Course XXV instills broad science background

By Richard Parker and David Olive

When, but at MIT, do students have at their disposal all the courses offered by the world's finest science departments? At MIT, students do not decide that they want to study science and then go where they decide they want to study science. Instead they want to study science at MIT. In fact, many students who wanted a strong science background but did not want the limitations that existing degree programs imposed. "There are only three major restrictions in ISP," stated Counselman. "One is to allow students to design their own academic programs in fields, like astronomy, that are taught by many departments. Many students at MIT want to receive degrees in a field that spans many of the existing departments. For example, Course XTH was formed by Press and then-provost Jerome Wiesner in order to make possible the "broaden the range of available educational opportunities in the sciences." Students receiving degrees in Course XXV are required to design programs consisting of at least 84 units in the School of Science. That leads to expertise in some area of science not covered by the usual one advisor system. The ISP equivalent of a departmental 'core' program, the interdisciplinary study it did not allow a degree to be given for interdisciplinary study. When the faculty voted to allow a degree to be given for interdisciplinary study it did not limit the program to the School of Science. However, it is only there that the program has become a working degree offering." We need not be unique," stated Counselman. "In fact, I expect the School of Engineering to establish such a department within the next couple of years. As previously organized, ISP is governed by eight professors representing each of the depart- ments of the School of Science. The 27 students who are enrolled in ISP have had to submit program proposals to this committee for formal approval as worthy of the Bachelor of Science degree. Once the student has been accepted to the department, two faculty advisors are assigned to him. One of the advisors works with the student in the particular field of interest. The other is the Registration Officer or faculty counselor who is responsible for the paper work. As a faculty counselor," stated Counselman, "I am in charge of the legalations of registration. It is my responsibility to worry about lab requirements and how students can petition out of them. The only problem in this system is one of communication. The student's advisor might not know what can be done with ISP, though I don't always know what must be done if the student intends to meet the degree requirements. The problem is simply solved by the advisors calling each other up. It takes up more faculty time than the usual one advisor system but the student benefits and that is what we are here for."