've just moved into the old, and part of the new, media lab buildings complex, which is fabulous for them, a brand new space, and it's just a wonderful occasion to have them all ingather with our media lab folks, with our Comparative Media Studies people in the School of Humanities, and of course our List Gallery, our List Visual Arts Center is there as well. There's a real, I think, shot on the arm that we're just beginning to apply in the visual arts that will put them yet higher up on the marquee of MIT.

INTERVIEWER: Are they part of the School of Architecture?

KHOURY: They're part of the School of Architecture and Planning, yes, and have been at least as long as I've known. There was a moment in time when I first came here, names that are familiar to people of a certain age at MIT. Minor White, one of the great individuals in the world of photography, was on our faculty. Ricky Leacock, probably the greatest documentary filmmaker of his age, was on our faculty. I came here, I'd actually heard of these people. I had not heard of a lot of people at MIT, being a humanist. But these two names rang out to me. Alas, one died, and the other went off and retired a little early, though Ricky Leacock still comes back to campus in his 80s now. So we had, you know, great depth, or real action in those areas, we're trying to rebuild, and are rebuilding, in some of these areas. Not all of them.

INTERVIEWER: Are the arts at MIT different from those at other leading research universities, or are they more prominent, and why?

KHOURY: So I wouldn't say they're more prominent. We don't have a professional school of the arts, say, the way Yale does. Harvard does not, Yale does. So one could say, I mean, I grew up in a world that everyone knew Yale had, you know, professional arts. I mean, one did, because kids would apply to Yale for undergraduate education, and part of the attraction was, they might one day go on to their drama program, or their music program, or what have you. We don't have those, you know, a school of the arts. Carnegie Mellon has a school of the arts. We do not, so--

INTERVIEWER: But there's a School of Art and Architecture--

KHOURY: A School of Architecture and Planning, which includes the Media Lab, yes. So we have that. But there's no question, the accent falls not on the visual arts as a programmatic activity, but it actually falls on architecture as a profession. That's where the emphasis is, and of course on media studies.

So just picking up on how the arts might be understood in the MIT context, what differentiates the way we do arts from other institutions, I think historically the arts have succeeded here, in many ways, even though they are not at the very core of what MIT is and about. They succeeded here because they have been very much tied in with the motto of MIT, mens et manus. Mind and hand. It is the way we do arts, principally, is hands-on. Hands-on learning. It appeals very much to the kind of young people we attract, both at the undergraduate and graduate level.

Beyond that, what has always differentiated us, really, at least in modern memory, since the second World War, I can't speak about anything before that with any authority, is, MIT, and again, it's really what fits with MIT, MIT is a place that is all about science and technology in the largest sense of those two words. Those two cultures, if you like, which are in increasingly intertwined. The arts here, where they're really strong, and where they're headed, most importantly, is at the intersections of science and technology. It is what has differentiated us in many ways. It's not the only thing we do in the arts, but there's no question, science and technology matter to the way we do arts. Hands-on learning matters to the way we do arts. We have just completed a long, I think, excellent whitepaper which is in the hands of the president and the provost, basically charting where the arts should be in the next 10, say, 20 years. It's maybe preposterous of us to think that one could think out 20 years. But it is really all about those intersections. That's our comparative advantage.

Having said that, not only have we been ahead of our peer institutions in the practice of the arts, I don't mean in art history or musicology, but in the practice of the arts, and I'm referring principally to Harvard and Princeton and Stanford and a few other places, they are all investing heavily now in what I would call the hands-on arts. They look to us, interestingly. They know what we have. They're beginning to go after our faculty in ways they hadn't. I expect them to go after economists and chemists. I don't expect them to go for arts faculty, and they're starting to do that. We will resist, to the best of our ability. But what they're doing, is building the facilities that will allow the arts to thrive at the intersection of science and technology. That's a tremendous investment. Princeton is doing it in a very large way. Harvard is beginning to do it. We know Yale has, in a sense, already been doing it, and investing. Stanford, at least, has it as part of its mandate for its latest major campaign.

So the way the world of our peer institutions is beginning to converge with MIT in that it is not all about, but mainly about, science and technology, and why our peers are investing in science and technology, similarly, they're investing in art forms and ways of doing art that intersect with science and technology. We're still, I think, ahead of them in every area except for the facilities. It really is a problem that we are-- we faced it for good long while-- I think it will grow more intense if we don't do something about it. We could end up on the losing end of the stick on this one, if we're not careful.

INTERVIEWER: What triggered the whitepaper, or the decision to look at it that deeply?

KHOURY: So the last time we had a systematic look at the arts at MIT was 1987 with what is called the Joskow Report. Paul Joskow chaired the Committee. He's now president of the Sloan Foundation. He still holds a professorship on leave in economics here.

That Committee created, among other things, a push for a theater arts program, which is now attached to music, and I think that was a very successful, intelligent way of doing things. It pushed for formal programmatic degree-granting in the visual arts. It pushed for new facilities, most of which we've never really built up, to be honest, but we've built up some. It pushed for a czar, or czarina if you like, who would be in charge of what are in effect the extraacademic arts. An associate provost for the arts. It's the position I inherited, to some extent, that I hold today, though the title arts isn't in it. That person was, you know, appointed really to represent the arts, and speak about the arts, and work with the deans and other faculty in the academic arts, but mainly to be responsible for the visual arts and performing arts, and to integrate things with students in better ways, and so on.

