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### Faculty fling fake facts in food fight

Professors talk latkes and hamentashen

By **Yuanyu Chen**

STAFF REPORTER

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Latkes or Hamentashen? That was the question this past Wednesday as students, faculty, and staff packed into 26-100 in anticipation of MIT Hillel's annual Latkes vs. Hamentashen debate. Six professors fought it out, arguing for the ultimate Jewish food product: the latke (a fried potato pancake eaten during Hanukkah) or the hamentash (a three-sided filled cookie eaten during Purim).

Professor Keith A. Nelson of the Chemistry Department, the moderator, opened the night by showing how latkes and hamentashen influence MIT, both in research and buildings. Keith claimed that both latkes and hamentashen inspired architect Frank O. Gehry, who designed the Stata Center. "Gehry used the shapes of the latke and the hamentash in the design of the Stata Center," he said.

Representing the latke were Amy Smith '84 of D-Lab, Professor Barbara Imperiali of the Chemistry Department, and Dr. Erika B. Wagner '02 of the X-Prize Lab. On the other side of the room, representing the hamentash were Department Head Eric E. Grimson of EECS, Assistant Professor Marta C. González of Civil and Environmental Engineering, and Department Head Michael Sipser of Mathematics. Each professor was allowed seven minutes to present why his or her treat was superior to the other. After each presentation, the opposing team was allowed a 90-second rebuttal.

In order to decide which team would have the choice to go first, the audience had a chanting battle. The right section of the audience yelled "hamentash" while the left section screamed "latke." The middle section of the audience was asked to decide which side was louder — the latke won. Team Latke chose to go second.

Grimson presented first, giving the audience a history lesson about the pastries. He presented photos of British and colonial hats from the 18th century, noting that the colonial tricorne hats were remarkably similar to hamentashen, and the British hats were like latkes. He said that hamentashen resemble golden triangles, and can be used to construct a perfect pentagram, which many religions believe have the power to protect against evil. Grimson criticized latkes for being circular, comparing them to the Golden Circle, a popular tourist route in Iceland. He pointed out that because Iceland is a bankrupt and cold country, latkes are not powerful.

He also examined the economic impact of hamentash and latke consumption and determined that hamentash are better for global economies while latkes destroy national economies. He argued that a



YUANYU CHEN—THE TECH

Sophia E. Lee '12 and Brian L. Ross '11, dressed up as a latke and a hamentash, engage in a fierce but playful battle before the start of the eighth annual Latke vs. Hamentashen debate held on Wednesday evening in 26-100.

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## Faculty fling fake facts in food fight - T...

latke is similar to mashed McDonald's french fries, which are made of only one type of potato. The last time an economy depended on one type of potato, the Irish potato famine happened, crippling Ireland's economy. The hamentash, on the other hand, uses a variety of ingredients produced by various countries all over the world.

In response to Grimson, Smith revived the image of the latke by presenting the triple bottom line for measuring success: prosperity, planet, and potatoes. She demonstrated how the triple bottom line explains why the latke is superior for a sustainable world. She added that 2008 was the U.N. Year of the Potato, whereas not once has a hamentash filling had its own year.

For Team Latke, Wagner convinced the audience that, because potatoes can be brought to space, latkes make great zero-gravity meals. On the other hand, because "safety in space requires no sharp edges," hamentashen are useless — even dangerous — in space.

Sipser wrapped things up for Team Hamentash with the HamenTheorem, which proves by contradiction that the hamentash is better than the latke. First, the proof assumes latkes are best. Then by obviousness, he claimed that hamentashen are better than nothing, and by first assumption, claimed that nothing is better than latkes. Therefore, Sipser argued that the HamenTheorem proved that hamentashen are better than latkes.

Imperiali used the rules of organic chemistry to criticize hamentashen. She said that the triangle structure of the hamentash is "unreliable, unstable, and duplicitous" because it is like a three-membered ring. She then concluded her presentation with a question to the audience: "Everyone may tell you that a triangle is perfect, but what happens when that triangle isn't a triangle anymore?"

Team Hamentash made the first rebuttal, quickly countering Team Latke's arguments with ones such as "the Challenger disaster was caused by an O-ring and not a hamentash ring." Instead of a traditional rebuttal, Team Latke presented a photo of the Latke-Hamentash fold, a protein which, when rotated, had 3 triangular sections surrounded by 3 circular sections, symbolizing latkes and hamentashen coexisting in harmony.

The debate, as always, ended in a tie, allowing for another debate next year.