



[Home](#) > [Volunteering](#) > [Alumni Leadership Conference](#)

ALUMNI LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

ALC Draws MIT Enthusiasts for Fun, Learning

[Visit the ALC media gallery to see the action](#)



ALC attendees laugh during a presentation on biological engineering at the plenary session.

The puzzle gauntlet was quickly dropped at the Alumni Leadership Conference's K-12 Initiatives workshop. J. Kim Vandiver SM '69, PhD '75, dean of undergraduate research, asked the alumni audience a question about the world around them. What percentage of a tree's growth, from seed to maturity, comes from the soil? Is it 65%, 40%, 10%, or less than 1%? Alumni checked off a ballot answer and turned it in.

(Read on for the answer and how many got it right.)

This simple but challenging question underscored how curiosity about how the world works is fundamental to building interest in science, math, and engineering education.

Robert Blumberg '64, SM '65, who is among key volunteers leading the Association's effort to engage more alumni in

[improving K-12 education](#) in their communities, is optimistic about boosting the number of alumni involved in after-school and in-school activities. "All MIT alumni have a solid grounding in math, science, or engineering," he said. "Some have been away for a while, but working with the school system, we can enhance science education and bring enthusiasm for the things you can do in science and technology."

In addition to the K-12 workshops, the Sept. 19-20 ALC, themed Inspiring Innovation, provided opportunities for alumni to dip into the MIT entrepreneurial ecosystem, work on volunteer skills from fundraising to reunion organizing, learn about shared leadership, meet Association President Toni Schuman '58, and hear from President Susan Hockfield about Institute priorities.

Hockfield noted several FY08 high points: Fundraising totals reached \$435 million; an improved endowment spending policy moderates market volatility; the \$10 billion endowment earned a 3.2 percent return during a down market; applications increased 8 percent and the admissions rate was 11.9 percent; and the incoming class included 91 percent who graduated in the top 5 percent of their classes, 18 percent who are the first in their families to attend college, plus MIT's first set of quadruplets.

ALC in Brief

496 participants and guests
29 states represented
10 countries represented
35 workshops and events
37 Alumni Association awards

And Hockfield noted great progress on both energy and cancer research. "The MIT Energy Initiative was formally launched two years ago, and last year it hit the accelerator," she said. MITEI raised \$160 million from more than a dozen industry partners for projects ranging from solar advances to improving the efficiency of fossil-fuel technologies. The next step will be support from private philanthropy, Hockfield says. The David H. Koch Institute for Integrative Cancer Research, with a new building due to open in 2010, continues to lead research in nanotechnology therapy, metastasis, and other critical areas.

In a session on promoting and sustaining innovation at MIT, Frank Moss SM '72, PhD '77, who is director of the MIT Media Lab and a longtime entrepreneur, described how the Institute's entrepreneurial

ecosystem fosters new thinking. The Media Lab, for example, is now involved in banking. Moss says the foray into finance doesn't betray the lab's core principle—to design technology for people that creates a better future—but rather strengthens it. "We have to collaborate to be effective," he told the ALC audience.

[Read more about Moss's talk.](#)



A festive awards dinner [celebrated 37 honorees](#) including five new Bronze Beaver winners, shown here with MIT President Susan Hockfield. From left: Albert O. Wilson Jr. '38, Anne Street '69, SM '72, Susan Hockfield, A. Neil Pappalardo '64, and Thomas C. Davis '84, SM '85. Not pictured: David H. Koch '62, SM '63.

A workshop titled Fostering and Developing Shared Leadership offered a strategy used by MIT Leadership Center Executive Director Mary Schaefer SM '90 to build membership, increase participants, and develop new leadership for the MIT Club of Boston. A vision, she said, is essential: "A vision helps you stay focused," Schaefer said. "What are you going to do and what are you going to let go?"

Her four steps to bolstering shared leadership were drawn from the MIT Leadership Center framework:

- Sensemaking—collect data, ask questions, and take action and learn from it.
- Relating—start with individuals to build group support, use inquiry to understand others' experiences.
- Visioning—Develop a vision you find exciting then share it; be specific to stay focused.
- Inventing—Align your organization with the vision and goals; engage people in planning and inventing.

Learn more about this and other ALC workshop topics and [download select presentations](#).

And the answer to that question about what makes up a tree? Less than 1 percent comes from soil, in essence a smattering of minerals. The vast majority of a tree is cellulose made up of water and carbon dioxide drawn from the air. And how did the audience do? 45 percent got it right.

Evaluation

For those who attended, the Alumni Association would love to hear what you thought of this year's conference. Your suggestions and feedback are welcome and help make improvements. [Fill out the conference evaluation](#).

Contact us

E-mail us at alc@mit.edu or call 617-253-8246.

The 2008 MIT Alumni Leadership Conference was made possible by the MIT Alumni Association and through the [generous support of our sponsors and partners](#)

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