That was a big step forward for MIT. That was in the late 80s. So we thought, isn't it time to take another look? It's been a good long while since the Joskow Report. We've not had anything in between with the depth of our new whitepaper. We'll see how folks look at it, but I think it will be of interest to folks, once we're able to release it.

INTERVIEWER: So can you say anything about surprises in it, or things that surprised you when it was being done?

KHOURY: I think the biggest surprise for me, as a nonartist and a humanist who's followed the arts more from an academic administration angle, was the willingness of our faculty to admit that our comparative advantage is at the intersection of art, science, and technology. There are those, and I came into that environment as a humanist in 1981, and there are still some on the faculty, who believe our main job as humanists and as artists is to somehow educate the heathen. Meaning the engineer and maybe the scientist.

It is a very arrogant kind of approach. I do understand it. When you're small, you've got to sort of define yourself. It may be that those who brought humanists in and artists in, a long while back, said, that's what you're here to do. Leven things, round them out, make them better at what they do. To some extent we have done that. But there is an arrogance to it. I'm dead set against that approach, and have fought it ever since I came here as a young faculty member. But that's, I guess, what surprised me most. Is that times have changed, and the faculty have moved with these times, and they've moved in the right direction, in my opinion.

INTERVIEWER: MIT has something called the Creative Arts Council. What is that and what does it do?

KHOURY: Well, it's funny. We just met for the last time, this year, this morning from 10 to 12. It is a toothless organization, in that all the leaders of the arts at MIT, from the deans of the two schools, to the associate provost, to the directors of the List and the museum and the various people who are middlemen and women, you know, who facilitate arts programs and the like, the department heads in architecture, and in music, in theater, and creative writing, and so on, are there. But we have no official role other than to help-- Creative Arts Council also grew out of the Joskow Report, but really to represent the arts, and to make sure they're looked after to best of our ability. But we can't vote anything in. We're really only advisory to the provost and the president. We hope they will through this whitepaper, which we, the Council, Creative Arts Council helped to draft this whitepaper, that they will accept that. But we're the guardians, if you like, of the arts.

INTERVIEWER: Anything interesting happening on the museum front? The MIT Museum, or the List Visual Arts Center, where do those stand?

KHOURY: So the museum is blessed, I would argue, with a, no longer new, because he's in his fifth year, I believe, remarkable director who came to us from the United Kingdom, who is a first-rate museum director for museums of science and technology, John Durant. A visionary of unbelievable proportion. He himself is an academic by training, he's a zoologist in his first degree, and history of science as a PhD, and he also holds an adjunct, which is an adjunct professorship in the Science, Technology and Society program. Adjunct at MIT is an august title. It is not adjunct is at most universities. To be an adjunct, you're vetted much like a tenured professor, but you're not full-time. Because most of the time, he's at the museum. But he teaches.

That helps a lot, because one of his visionary activities, or outlooks, is to bring the faculty closer to the museum. He knows that if this museum is really to shine, the faculty have to be behind it. He's done so well that he has recruited Philip Sharp, no less than Philip Sharp, Nobel laureate, former head of the biology department, to be the new chair of the Advisory Committee. Which is principally an external advisory committee to the museum. He has raised funds, with a little help from me and others, to expand the museum down to the ground floor, so we're now retail, and it has just transformed the museum. Attendance rates are way up and he has a great plan for expanding the exhibition space as well. He just recently raised another million dollars for this.

So he is entrepreneurial, full of ideas, he's also the individual who, the idea is his, though he had the staff to help him, the Cambridge Science Festival is the first science festival in any city in the United States. He created that, and now this is spreading like wildfire to other cities around the United States, and he is the leader in this movement. So that has helped to improve our relationship, in the best ways, improve our relationship with the city of Cambridge and hopefully with the wider Boston area, which is our next horizon. Since this is a big town for science, it's a great place to have visibility around science festivals.

INTERVIEWER: Does he teach about running a museum, or--

KHOURY: He does indeed. He teaches about running a museum, he teaches about all kinds of things that have to do with curatorial work, directing. He's a Darwinian in terms of his scholarship, so he's very interested in, you know, the debates in this country over Darwin, and over learning, and so on, from Scopes Monkey right up to the present. I don't think Scopes Monkey has actually disappeared, in my opinion.

On the List Visual Arts Center front, this organization, this gallery, and it's a gallery, has a terrific national and international reputation. It is very small. It's largest problem, and the museum faces a similar problem, is space. Unfortunately, it is in very good space, but limited in the number of exhibitions it can possibly do. The hardest part of its existence is that every time it does a major exhibition, and it does three a year, it needs to close its doors until that exhibition is mounted. Because there's not enough swing space. So we need to figure out other ways of exhibiting what the List does. But it has a tremendous, tremendous reputation, and gets lots of attention in the media, in this town and elsewhere. Including the *New York Times*, I'm happy to say.

INTERVIEWER: Do students get very involved in it, or is it sort of off on the side and more a public thing?

KHOURY: It's more of a public thing. The director knows that it is better known outside of MIT than it is within. It is basically helping to define the mission of the arts at MIT. I said earlier, the arts, I think, moving forward, if they haven't already been, it's the connectivity with science and technology. It's also all about contemporary art. That's what our purchase is. We cannot go back to early modern times, to the renaissance era, and build up collections. They're unaffordable, they're what MIT is about. We can't do everything. Everything we do must be excellent. We are excellent in the area of contemporary art. That's what our visual arts program is about, that's with the new ACT, the Art, Culture, and Technology program is about, that's what the List is about. So I would bet on the List becoming more successful.

