

Screenshot from MIT Sloan Executive Education's recent Platform Strategy live online program offering

## MIT Sloan Executive Education pivots to live online courses

Jumping the digital learning curve is forging a whole new path for participant engagement and program delivery.

MIT Sloan Executive Education  
April 29, 2020

Back in early March, before the Covid-19 outbreak was at full tilt in the United States, MIT Sloan Executive Education was preparing for more than 600 participants, traveling from all over the world, to attend dozens of two-day to week-long open enrollment courses on campus between March and June. Like many other schools and programs across campus and around the globe, administrators were forced to make difficult decisions rapidly, and to adjust the delivery model, wherever possible, from on-campus courses to virtual classrooms.

Fortunately, MIT Sloan Executive Education is well-tuned for disruption. Back in 2013, when Hurricane Sandy prevented numerous participants from attending class on campus, the executive education team reacted quickly and launched a new technology platform that connected remote participants to the live classroom by virtue of avatars and a collaborative, "4D" environment. This hybridization of the online and offline experience was a first in executive education at the time.

The MIT Sloan Office of Executive Education has also employed the use of telepresence robotics units for several years, enabling employees working flexible schedules to attend meetings by way of a roaming tablet interface. The robots have also been used by program participants who could not otherwise attend due to disabilities or travel restrictions.

Of course, the extreme nature of the current crisis meant that the most significant digital transformation to date would be required of administrators and of faculty in order to keep courses running.

"While in many ways we were well-positioned for a transition to virtual learning, there was obviously a lot to do in a very short period of time," says Kate Anderson, senior director at MIT Sloan Executive Education. "We wanted to make sure we could provide a high-quality remote experience that would rival the in-person classroom experience and provide a path forward, not just in the short term, but well into the future. Thousands of executives from around the world count on us each year to help them upskill and prepare them to solve complex business challenges, and we need to be able to ensure they can continue to progress. Perhaps now more than ever."

### Tapping into MIT's spirit of experimentation

The team moved quickly to adapt short courses taking place in March and April for a live online experience using the Zoom platform. They let participants know that while there were still many unknowns to be addressed, they were welcome to participate in the experiment.

"As the outbreak worsened and the dates drew closer, I received a notification from MIT that both courses I had enrolled in were pivoting to a remote format," says James Goodnow, CEO of the law firm Fennemore Craig. "The school asked us if we would be interested in attending live online versions of the programs, utilizing Zoom. I was all-in."

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Despite working 18-hour days as he and his colleagues navigated the current crisis, James wanted to find time to continue his professional development. But with the new format, he wasn't sure that to expect.

"Communication and Persuasion in the Digital Age was first up, and it was actually the very first MIT Sloan Executive Education course to be presented in this format, so several members of the MIT staff were on the line, observing. Honestly, I thought it was great! Much better than expected." James says the Zoom platform replicated the classroom experience well, providing ample give-and-take and enabling breakout sessions, where participants were divided into small groups for closer interaction.

"In some ways, the online experience was perhaps better than an in-person experience, in particular for this communication course, which I enrolled in specifically to become a better communicator online. I wanted to learn how to be more effective through tech, Slack, email, and video conferencing. Having the course conducted online forced that issue and made the learning highly relevant."

James also noted other aspects of the format that worked particularly well. "For example, you can see everyone's face. You're able to read the room very effectively. We had immediate access to documents and materials that faculty could send through the chat box." He subsequently completed a second live online course, a two-day program on **platform strategy** in which several additional collaborative features were used to handle mathematical equations and group work.

"Despite my initial skepticism, many of these features aided the collaboration significantly," says James. He also added that the online platform made networking not only feasible, but easy to do. "On the second day of Platform Strategy, we all went around and talked about who we are and what we do, and we picked those threads back up in the breakout sessions. We bonded around the virus situation. The format was conducive to networking in ways I never thought possible."

#### Jumping the curve

While the team at MIT Sloan Executive Education was certainly focused on the participant experience, they also had to ensure the MIT faculty were willing, able, and properly resourced to make the leap to a live online platform.

MIT Sloan Senior Lecturer Hal Gregersen was one of the many faculty members up for the challenge, conducting the April session of his two-day course **Innovator's DNA: Mastering Five Skills for Innovative Disruption** while sheltering in place.

"Changing in-person courses to 'live online' sessions has been a Herculean effort by so many here," wrote Gregersen in a post about his experience on LinkedIn. "I would not have said that I'm grateful for the chance a few weeks ago, but as it progresses, I'm 'all in' to the experience. There is something both creative and disciplined about the process (and the latter is not my strength). It's causing me to rethink how ideas can make an impact in uniquely different ways, and that's been a beautiful experience."

MIT Sloan Executive Education is currently transitioning the majority of their June program sessions to **live online formats**. While the team looks forward to getting to the other side of this crisis, there is a lot to learn and to be gained while forging a new path for participants and faculty.

"The entire exec ed team is on board — everyone is pitching in and pulling it off," says Anderson. "We were already pointed in the direction of developing blended and synchronous online learning experiences that could complement our portfolio of on-campus and asynchronous online programs — in particular so that we could meet the needs of participants who might require disability accommodations or are faced with travel restrictions —but by no means had we planned to accelerate overnight. We're jumping the curve — and landing perhaps on an entirely different one, which we're very excited and optimistic about."

