Alumni to hold small business seminars

By Jim Moody

A series of seminars, workshops, sponsored by the MIT Alumni Association and open to the MIT community, will be held this spring.

The seminar program is now 12 years old. Originally they involved 200-300 participants per year, were organized by an impressive committee, were very expensive, and were conducted by special guest lecturers, experts in their fields, who were paid very high fees.

In 1969, the format was drastically changed. Alumni, many of whom were looking for something to do to help their fellow graduates, took over complete control and execution of the program. The seminars became more toward younger alumni and students, became much cheaper, and were increased in number to the present 14 this year, with 20-30 speakers for each one.

Outgrowths of the program have included several articles in Technology Review, several special reports, and a book on the set-up and operation of small business, written by a 16-man voluntary alumni committee, and soon to be published by the MIT Press.

The spring portion of the program this year includes six different topics, with presentations in Boston, New York on April 18 and 29, The course, consists of all four meetings.

The "Entrepreneurship Workshops" will cover such topics as finance, marketing and product development, production, accounting and control, attracting and holding staff, managerial style, and law, is the four one-day seminars. The workshop will also be offered on the same dates in Los Angeles and Washington D.C.

The second seminar is a repeat of a very popular topic, "How to Start and Operate a Small Business." It will be held in Boston on March 11 and 12, New York on March 4 and 5, and May 6 and 7 in San Francisco. The program will include panel discussions, lectures, and workshops, with give participants the opportunity to raise questions of their own, and will cover such topics as planning and goals, the team and organization, strategies for finance, marketing patterns, and accounting and legal aspects of startup situations.

The third seminar, "Technology and the Economy in the '80s," will be given in Boston on March 23 and 26, in New York on April 21 and 22, and in Los Angeles on April 22 and 23.

The program for Boston will include two panel discussions on "Manpower Needs" and overall economic forecasts, and the remainder of the time will be spent in chosen workshops covering specific fields: aerospace, housing, chemicals, computers, communications, electronics, energy, finance, health care, ocean engineering, and transportation.

The fourth seminar, "The Future Character of the Urban Fringe," will be given only in Boston, on April 29 and 30. Participants will investigate factors which will shape the character of our future living with the aid of technical innovations now becoming available," will "examine the pragmatic facts -- economic, political realities, and political realities," and finally will "prove the options open to us in the future."

Panos D. Spiliakos, Asst. Secretary of the Alumni Association, discussed the philosophy behind the seminar program. They provide a means by which alumni can help other alumni, in the continuing education program, sponsored by the Alumni Association, and requested by many former graduates.

Students can also gain much insight into what life in the real world is like. They can see what MIT alumni are actually doing in specific careers, as well as meet with people engaged in their specific career interest. As one respondent to a post-seminar questionnaire put it, "I came because I knew it was given by alumni who had nothing to sell but their enthusiasm."

An important feature of this program is that all of the workshops, lectures, panels, and presentations are researched, prepared, and delivered voluntarily by MIT alumni. Fees are used only to defray overhead costs. MIT students can participate free of charge as long as space is available. Fees for alumni range from $40-$90, and for non-alumni from $80-$240. Spiliakos pointed out the difficulty, due to time and money, that he has had getting the word out to students, but he absolutely encourages any student to attend. Proposers registrants should contact him at E19-438 or x3763, x7200, or x9922 to reserve a place.

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