INTERVIEWER: You've got a new curator there this year.

KHOURY: A young, new man from the Drawing studio, the Drawing Center in New York. He's barely 30 years of age, he looks like he's been around forever, except he looks very young to me. Dynamo. True dynamo, an arriviste. I'm very, very pleased how he's working out. His first significant exhibition will I think take place next fall at the List.

INTERVIEWER: Let's back up and talk about your life, and what led up to your time at MIT. Where you were born, what was your childhood like?

KHOURY: So I was born in Washington, in late 1949.

INTERVIEWER: Washington, DC?

KHOURY: Yes, the District of Columbia. I literally was born in the city. No one was born in the city back then. Because my mother was a diplomat from a foreign country, Lebanon in this case, and the law was that you wouldn't have to be born within Washington, but diplomats all had to live within the city confines. That has changed. We actually lived in the city, not deep down in the heart of the city, but I was born there and raised there. I grew up in a family of, my father was a lawyer, but also from the Arab world, like my mother, and so they met in Washington. My godfather, who was then the ambassador of Lebanon to the United Nations and to Washington, it was a small delegation, my mother was the number two in the embassy, came with him. He introduced my father, an old friend from their Boston days, to my mother. I came along, and a younger brother followed two and a half years later. That's our family.

I've had, I would say, about as privileged a life as you can have. In all candor. I mean, I really think about this a lot. It worries me, because you know, one day, what if you're no longer privileged? But for me, privilege is stability. That is, not having to worry about what's coming from my right and left, and being comfortable in my surroundings. I say this because I went to the same private school in Washington from the age of three until I was 17, going to the same campus every day, it was a liberal, very tolerant institution that would allow someone like me to thrive in it. Later I found out that it wasn't tolerant of African Americans, which it excluded until my class finally graduated, some African Americans. But it was very good for other minorities, who were not always welcome in society, that is, in certain institutions. So Jews, for instance, were accepted in large numbers, and the school has benefited from their philanthropy over the years.

INTERVIEWER: This is Sidwell Friends.

KHOURY: Sidwell Friends. It is known, of course, best known for the presidents putting their children there, or vice presidents putting their children there, in the case of Al Gore and Richard Nixon. But that was privileged. Then I, it's a Quaker school, moderate, liberal, tolerant, and it gave us a terrific education and some of my best friends in life are those friends from those days.

INTERVIEWER: Lots of children of diplomats, or--

KHOURY: Numbers of children of diplomats. Mainly children of elected officials, and you know, secretaries of defense and the like. So there was some transience. New administrations came and went. But that's the world I grew up in. It's not a world of wealth. It was a world of influence, that was it. I want to be very clear about that. It's not the wealth of New York City, not Washington in those days, never. But it was the world of government.

INTERVIEWER: Did you travel to Lebanon when you were growing up?

KHOURY: Yes, we did. I wouldn't say all the time. My mother had to go back from time to time, though, she was in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for 25 years. We did, and I had a large family there. Most of whom have left, though I'm deeply involved with Lebanon and with the American University of Beirut. I can talk about that later, if you're interested. But yes, so I do go back. In fact, I just was there this past week, and came back Saturday from Beirut.

INTERVIEWER: Did you know when you were growing up that you wanted to go into history? Was that your favorite subject, and did you read lots of history books while you were in high school or junior high?

KHOURY: When you have a privileged education like this, you get a lot of great history teaching. [INAUDIBLE] my calculus, my math teacher was an MIT graduate. I taught his grandson here, I'm privileged to say that. He also taught me chemistry. But I had a lot of history, and it was clearly my best subject, the one I liked the most and I embraced. I never thought I'd become a historian. I was more, I would say, somewhat of a scholar, but as much an athlete. I wanted to play sports, and so I went to a small college where I could play three sports. Or I thought I could play three sports. I did that for a while, and realized I could not keep it up. But history meant a lot to me. But I thought I was going to follow my father into the law. It was a default kind of thing. It wasn't that I was embracing law as a subject. But it was something I might be pretty good at, but wouldn't know for sure. At least I knew something about it through him.

But I grew up in the Vietnam era, and the era of Civil Rights, and the 60s, mid to late 60s, were transformatory. I was transformed. I went off, during my college years at Trinity in Hartford, to the American University in Beirut, which is my family's university, where many of them were educated. So I spent my junior year, and that's what transformed me. I had not much interest in the Middle East until then. Call it identity crisis, or the search for one's identity, that probably lay at the bottom of it all. Also, they admitted me, which was nice. I mean, that helped.

I came back, and I knew I wanted to be a historian of that region. I buckled down, and was able to liberate myself from my parents. Because they could afford to send me to school, I was dependent on them, I couldn't get a scholarship. But at graduate school, and it would come back to how education is financed, graduate was more merit-based, at least in those days, I hope it still is. I got a scholarship to Harvard, and went there.

INTERVIEWER: You went right from college--

KHOURY: Right from college and right into a PhD program. I had had enough Middle Eastern history courses, and some language training, you know, sufficient to be admitted into a doctoral program. I never did a Master's. It still took me nine years to get out of Harvard. I was two years below the mean for my program. But those were days, also, where funding was very generous. I spent half of my time at Harvard abroad. Two years at Oxford, a couple of years in the Middle East, doing research, in France as well. It was a good life, in the 70s.

