Forum airs its grievances

By Norman Sandler

A study of approximately fifty women last Thursday sparked a discussion on the pressures facing women at MIT.

The report of the Subcommittee for Women's Affairs at the Institute Equal Opportunities Committee and MIT's Affirmative Action Plan for hiring of women as well as meetings with the Personnel Office concerned job descriptions and comparative salaries for women at MIT.

This was a reaction to the judgment by the committee's informal meeting that the questionnaires (71 out of 428) which had been filled out by women at MIT, the presence of a woman on the personnel staff, (though in May for some of the women present to say that they thought their status did not matter) may in fact be a signal to some others that the system has not been effectively changed.

In addition, the system had been designed to provide a formal and independent committee to examine the grievances of the women involved.

The study was based on a sample of 428 women who had been interviewed by telephone and who had completed questionnaires. The sample was not random and included women from all parts of MIT, including secretarial, faculty, and administrative.

The study of the Subcommittee was attended by members of the secretarial and administrative staffs, as well as lab technicians, who brought to light the grievances that they had been experiencing as a result of their positions.

One of the most important aspects of the report is the fact that the system has not dealt with the grievances of the women involved at MIT. The study showed that 82% of the students were in favor of continuing it in the future year and 38% for extending the study.

The report noted that the support must be taken into account: "It is likely that any drastic reduction in the status of Pass/Fail would not be well received by the student body and might even be interpreted as a loss of faith in the system of examination and faculty."

It was clear that the system reduced the amount of competition for grades experienced by freshmen, but also that there was little lessening of the pressures and anxieties associated with grades and progress. This might be "the result of the strong emphasis on academic excellence at MIT," which makes students extremely sensitive to the evaluation of their course work for maintaining their morale and a positive self-esteem."

It was pointed out that there were not a formal and independent student culture expressing objective values and goals for students, which was the more susceptible to seeking faculty approval.

In summation, the Stanford report stated that "Pass/Fail has had some effect in making MIT a more enjoyable and humane place to work."

Some of the most negative assertions about the MIT secretaries were that they were not being fairly treated, or that their status was lower than that of the secretaries in other universities. The report implied that the secretaries were as important as typists. The opposing view does exist among many students and faculty that it is the secretaries who keep the Institute running.

Another item discussed at length during the course of the Subcommittee's informal meeting was the question of press coverage of future meetings. The report asked for no press coverage for these two-fold. It was that the press is for women at MIT, the presence of a woman on the personnel staff, and determined that for a few weeks, it should be a few hundred higher.

Last year, a total of 342 students submitted their application, compared with 412 the year before and 412 early in 1969.

The rise this year is as difficult to explain as last year's decline. Some of the factors that the economy may have taken a turn for the better (encouraging parents that technical studies still lead to successful careers) or the public may have become more aware of MIT's increasingly diverse approach to education.

One or two significant changes were made in the past year to speed up communication between MIT and prospective college students. One such change now helps high school students in establishing contact more easily with their educational counselors. Many students seem to have made contact with the admissions office even though the system has not been effective.