Ivy group sets aid policy

By Paul Schindler

Almost half of the students applying to MIT next year have also applied to RPI, Caltech or an Ivy League school. Very few of them will ever know that their financial aid offers were decided, in part, by compromise between the schools they applied to.

The financial aid officers of the Ivy League schools met with their counterparts from MIT on the fourth floor of the Student Center last Friday, in order to equalize financial aid grants offered to students applying to more than one of the schools. Thus, if a student were offered $1900 dollars by MIT and $2500 by Harvard, his case would be discussed at this meeting, and he would end up with a compromise figure being offered by both schools—possibly $2000 from MIT and $2400 from Harvard.

The purpose of the meeting, according to J. Samuel Jones, associate director of Student Financial Aid at MIT is to make the choice of schools easier for an applicant. It has been pointed out that the process used to determine need in the first place, and then the amount of aid to be offered, is complex, as is the compromise process used at the meeting to settle differences.

But in any case, during recent years, MIT has come out on the short end of the stick.

All of the schools start out with the same basic information on student need, gathered into Promus by the Educational Testing Service on a form known as the Parent's Confidential Statement (PCS). The PCS is given a rough analysis by the ETS, which then generates a computer-printout which extracts the information on each student and sends it to every school which bears the student and indicates he is applying to. The schools then apply their own standards to difficult or unusual cases, and make their own determination of need.

But determination of need is not the only, or even the major step in the process of deciding financial aid. The college sets up a policy on the make-up of the "package" that it will offer each incoming student. In other places, the components by other names, but the idea is always similar to that of MIT which, in a fairly unusual combination with a "Self help" package consisting of part-time job and loan.

A problem arises from the fact that MIT's proportion of self help in its "package" is much higher than that of many of the schools with which it competes for students. Cornell and Harvard for example, the schools with which MIT has the most application overlap, both offer significantly lighter self help options than MIT does. But the MIT position, although rather non-competitive, is derived from faculty agreement to offer the same level of self-help to each student requiring aid. Thus, if a student's need is below $12000 (or $16000 next year), he receives no scholarship at all, except travel grant and funds for 2 round trips per year.

At one time the meeting last Friday was held to help to equalize the proportions of the package that each school offered to the applicant they were competing for. But, as Mr. Jones tells it, the schools have "fallen apart" in their ability to supply scholarship-type aid. Now the amount of scholarship is pretty much determined by how badly the school wants an individual student. If they want him very badly, they will offer the competition. Except for MIT which, apparently, doesn't have the money.

The decrease in the scholarship proportion has not caused any great increase in parental discretionary aid. Jones noted that there has almost never been a time during which at least 90% of the financial aid applications would not have liked to receive more aid. As a rough estimate, he pointed out that nearly 30-50% of the MIT undergraduate student body now receive some help from the Institute for financial aid. During any average year, about 60% of the undergraduates get some kind of "package of aid" from MIT which includes, besides the scholarship portion, loans from the Government Insured Loan Program and local banks, National Defense loans, Technological Loan funds, and the College Work Study Program.

But if the Nixon administration has its way, the federal government will no longer support loans to families with a yearly income of over $10,000. In particular, the motivation behind this is to increase the proportion of aid channeled into the 3 to 6 thousand dollars per year income bracket. This kind of approach is considered to be rather simplistic, since it has been pointed out that the cutoff level makes no allowance for parental age, number of children, or family debt structure. MIT's friends in Washington will probably not allow this bill to pass, but the Institute is still worried, and has written to all Financial Aid recipients and asked them to write Washington to protest the possible passage of the bill. Recently, another more liberal bill has been introduced in the House. While not as abhorrent as the administration measure, it still has its unpleasantries.

There is no guarantee for scholarships and loans at MIT is unclear, as the Institute must now play a game of brinkmanship with the federal and state governments. Jones told The Tech that the Institute sees the wave of the future in government aid to private education. Next year's aid from the federal government has not been determined yet; officially MIT is still in the air about whether or not it will get financial aid.

Jones also mentioned to The Tech that the delinquency rate on student loans has been minimal to nonexistent.

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