INTERVIEWER: What was your final dissertation topic?

KHOURY: Right. So I wrote about, I wanted to write about Egypt in the interwar period and nationalism, but when I got to Oxford as a fellow from Harvard, I found someone coming back from Cairo, an American who was at Chicago, University of Chicago, who had basically done the dissertation I thought I would do. It was also about a bank. Some political economy, really, is what I wanted to do.

My supervisor, who had taught me at Harvard but was at Oxford, said, have you ever heard of Syria? I mean, jokingly. Of course I'd heard of Syria, I'd traveled there a bit. Then he said, this is, you know, the archives are opening up, this is where the French were, and maybe you could get ahead of the market, and get in there, and there's a great topic in the interwar period. It turned out very few had written about this. So I wrote about Syria under the French in the interwar period. Again, it was about nationalism, and there was a strong urban political economy bent to it. It helped to shape my career, no question about it.

INTERVIEWER: But you didn't veer off into political science or international affairs. You stuck with history as your central theme, I guess?

KHOURY: You know, I probably had a very naive view of life. My mother was a sociologist before she joined the foreign service of Lebanon. She spent the last 15 years of her life as a professor at George Mason University teaching international relations and law. She had her PhD and went on in that area after doing sociology. I always found diplomacy and international relations and the like soft. I mean, really soft. That may be my own bias. I adore my mother. I just visited with her on mother's day. She's 94 and going strong.

But the field, I tried it, I took courses in it, it just didn't interest me. Maybe I just had it wrong. Something historical, in depth, looking for evidence, the search for evidence, spending times in dusty archives, trying to bring this evidence to the table, shaping it in some narrative that made sense in some semi-coherent way, was what excited me. So I went that route, and I don't regret it for a moment. Not a moment.

INTERVIEWER: Were there jobs for historians when you came out of graduate school?

KHOURY: So maybe it was good that I took so long to graduate, because the trough for PhD's was 1975, when many, many people who were in graduate school with me basically bolted. Went to law school or business school. They were smart enough to get into the Harvard Business School or Stanford, so they could make the transition. I stuck it out, maybe because it was the Middle East field and most of the young people I knew who were bolting were in American and European history, where there were almost no jobs, it turned out.

But I'll tell you in all candor, I think I got a job here and at Stanford, those were the two best places I got jobs in the year I finished, largely because of the Iranian revolution. There was a sudden recrudescence of interest in the Middle East and in Islam, and I got lucky. Very lucky. One, that MIT took me. It was no real issue for me, between Stanford and MIT. I knew this was the place I would prefer to be at. So I went with fear and trepidation, I had no idea what was really like. But it was in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and I'd heard of some faculty here by then. My parents knew what it was, too.

INTERVIEWER: Although it would be a very different job from a historian at Stanford, I imagine. In other words, you wouldn't have the PhD program. That didn't put you off?

KHOURY: That's a great point. So it made me a bit uncertain, when I got here. I didn't look very closely at that. I just felt I was lucky to have a job, and I didn't have to leave Cambridge. Stability, as I said, was very important. I didn't have to leave my apartment, the whole thing. But what I discovered was, and really, I think it's probably why I ended up in academic administration, if you're in a small unit, where the center of the earth is not around you, you're not at the center of the earth, the way you learn is by reaching out across boundaries. I have the kind of personality that allows me to reach out. I mean, I'm more gregarious than introverted. I wish I were a little more introverted, actually. I'd probably be a better scholar.

So from early on I got involved in committees, started meeting people. I started teaching in the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture in the School of Architecture. They saw I had real expertise in cities, and so I was giving the, you know, the introductory graduate course with the professor of Islamic architecture. I did that for a number of years. Then I started getting PhD students.

In political science there were a number of students who wanted to do work about the Middle East, but there were no real specialists, so they would come to me. The departments made me, not half time, but two of my four courses were in political science. This way I got graduate students, and began to supervise doctoral students, in that way.

Harvard was my other back-- I felt, pro bono, I should give something back to Harvard. There was no senior person in my field at Harvard, so many of the people working on the Levant area would come and do their doctorates with me.

INTERVIEWER: You weren't worried about, is all of this going to add up to tenure? In other words, what does it do for the history faculty and the humanities department at MIT that had to make that decision?

KHOURY: You know, my colleagues here are fabulous. A number of them are still here, who helped me get tenure. Because you don't get tenure on your own at an institution this tough and this great. People are there, finding you support, getting you research grants, helping you, teaching you how to do it. So I owed them a tremendous amount. They gave me the latitude. I think they wanted to keep me, and they feared, in my position, if I left, who knows whether the then dean would say, should this position in Middle East, why Middle East history? Why not another Americanist, or Europeanist? At least students would have heard of America and Europe, right?

I mean, so I think they wanted to keep me, and so they pushed very hard to give me that freedom. My own personality kind of played to that, and it worked out. Though I will tell you, like everyone else, I sweated tenure. Anyone who tells you, it was a breeze, will be deceiving you. That's my clear sense of things, having been dean for all these years and seeing it from the other side.

INTERVIEWER: So MIT represented stability in terms of being in Cambridge, but a very different institution from Harvard and Trinity. Do you remember what your first impressions of it were? So you landed here and thought, oh my goodness?

