ICFO



COLLOQUIUM: Data, Narrative, and Allies: A Path to Institutional Change for Women in Science

EBONEY HEARN

February 25, 2026
12:00 to 13:00
ICFO Auditorium

Special Colloquium for Women in Science Month.

ABSTRACT:
Women in quantum sciences and STEM continue to face systemic barriers: the "genius" mythology that codes brilliance as masculine, marginalization that compounds over careers, lack of mentorship, and institutional structures built around outdated assumptions. These barriers can impact recruitment, retention, and career advancement for women in science. Yet meaningful change is possible.
This talk will examine MIT's landmark 1999 study on women faculty as a case study in institutional transformation. The numbers then were stark-women were 8% of science faculty, with only 15 tenured women among 194 men. When senior women came together to

document their experiences through data and narrative, working alongside critical allies, they revealed what the report called "twenty-first century discrimination": patterns of exclusion invisible even to those with good intentions.

President Charles Vest (1990-2004) publicly acknowledged what many had long known: gender discrimination was not a matter of perception-it was overwhelmingly real. His acknowledgment catalyzed rapid action. Twenty-five years later, the transformation is measurable. Today, women are 28% of MIT faculty versus 10% in 1991, and the President, Chancellor, Dean of Science, and Dean of Engineering are all women. Drawing on my own experience entering MIT in the late 90s as a college student-and witnessing this transformation across nearly three decades--I will reflect on what this journey at MIT teaches us about creating lasting change.

Introduction: Lydia Sanmarti, Head of Outreach at ICFO.