OUR STUDENT ADVISER SYSTEM: IS IT ADEQUATE?

With an academic schedule as intensive as the one we have at MIT, and with times being what they are, it is perhaps inevitable that we, as students, should have another student, or another during our stay at the Institute with dilemmas and problems which require the counsel of one more nature than we are.

First, there are the Registration officers, who, to quote the leisures of freshman weekend group leaders (upperclassmen) and insure that each student’s particular problem will receive within a meeting of some sort—next, we have the newly reinstated group of SS freshman section advisors; and finally, in the course of a semester, there is the influence exerted to a greater or lesser extent by freshman weekend group leaders. It is a fact, too, that freshmen are designated to take care of one particular class, say the 2-2. In the opinion of many students, it leaves much to be desired in the way of efficiency and dependability.

The freshman counsellor system, for example, is in operation during short terms and in days during which the advisor is easy enough to contact in daytime—always assuming that the advisor has not happen to be teaching and the freshman has a free period after class hours. It is harder to get to see an advisor who lives in distant Newton, Belmont or Wellesley.

Upperclassmen come across the same drawback in their relations with the Registration officers. Added to this, another problem occurring in most departments: Registration officers are designated to take care of one particular class, say the juniors, which they keep year after year. The result is that just when the Registration office is getting to know the problems of his students, the academic year comes to a close and the Registration officer has to pass the student on to his colleague in the higher year, where the whole process of familiarization starts all over again.

The tenure of the freshman weekend group-leader is at best temporary; the pamphlets distributed to the incoming students deal only with general problems—very efficiently, it is true, but not with the special (their athletics, for example, or any personal problems that might arise; and advisors in religious organizations and clubs with members from numerous colleges in the Boston area will not as a rule be acquainted with conditions at the Institute to be of service in problems of academic character.

In order to improve the situation, we submit the following proposals:

There is no reason why willing members of the faculty should not be upperclassmen. As a matter of fact, this excellent idea has already been put into execution. With one faculty resident for about three hundred students, however, it cannot hope to be of any great success and should be expanded. There is at present sufficient space to accommodate the additional residents, and it is a waste of dormitory space, the fact that a dozen or so students would be obliged to take rooms off campus instead of the campus would not be too big a price to pay for the advantage of having numerous advisors on campus.

The faculty need not necessarily be professors; in fact, some younger instructors and research assistants could do a very adequate job.

The idea of faculty residents should be extended to cover the fraternities. Various fraternity men contacted asserted that they would welcome such a plan, where a reliable faculty men would be available near the houses by taking up residence in the Bay State Road and Beacon St. area; the houses on Memorial Drive could avail themselves of the on-campus counselors.

Group-leaders at freshman weekend should be selected with care and should be willing to remain with their group for the rest of the freshmen’s first year; and they should be officers of the group. This would enable them to act as general counselors. They should be seniors, and in many cases, senior officers are exactly those who can really know the ropes.

Advisory and related questions will always remain the task of the Registration officers and of the freshman section advisors. The present system can be improved upon in several ways.

First, a student should be able to keep the same Registration officer for all his four or five years; it is a sad fact in cases where courses split into options after second or second year.

Second, Registration officers and freshman counselors should familiarize themselves with the course of their section and announce when they are available for consultation.

Third, such academic counselors would be of particular service to commuting students who could conveniently not avail themselves of the advice of resident advisors.

Finally, all groups of counselors should meet regularly to discuss and to agree upon optimum remedies for current problems and dilemmas facing the student.

The Tech, Friday, March 14, 1952