KHOURY: Yes. So my first impression, and maybe it's a problem with having been a local boy, that is, just up the river, I came down to this place, and I do recall that I went through my interview, and gave my job talk, and all that seemed pretty good, worked well. Then the head of the Search Committee said, I want you to meet a historian who wasn't able to come to your talk, and hope you enjoy him. I thought, well, this is nice, why not. The man was almost abusive. I mean, I couldn't believe how arrogant-- and making comments about the field of Middle East history. I did ask myself, at this moment, am I going to have to live with him? The one thing of growing up in a privileged world, is you're not naive, I mean, you tend to know humankind pretty well. So I said, I would not really want to spend a lot of time with this man. I later had to retire him, as a dean. But he didn't hold it against me in the end.

My first impression was the roughness of the place. I had been used to the gentility of a liberal arts college and of a Harvard. I found people a little rough around the edges, and I didn't know what to make of that, it wasn't my style, I'm not pretty rough, I mean, I wish I were tougher. But so I thought, maybe I have something to contribute here. Not diminish what MIT is about, but bringing something a little different. Not just I, but most of us were educated at Harvard, or you know, one of the Ivies, in the history department. I think we all felt that we had something to contribute. Not a civilizing mission, but a breadth mission. Bringing breadth to our student body. Opportunities for greater breadth.

INTERVIEWER: You're talking mostly about the students themselves?

KHOURY: Yeah, the students. Brilliant, but a little rough around the edges. Unwashed, I think. That's fine. Much smarter than we were as individuals, you just felt it in the room. When they got interested in something, you saw minds-- I have never encountered brilliance the way I, what I've encountered with MIT undergraduates. Graduate students, you know, they're great. I don't mean to take anything from them. But it is just unbelievable what exists in this undergraduate student body.

INTERVIEWER: Were they interested in history? How many?

KHOURY: Well, eventually I had, you know, I prided myself on being a good lecturer. I had about 40 to 50 students taking my course within two or three years. When I arrived I had lectures prepared for 100, and I got two students in my class. Two.

INTERVIEWER: This is a class called, what?

KHOURY: Introduction to Middle Eastern History. You know, you would have thought-- and the Iranian revolution was still flaming, This is 1981, things are still, you know, hostages and everything. It was a rough time. The Middle East was on the front page, between that and Lebanon it was front page on the *New York Times* every day! I don't know why I keep mentioning the *New York Times*, but it is the paper of record. So I thought I would get many more. You had to build up a reputation in the humanities and some of the social sciences. Because these are not requirements for students. They will fulfill a requirement, but they don't have to take your course to do that requirement.

INTERVIEWER: Did you do any kind of marketing, or was it really just a few years of word of mouth?

KHOURY: Word of mouth, it really was word of mouth.

INTERVIEWER: Did you end up with any history majors at undergraduate?

KHOURY: Very, very few. I mean, I would say in the steady state, there might be five. By the way, we didn't introduce history as a formal major until 1990 at MIT. You could major in it, but it was called humanities. You could do it a joint degree with engineering or science, a 21H, E, or S, but we really got these named history, literature, writing, et cetera, in 1990, we passed. I was the associate dean of the School at the time.

INTERVIEWER: How much has MIT changed since you first arrived? What do you think are the biggest changes, and what do you think is still mostly the same?

KHOURY: So I would argue, the most positive change I've witnessed, can't say experienced but observed, is the much larger number of undergraduate women, I'd like to say graduate women as well, but undergraduate women at this institution. I talked with a former president of Dartmouth two or three presidents ago, who once visited me here. I asked him what happened at Dartmouth when women, when Dartmouth went from the largest all-men's private institution in America, 4,000 men, to a co-ed institution? He said, actually, it was terrible. You would have thought things would have gotten better. Maybe today they are better. But then he said, what he experienced was, you got women who were very much like Dartmouth men, you know, outdoors, beating their breasts and drinking a lot of beer, because they wanted to be at Dartmouth and were excluded from it. So this was their opportunity to join their brothers, as it were. Or, you had women whom in order to survive had to basically learn to live in that culture and survive it, and were not happy with it.

I would argue that what's happened here, and again, it's from observation, that's all, and from talking to students, is the culture is a lot healthier, there is much greater respect on the part of young men students towards women, they realize that their capacities are just as great, if not greater, as the men, in science and technical fields, like they've always known, it's never been an issue in the humanities and the arts and even many of the social sciences, though not necessarily economics. But I think they've now seen, you know, that women have just as great capacity. It's great socially for them, too. Poor Wellesley College has suffered a bit from that as a result. Our sister school. But I think that's the most profound cultural change, or societal change, I've seen at MIT.

I think the quality of undergraduates we're getting, not the intelligence of undergraduates, but just the breadth of, the students we're getting are just able to do a lot more. They're interested in science and technology, and yet they have the capacity to do almost anything really well. It reminds me that we're no longer producing the best engineers in the world or the best scientists. We've only produced some of the best, right? I mean, it's arrogant to say that we're producing even the best engineers. We produce among them. But we're producing the leaders of tomorrow. I mean, who have, who are acquiring the skills, and think here's where the humanities and the arts really fit in with the social sciences and help add value, but we're producing the opportunity for people to go on at any walk of life and be really successful, and contribute something. To me, that's, I've noticed that change in 30 years of teaching at the Institute. It's not an IQ issue, if I can even use that word and still walk out of this room. It just isn't. It is a breadth issue.

