MIT offers writing course

By Michael Gazy

Writing is alive and well and at MIT. So if you have a budding or fully developed interest in writing poetry, short stories, essays, technical papers or even novels - MIT's newly established writing program may be just what you're looking for. The new writing courses have been offered for some time at MIT, but the current pilot program scheduled to begin this fall, has certain innovative features that make it a major in writing or take the upper class humanities concentration in writing. Those who have been working on the program for the past several months, drawing up proposals and gathering much student and administrative support, hope will have an even larger impact.

Physics option lost

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One student who took the equivalent level of physics with French's observation, saying the tutoring "made life easier" and that he managed to "instill a more personal touch in the teaching in it. "The writing program," says Don Blackmer, calls for allocating teaching resources according to the decision to cancel the course. The tutorial approach does not work for everyone. In the past two years enrollment at mid-year dropped off by about a third. Some students, said Judith Bostock, coordinator of 8.01, "prefer the anonymity of a large lecture hall." One student who took the course last year concurred that they are called student-teachers rather than the usual name for undergraduate teachers, teaching assistants, because "they serve a much greater function than just grading papers."

In conjunction with the writing program a text Free Writing has recently been completed. Its authors are students, teachers and faculty members from the program. Contract negotiations with a publisher are now underway for this addition, a report is available describing the program in detail. Skier asks students and faculty to read the report and comment on "how the program can be made more responsive to the needs of the Institute."

Another feature Skier hopes will be incorporated in the program is the opportunity to do undergraduate research in the writing and teaching processes. As Skier, Blackmer points out, the program is still evolving. Perhaps its most important purpose, he concludes, is "to dispel the slide-rule image of MIT by serving the many sensitive students at MIT who have a need and want to express themselves."

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