News Analysis

MIT's privacy future: issues

By Mike McNamee

(Third edit last in a series)

Hordes of book-hungry people streamed the Sale de Puerto Rico on the second floor of the Student Center, as the annual MIT Press Book Sale presents its wares to the world. Over 50,000 books are on sale, at prices ranging from 50 to 95 per cent off the marked price. The sale, which started Wednesday, continues today through Friday, and tomorrow, as prices slide toward rock bottom on Sunday.

There should be no regrets.

News Analysis

SHL declares 'Gay Wednesday'

By Gerald Radeck

December 11 has been declared "Gay Wednesday" by the Student Homophile League (SHL) in an attempt to make the student community more aware of the presence of homosexuals on campus.

A variety of opinions on what the committee should deal with and its role in the administration have been expressed. The original proposal for the committee, contained in the 1971 report, suggested a group to "gather information and develop experience about privacy matters with few operational or administrative responsibilities." Both Smith and Vice President Cromartie, however, have said that they believe it would be wise to "update" this charter, allowing the group wider responsibility for making policy decisions.

What will be the new committee's first task? Smith told The Tech that the Buckley amendment would necessarily be "an important issue, but not the only issue" to be discussed in early meetings. Beyond that, he said, the committee might find it desirable to do within the limits of the charter's goals.

Interviews with a number of MIT administrators and faculty in the last week reveal unanimity on at least one point—that the committee will serve "the location of the Institute's consciousness on matters of privacy," according to Associate Provost Professor Hartley Rogers Jr. Beyond that, there is no general agreement on how much responsibility the group should have, and what precise role it should play.

Professor of Political Science Eugene B. Skolnick, who was said to be "unsatisfied with privacy issues by his work as the first chairman of the committee which wrote the 1971 report," said he could not comment to the Tech on whether he still felt the committee could address itself. The director of the Center for International Studies cited six areas which he felt should be taken up by the new committee:

- Expansion of the privacy provisions of the Buckley amendment to former students, faculty, staff, and other employees of MIT.

"The problem with confidentiality of files is that everybody owns blue jeans," according to Ugol, who noted that SHL is open to all students as members of the MIT community, SHL serves as a "social outlet for people who are gay — an alternative to bars," according to Ugol. He said, "It provides help to people who are confused" and tries to "get across to the students the idea that they are not alone on campus.

The president of the MIT Gay Student Association has 25 regular members, according to Bonnell. This year it has a fresh- men member, something which he described as "absolutely unprecedented.

Bonell said that the purpose of his organization is "educational, political, and social." Its "political" activities include "dealing with the Harvard administration, he said.

During its publicity campaign, the group has screened many LSC movies and in campus programs. The group has also circulated a petition around the Institute announcing "Gay Wednesday." Three petitions were scattered around the campus, which is "a symbol of student activism," said the Gay Activist Alliance in the City.

Ugol said that he expects "Gay Wednesday" to be effective but does not expect anything one to be planned at MIT for "at least ten years.

Changes proposed in file-release law

By Mike McNamee

Annexes designed to modify laws in areas that are "not clear" in the Buckley Amendment to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 will be introduced in Congress this week.

The amendments, to be co-sponsored by Senators James L. Buckley, R-N.Y., and Claiborne Pell, D-R.I., will exempt information written for colleges under the promise of confidentiality from the provisions of the original Buckley amendment. That legislation allows students to review and correct their files, permitted by the colleges on students.

Under the proposed changes, confidential information written before a specified date — probably January 1, 1974 — will be exempted from the files review. This is similar to the policy stated by MIT recently, except that MIT will allow review of the letters if the authors give written permission.

The problem with confiden- tialized letters, according to MIT, has been that a major stumbling-block in college's attempts to implement the law has been the Buckley effect Nov. 19, MIT, like many other institutions, has adopted "fictitious rights of privacy" in re- fusing to allow review of files containing confidential information.

The proposed changes would not only make it more difficult for students to obtain information, but would also give colleges the right to withhold information from the authors.

Only five more shopping days 'till Xmas!