INTERVIEWER: Despite MIT's great strengths in these areas, the humanities and the arts and the social sciences, they're often overshadowed by MIT's reputation in science and engineering. People outside of MIT sometimes express surprise that these fields even exist, let alone that they're so strong. Did you encounter that very much during your tenure as dean, and did you see it as a problem, and try to address it?

KHOURY: MIT has the strongest brand name of any research university in the world. There is nothing comparable. Harvard's name may be as well-known, worldwide, as MIT. Perhaps even better-known. I don't know. Again, the further you go away, the better we're known. But I can't think of two words with a conjunction between them that describes the core of Harvard. Whereas I can say science and technology, or science and engineering, and you'll know, and everyone will know, what I mean. That is so powerful that it is almost impossible to, and I'm not sure we want to, either, almost impossible to redesign that brand in a way that will allow other areas to get as much credibility, as much attention, at least, worldwide.

Today at the Creative Arts Council the former dean of Sloan, Bill Pounds, who is a person who has been chair of the Museum of Fine Arts, and chair of the board of WGBH, and advised David Rockefeller and the Rockefeller family, and he's done many, many different things and is quite well-known outside of MIT, not just within, said, try it at Sloan. We even have a name. It's remarkable how difficult it is, how few people really know that the Sloan School of Management exists at MIT. This would not be the case with Harvard Business School, if I may. Now, we're much smaller than Harvard Business School, but getting that name out there is hard. The Media Lab has managed to figure out how to do it. Notice it's not the media arts and sciences department or program, which was the academic road, it's the Lab, it's the research home.

So I struggled with this as dean. I struggled with it as associate provost. I don't want to damage our brand. I don't want to tamper with it. I worry about that. At the same time, I would love our administration, of which I'm a member, and maybe I'm a failed remember in this way, to figure out ways of giving greater recognition to the arts and humanities and social sciences than we do. Not be, you know, worried that we're going to damage it by pushing it a little more. I don't want to call this affirmative action, because I really think that's not what we're talking about. But it really is, admit where there's excellence, and don't fear stating it to our Alumni, and to our Corporation, and to others.

INTERVIEWER: But I mean, the excellence is certainly very visible. I mean, if you look at the wealth of Pulitzer Prize winners among the humanities faculty, for example. You have Pauline Maier, and John Dower, and John Harbison, and Junot Diaz, and you have your Nobel Prize winners in economics, and the intellectual giants in philosophy and linguistics, and they must all get showered with offers from other universities. How does MIT manage to attract and hold people this caliber who aren't in engineering and science and with that overshadowing effect going on?

KHOURY: Great question. So I think one attraction is any educated person knows, this is one of the two or three most exciting research environments in the world. University environments. Maybe the most exciting. Certainly best known for its innovation, for thinking about the present and the future. Anyone who is interested in kind of marching with the times, I think, would find MIT at least worthy of visiting. Spending time at. Check out the experiment, OK, and see if it holds for you, if it really is tried and then tested and it works.

I also think anyone who looks around in my area, or in the wider humanities and arts and social sciences, I mean the two greatest research universities, in my opinion, anywhere, happen to be a mile and a quarter from each other. The greatest medical center in the world, when you add that, and it's an academic medical center with academic research, academic hospitals, teaching hospitals. Then you have all these other institutions.

So it is very hard. I mean, you're willing to sacrifice a bit, I think, to be at a place like MIT, knowing that your field is not most central to the life of the Institution or its reputation or future, because you're in this exciting milieu in a wider world. You're compensated quite well. I don't want to exaggerate, but you're compensated quite well. But you have a lifestyle, and you're hanging out with, spending time with, some of the smartest people anywhere. That's a tremendous attraction.

Also, we have been ahead of our time in accepting faculty whose ideas are far out and not the orthodoxy. They eventually at times become the orthodoxy, and we're very proud of that, and they become very famous. So a Noam Chomsky can be on the outside because of the field as it was in the '50s, of theoretical linguistics, and today it is the orthodoxy. He, with other colleagues, brought that methodology and framework of analysis to this campus, and made it happen. He's not alone. He maybe the most famous, for other reasons, not just for linguistics. But others have done that: Paul Samuelson in economics.

What I worry about, and we all worry about, who are the next Samuelsons, and Chomskys, and Solows, and Jerry Friedmans, and so on. I mean, where will they come from? The fact of the matter is, we're producing them, or they're coming to us. I mean, I feel it. I used to worry about that a lot more than I do today. But as an older person, I'm on the older side of the faculty now, I can see these young people doing the same things! Inventing fields I don't quite understand, but they're doing it, on our campus. That's an attraction. For humanists, to be in that milieu, that's a very attractive opportunity.

INTERVIEWER: Is it a different kind of humanist? Is there's something quirky about someone who will enjoy that, rather than wanting to run for the tradition of a Harvard or Stanford or Yale?

KHOURY: So the biggest issue for my kind of people, as it were, the humanists you're talking about, is doctoral training. You have to have an ego that says, I can somehow figure out a way to have an advanced research world around me, doesn't have to be too extensive, without having my own doctoral students. This isn't the case of social science, it's the case of the humanities. You have to have that kind of ego that says, I'll figure out how to do it.

