Advisory system seeks avenues for change

By Robert Dennis

(EDITORIAL NOTE: This is the second of two articles dealing with faculty and administration attitude toward the advisory system.)

In its guide for its advisors, the FAC officers outline some of the qualities that are all too often lacking in the advisory system as a whole. Some crucial examples: “You must not be a specialist. You must be a generalist more than twice each term. If you only see a student at registration time, you may consider yourself a failure as a freshman advisor. Establish regular office hours at the beginning of each term...Your own knowledge—or the lack of it—if of a student's performance at MIT may well be a deciding factor in the student’s future... By the remarkably simple device of advisors, the counselor can help the student plan his course of study in conjunction with the curriculum and is also interested in the capacity of counselor and friend.”

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In describing the problems of the FAC and its advisory system, Professor Rens and Mr. Buttner note the same serious problem that the FAC has recommended the quality is in recruitment through the departments, and that of those students who are not chosen. Advisors are not merely from such supplementary department...in the overall system will come clear that a true and lasting improvement of the entire system is the proper value of the individuals of the faculty the proper value system.

The Physics Department plans to promote freshmen advising by reworking the literature that freshmen receive. They hope to prepare a new booklet which will be more of a counseling tool than previous works. The booklet's description of the freshmen experience would include suggestions on how to get along with the advisor.

Mr. Buttner reflects that it is a truly difficult task to find the ideal advisor for each student. How would one choose between Robert and Jerome White? Mr. Buttner knows all there is to know about the freshmen, and is interested in the capacity of counselor and friend. The FAC, along with the rest of the advisory system, must face the problem of the lack of a systematic mechanism for advising advisors. A typical problem arises when Mr. Buttner speaks to one of the freshmen advisors, and it is coordinated that the advisor is concerned about his role—but when he talks to the advisor's students, he receives an unfavorable report. Mr. Buttner believes that an extensive feedback system between freshmen and their office concerning the effectiveness of the advisors would “turn off” many advisors who would then see the FAC in its “gray.” (There has been a 40 percent turnover in the freshman advisors over the past year—a rate somewhat above normal.)

The FAC also hopes to possibly improve freshmen advising by reworking the literature that freshmen receive. They hope to prepare a new booklet which will be more of a counseling tool than previous works. The booklet's description of the freshmen experience would include suggestions on how to get along with the advisor.

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