By Robert Dennis

Captain James Lovell's visit to the Institute Thursday was another step in NASA's public relations campaign since the Apollo 8 flight to maximize public support for the space program. In the background, however, lay the inevitable question of what will be the size and extent of the program following Project Apollo.

Astronaut Lovell proved himself to be affable, humble, and, above all, human. In the question and answer session in the Sala de Puerto Rico following a presentation to him by UAP Maria Kivisild '69, he commented on the projected mission to Mars which would take more than one year in duration. On a trip of such extent, Captain Lovell declared, "I'd obviously need more than Frank and Bill along."

On the crucial general question of federal funding for post-Apollo plans, the astronaut, as well as his superiors from NASA, were understandably less candid and forthright. Answering a question on this subject during the press conference prior to his Kresge appearance, Captain Lovell stated that, in addition to its other numerous advantages, the space program was a boon to the nation's "prestige." Considering that American prestige has fallen to miasmic lows in many parts of the world during the Vietnam War, this argument is certainly a valid one since our successful space missions, and the open manner in which they have been presented to the world, have at least won worldwide admiration for the vivid displays of our technological progress.

Yet, one might forcefully argue that the prestige to be gained a few times a year from the space program is worth less than the prestige to be gained from efforts toward correcting the unfortunate view of our nation that the rest of the world sees every day — that is, to concentrate all possible resources toward making our cities more livable, reducing poverty, and eliminating the many forms of violence and strife that have shaken our nation — and its image — in recent times.

The space program, of course, has greatly benefitted the nation in the contributions it has made to many fields (such as medical technology) from work arising from space research. It has certainly been useful in providing employment for thousands of engineers and technicians. Most of all, it is successfully and spectacularly satisfying man's quest both for adventure and for knowledge about his universe and its origins. Opponents many still argue, however, that the space program is a type of luxury item that should be put aside, or at least slowed down, until we take meaningful steps to make America truly a land of promise and opportunity for all.

Opponents of the space program should also consider that its annual budget is only about one-tenth of the total federal outlays for defense of $81 billion. Considering the Vietnam War (which itself comprises an annual drain of $25 billion) and some other questionable aspects of our defense policies, space opponents might be better motivated to concentrate their pressures on pruning the defense budget.

With the moon landing expected sometime this year, the Administration will soon be faced with making the difficult decisions that will determine the future of the space program. An early and lasting end to the Vietnam War would certainly give more flexibility to the decisions, but this unfortunately does not seem likely at the present time. In any event, when the time of decision comes, I would like to see the Administration give top priority to the domestic social problems. For while the space program could conceivably be slowed down somewhat without great harm and the defense budget might be proportionately cut through more foreign policies, our urgent problems at home cannot wait much longer.