So if we were in Iowa, in the heart of Iowa, it would be very hard to do, frankly. You can do it in this town because of the externalities. The opportunity to cooperate and do collaborative work with colleagues in and around our town. That's the advantage of being in Boston, in Cambridge. I think a number of our faculty have figured that out.

You also have some faculty, and here it's just, you know, who shows up and who's right. Pauline Maier has never needed that. She's never really taught graduate students, and has not been interested in it. She has a tremendous research career, she's an archivist and a hound for the archives, she needs time for herself, and what this Institution provides is the time. We have small classes in the humanities. We teach large loads, compared to the rest of the Institute, true. But we don't have large numbers of students, heavy grading assignments, and all that. It gives you the time to wed your research to your teaching, and to bring that into the classroom and test it out on some of the brightest young people on earth. That's an exciting proposition for any of us.

INTERVIEWER: I remember talking with one of your music faculty members, a rather prominent one, who said it was a certain relief not to have all those graduate students, because it allowed him to go off and do his composing, and it gave him a real window to focus on his own work.

KHOURY: This is a research environment. If you want to be a scholar, a researcher, and a great teacher, it's hard to find a better place, frankly.

INTERVIEWER: Are there, though, questions of critical mass, particularly when we were talking about there being less awareness of MIT's excellence in areas like the humanities, do you simply need more people out there for there to be a sort of percolating through society? I think the Sloan School decided to expand, partly because they said, no one knew their name, they needed more people out there. Whether they had enough people out there to begin to have the name recognition of a Harvard Business School, I don't know. But that attention seems to be one issue, in terms of critical mass, and also the collegiality, although maybe that becomes less so in a place like Cambridge and a world of internet.

KHOURY: So that's a great question. It really is a great question, because it's one we're debating at this very moment in the humanities with the new dean, who happened to be associate dean when I was dean. She has tried what I tried, and what my predecessor tried to do, and that is to figure out, how can you build units of scale to give you a larger community, right in the domain we work in, within MIT? How can you get these disciplines, departments which are almost sacrosanct, they have to be the discipline of history, of literature, of foreign languages how can you get them to, how can you remind them that the most interesting work is at the intersection of these disciplines today? If they really believe in that, and I think many do, they might be willing to lay down, a bit, some of the tough rules they have about the disciplinary nature of what they do in order to have a wider community of interest. It's not easy. So when you can't get it on the campus, in a small humanities-- you find it up at Harvard or at BU or BC or Tufts or whatever. So that's what I met about the advantages of Cambridge and Boston. But we want this, first and foremost, on our own campus. That's what we're working to try to do.

Here, science and engineering are helping us, because there has been tension between science and engineering ever since I got here. suddenly, they're laying down their swords, as it were, and saying, our future really is in combining. So the Koch Center Institute for Cancer Research, I mean, it's basically, someone has to do the basic science, and then who's going to deliver what we learn, right, into the human body? That's what the engineers can do. So there's going to be a lot more cross-disciplinary fertilization. There already is, and with the right facilities, and I come back to that, you might be able to do it.

I think what the humanities and the arts are wanting, or don't have, are the kind of facilities that would encourage this scaling up, as it were. Basically, reorganizing how we do humanities. There's no reason for MIT to pretend it's Harvard. We're not. Nor should we ever be, in the humanities. If you want to be at Harvard, you go to Harvard, and some of our colleagues have gone as a result. Because that's what they want. They want a formal PhD culture that's in their image. You're producing students who say, I'm working in your area, and you're my teacher, and I'm going to go on and be like you. That's fabulous. There's nothing wrong with that. We all have egos. But that's not what we're about, nor will we ever become in the humanities.

We can scale up and perhaps start doctoral programs that would be revolutionary, new, exciting, but not discipline-bound. Or departmental-bound. We're not there yet, though STS was a step in that direction that many people scoffed at, and maybe for good reason, for the ways it was created, but today I think people now look at it, are beginning to look at it, as something very creative. Because here's an opportunity to build across, you know, amalgamate, bring together, folks from different disciplines who can live in the same house, can live under the same roof, and collaborate.

INTERVIEWER: That's the science, technology, and society program? Does that exist in a school at MIT?

KHOURY: It's in the School of Humanities. It's a separate department, but it has a doctoral program with history and anthropology. While there are tensions at all times in this program, it attracts and produces the best graduate students doing the history and social study of science and technology in this country, at least, which probably means anywhere. So they managed to do it in the little humanities at MIT! Yes, science and technology are at the core of it, so I don't want to-- we need to play to what's strong at MIT. That's what I meant about the arts heading definitely in that direction. I would argue humanities, through comparative media studies and others, have headed already in that direction. That's our comparative advantage.

INTERVIEWER: Although your interest in the Middle East certainly wasn't technology, you did find places and people to collaborate with.

KHOURY: Absolutely. You don't, you know, I'm an enrichment, right? I'm in an area they didn't have before. So they bring me in, it could have been anyone to do what I do. But I'm not the core of the humanities, even. The person who succeeds me, if they hire someone to succeed me, that person might well be doing work in Islamic science, which is a very interesting field. It's a big field, actually, growing. With funding.

INTERVIEWER: You mentioned the core curriculum a little while ago, and the fact that all MIT undergraduates are required to take, I think it's still eight courses in humanities, social sciences, and the arts, as well as certain math and science courses. There have been repeated attempts in the past couple of decades, I guess, to reshape these non-math and science requirements. Can you talk about that part of the curriculum and how it's changed?

