Schwartz and Schey discuss USSP

By Greg Bernhardt

(Editor: note: Two new experimental programs in education are being offered to the freshmen this year. One, called the Unified Science Study Program, has been set up by the Education Research Center. The second, the Experimental Studies Group, is largely the result of work by Professors George Valley, Department of Physics. Both experiments involve a combined approach of personal initiative and close student-teacher contact.

The following is an edited transcript of an interview with Dr. Judith L. Schwartz and Dr. Harry M. Schey, both of the Education Research Center. The story has been left in interviews form to try to capture the rationale of the program from two stars who have been working in the program.

At present, 27 freshmen have decided to be part of the program.

A feature on the Experimental Studies Group will appear in the next edition.

The Tech: What is the United Science Study Program?

Schwartz: We're starting a program for a collection of MIT freshmen who may range in number anywhere from 25 to 40. This program is run for the first five weeks of the freshman year in a very different way. It's run in a way that's not like the normal freshman year. There will not be lectures as such and there will not be recitation. There will be no exams. The students will have an end to end experience in doing much of the same material and setting at a pace they have chosen and taken on their own.

The Tech: Who's sponsoring it and who's working on it and where the money coming from?

Schwey: We view the program as having a deep commitment to the production of material that all students may use. You may argue that not all students are at that level and that it may be that what we export is not so much information as an attitude and approach to the material and how you structure it in order to organize it.

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The Tech: How will students be chosen?

Schwey: The kid will come and think about it and look at it and he might figure out that this seems to be the way for him to spend his time.

Schwey: Well, to begin with, a letter went out to all the freshmen early this summer saying that if they were interested, they could clip the coupon and send it back and we would send them further information. There have been about 80 responders.

Schwey: Let me point out that we have deliberately not made a hard sell. You can imagine yourself the consequences of making a hard sell on a program that offers 45 credits.

The Tech: How will the students receive credit?

Schwey: The student registers for 45 credits and the way we set it up in the Registrar's Office is that that'll be the initial registration, the final number of credits to be adjusted. And then you ask what about the Institute requirements? What the student does in petition to get Institute requirements waived on the basis of what he's done in his course. For example, he may have spent his first semester working on math, so he has 45 credits, but he also petition the Mathematics Department and say, "look, the stuff I've done in math, I might have done in one of the usual physics courses." We view the program as having a deep commitment to the production of material that all students may use. You may argue that not all students are at that level and that it may be that what we export is not so much information as an attitude and approach to the material and how you structure it in order to organize it.

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