Sharp declines presidency

Nominee says research, teaching are too important to leave behind

By Niraj S. Desai and Neil J. Bass

It was announced last week that Phillip A. Sharp yesterday withdrew from consideration for MIT's presidency.

Sharp, professor of biology and director of the Whitehead Institute for Biomedical Research, stated in a letter that he was not willing to give up his research program and teaching duties in order to assume the position.

Before his announcement, Sharp’s nomination had been expected to receive early confirmation by MIT’s Corporation, which met last week. Sharp is widely regarded as the favorite for the presidency.

“Sincere dissatisfactions that people from Stanford might have with Mr. Gibbons,” said a source close to the selection process, “were actually chosen, as a candidate, it was unacceptable for comment.

Sharp's decision was a “shame for MIT,” said a source close to the selection process.

Other candidates mentioned shortly before the Sharp nomination included Dean of Engineering Arnold L. Wilson ’61, a humanities Department Chair Mark S. Whittow, and Jack E. Knott, chief of staff and a professor of aeronautics and astronautics.

Professor Philip A. Sharp

It is possible that the executive committee and the full Corporation will ask the two search committees to resume their review of presidential candidates.

"We only recently stopped meeting [so we can continue without too much of a break," said search committee member Claude R. Canizares, a professor of physics.

"Surely there is a danger of that," but I think it would be a real shame if that were the way most people perceive it," Canizares said. "We are not dealing with a linear ranking," he asserted, saying that Sharp's selection was not an indication that he was better than all the other candidates, but only that he had the combination of strengths and perspectives the committees were looking for.

The search process is about "identifying a small group of individuals -- each of whom would do an excellent job," Canizares added.

"I don’t think that some potential candidates might stray away from a renewed presidential search for fear of being named as second best," he also believed that "a simple numerical order is oversimplifying the characterizations."