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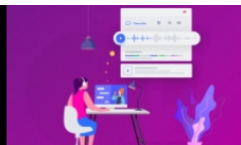
## Thesis defense via Zoom

Emojis, grandmas logging in, and kudos from strangers: How MIT students have finished their PhDs during the pandemic. 🍷



### Second-life batteries

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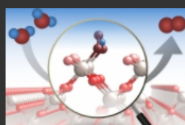
### Reversing Fragile X

Drug compound, tested in mice, could be effective in treating the leading heritable cause of intellectual disability and autism.

Prof. Eran Egozy speaks with *Boston Globe* reporter Grace Griffin about "Comusica," a musical celebration of the Class of 2020 that combines audio and video clips of graduating MIT students to create a cohesive song. Egozy hopes the piece creates "that feeling of coming together and celebrating and basically seeing everyone's smiling, happy faces."

**The Boston Globe**

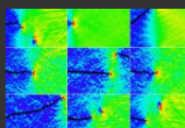
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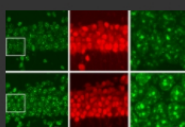


### Making an impact through chemical engineering

Hadley Sikes designs simple-to-use diagnostic devices that could benefit patients around the world.



**MIT engineers propose a safer method for sharing ventilators**  
Suggested design could make it easier to divide air flow for Covid-19 patients in emergencies when no other options are available.



**Study finds that aging neurons accumulate DNA damage**  
Reactivating an enzyme that promotes DNA repair can help to reverse age-related cognitive decline in mice.

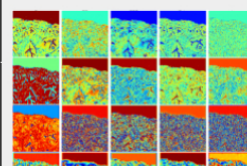


**The changing world of work**  
MIT Task Force on the Work of the Future responds to rapid changes brought by the pandemic.

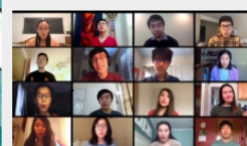
## AROUND CAMPUS



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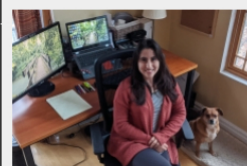
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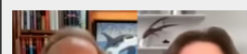
**MIT a cappella group sings through quarantine together** 🍷



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## IN THE MEDIA

*New York Times* reporters Quoc Trung Bui and Emily Badger spotlight how MIT researchers have captured audio recordings of walks through city parks throughout the world and found that ambient urban noise has declined during the coronavirus pandemic. It's almost like the countryside melody coming into the city," explains Prof. Carlo Ratti.

**The New York Times**

A study by MIT researchers finds uncoordinated reopening strategies during the Covid-19 pandemic could cause regional issues, reports Jim Braude for WGBH's *Greater Boston*. "One state's or counties policies significantly affect mobility in other states or counties," explains Prof. Sinan Aral, "and it's not just in geographically proximate states, but often at great distance through behavioral influence over social media or other communication."


**WGBH**

*Boston Globe* reporters Kay Lazar and Felice J. Freyer spotlight a study by MIT researchers that lack of coordination in reopening strategies could lead to increased spread of Covid-19. "We don't advocate a one-size-fits-all policy. We recognize different localities with different circumstances may need different policy responses," explains Prof. Sinan Aral. "But our work suggests that they should coordinate with each other."


**The Boston Globe**

Postdoctoral associate Seth Benzell speaks with Marketplace's David Brancaccio about a new study by MIT researchers that assesses the cumulative risk of opening different types of businesses. "Every time we have an interaction with another human, especially in a dense space, that's a chance for the virus to spread," says Benzell. "So we







Letter regarding efforts to chart MIT's course for the summer, fall, and beyond




"Lean lab" approach enables quick research ramp down  
MIT lab offers a model for cost savings, productivity, and safety; principles may also facilitate efficient reopening in the future.



Exploring the quantum field, from the sun's core to the Big Bang  
Theoretical physicist William Detmold unlocks the mysteries of quarks, gluons, and their "strong interactions" at the subatomic level.



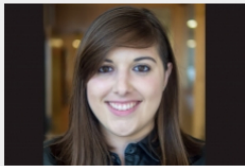
Who gets ventilator priority?  
Paper co-authored by MIT economist proposes a new way to handle medical shortages during the Covid-19 crisis.



Susan Solomon earns Killian Award, MIT's highest faculty honor  
Atmospheric chemist is recognized for her "leadership in working toward real-world solutions to address the global climate crisis."



Microsoft President Brad Smith talks data, Covid-19, and a potential "digital 9/11"



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A scientist turns to entrepreneurship

really need to ration our social contact."

## MARKETPLACE

A study co-authored by MIT researchers finds that more than 200 evictions were filed in Boston before a lockdown was imposed due to the coronavirus pandemic, reports Crystal Haynes for Boston 25. "We know that 78% of eviction filings in housing court occurred in census tracts where a majority of residents are people of color," says graduate student Benjamin Walker.

BOSTON 25 NEWS

Prof. Simon Johnson writes for *The Boston Globe* about how to protect residents and staff of senior living facilities from Covid-19. "State testing programs should: ensure adequate capacity and supplies are in place for polymerase chain reaction testing; add scaled-up serology testing as an important part of the monitoring toolkit; and provide bridge teams for facilities facing a staffing shortage as a result of COVID-19 testing."

The Boston Globe

A new study by MIT researchers examines the impacts of social isolation on the brain, reports Scott Barry Kaufman for *Scientific American*. The findings suggest that "people who are forced to be isolated crave social interactions in a similar way as a hungry person craves food."

SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN

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