KHOURY: Yes. So when I first started here, there was a, almost an amorphous distribution system in the humanities. It was called the HumD system, humanities distribution, where almost any course you designed, counted. I mean, you would just make the case.

Today, under the latest reform, which is just being implemented, we're basically removing the title distribution, which I think confuses people. What we're trying to get at is some sort of curriculum that allows us to put blockbuster subjects in most of our disciplines as the introductory level subject that will, and they don't necessarily have to be discipline-bound, OK, they may be a challenge, a theme, some thematic subject, but that would be led by members of a department or two departments that will knock the socks off of our freshmen, get them excited about, not just the information they're learning, but the methodologies. Why we learn the way we do in our disciplines.

If we're successful at that, and we have some examples, I've been teaching really just one or two lectures a year in a course on revolutions. Now, revolutions are hardly new. But the way this course is designed is really very, very innovative, in the way you can get eight or nine faculty to run a course, and the students actually feel they're talking to eight or nine different faculty. It's not just wheeling someone in and wheeling the person out, but there's continuity in the subject. You're talking about all kinds of revolutions, not just the historical type that a historian might teach, but the technical revolutions that occur, and so on.

I find that if we can develop more of those, and that's the aim of the new curriculum, we will, I think, engage these very bright young people we get here from day one to value what we do. It's really valuing what we do. Most engineering faculty would say, if you're going to take a course in the humanities, arts, and social sciences, take an economics course, OK? Economics is the most popular and the dominant social discipline. There's no question about that. It's tremendously successful. But we know there are other things that are also very, very exciting!

INTERVIEWER: Plus, if there are eight semesters' worth, they're not likely to take eight semesters of economics! You'd major by then, I think.

KHOURY: Right. You could almost major in it with eight. You could certainly minor in it. They do minor, in large numbers.

INTERVIEWER: Are they still being asked to spread their eight across some different fields, or could they do them in one?

KHOURY: No, they can't do it all in one, no. There has to be distribution. In fact, we've finally gotten the five categories that are called humanities, arts, and social sciences down to three called humanities, arts, and social sciences. So it'll be a lot easier for students, and really for their advisors, to advise. What's hard--

INTERVIEWER: Most of them are in your former School, but not all of them? They can take some courses in--

KHOURY: Architecture and Planning is the other major home, and it's not a significant as--

INTERVIEWER: Some art history, photography--

KHOURY: There's a doctoral program and an undergraduate program in history, theory, and criticism in the School of Architecture. Terrific humanities program, frankly.

INTERVIEWER: If you could wave a wand and prescribe what you would do with the eight courses, what would you do?

KHOURY: What would I take, or what would I do? Prescribe for others?

INTERVIEWER: What would you prescribe for others? But the question of what you would take is sort of interesting, too.

KHOURY: I wouldn't take all history, I can tell you that. I mean, if I had to do it again, I would have taken the economics I did take as an undergraduate a lot more seriously. I really, I've learned a lot of economics basically by shepherding promotion and tenure cases, and learning to read some of the most exciting work being done. Not all of which I grasp, though I'm better at it than I am at linguistics, I've found. But I think I would like to see subjects that are able both to shine positive light on the disciplines we do teach here, and at the same time show where the excitement in these disciplines are. Which I would argue are on the margins of these disciplines, at the intersection other with other disciplines. How do you do that? Can you do that with freshmen? But I would like to see more subjects of this kind sprinkled through the curriculum, so that you can go out maybe in stages or in phases. You'd still distribute yourself across humanities, arts, and social sciences, but you're learning why interdisciplinarity, and here it is, what you're doing is you're bringing the great research enterprise that our faculty are engaged in, into the classroom even more wholeheartedly, more concerted. So that's not easy to do. It requires a lot of work. But if we're moving in, that's where 21st century education ought to be in the areas I know best.

INTERVIEWER: So if you could take a couple of courses at MIT right now, what would you take?

KHOURY: I think the first course I would take, and this would be outside the humanities, arts, and social sciences if I may, I would love to see if I could get through Introductory Physics. I never had physics. I like mathematics, and I know you have to have a certain amount of mathematics to do physics, but I have no idea if I would even survive past, you know, lecture six, or class six. But I think that is an absence, a void in my education I would love.

I love chemistry, so if I could take intro, 5111, or 3091 with these great professors, if Bob Silbey taught me chemistry, the former dean of science, I would be so thrilled. Because I've heard from students for two generations now, three, what a great teacher he is and you've got to imbibe Bob Silbey and others. I mean, I would find these great professors, whom I know personally and admire so much, I'd love to sit in on their classes.

INTERVIEWER: When you became dean of the School, quite a few of their courses, the ones that were eligible for the fulfilling requirements, were oversubscribed and students ended up being put in lotteries. Were you able to do anything about that?

KHOURY: No, on my watch, the lottery became a way of life. I was happy to say that it was often first and second choices. You usually got your second choice in the lottery system. But you know, that is the price you pay for a boutique humanities, arts, social sciences education. We're not a state school, we're not a factory, and we will not teach with inferior teachers. The classes have to be small. That is the magical thing about MIT in the humanities, arts, and social sciences.

INTERVIEWER: Nice to have students clamoring at the door.

KHOURY: It always is.

INTERVIEWER: Thank you for talking with us today, and good luck with the global problem-solving and all the rest.

KHOURY: Thank you.