Students challenge proposal on grades

By John Salley

MIT's Senate turned out in force Tuesday afternoon to voice their opposition to the recent faculty proposal which would add pluses and minuses to the letter grades they receive.

On the more than 200 students and the handful of faculty members attending a Undergraduates' Association-sponsored meeting discussing the grading issue, only five favored the proposal, while the rest adamantly opposed.

Other grading topics, including registration, grade inflation, and ways of auditing, were discussed, but only as far as being a part of the larger issue of the faculty proposal. The meeting began with a brief discussion of the faculty proposal to advance the drop date one week and create an "add date" next fall. According to Smith, this proposal will "help out the Registrar" and save the Institute both a "good fractional part of a million dollars spent on adds and drops," and "anacronomic letters in \"gearing up courses for students in the system.\"

Although students accepted the creation of an \"add date\" five weeks into the term, a large group opposed moving the drop date ahead to next fall.

Pluses and minuses

\"I've been unhappy with the instructor's grading system since I was here as a student,\" said one student.

Professor Stephen D. Senturia, a Professor of Electrical Engineering and one of the faculty who supported the inclusion of pluses and minuses in the grading system, also voiced his support for this unusual proposal.

"We've been unhappy with the system for a long time,\" he said.

"We have students who have very good pluses in their courses, but have never gotten higher than a B.\"

According to Smith, the idea of adding pluses and minuses to letter grades was first brought up last fall, but turned out to be a non-starter.

\"The vote was 48-37, explained that the proposal would \"make the grading system \"flatter,\"\" he said.

\"but that the current system has only \"two slots,\" and \"two buckets\" in which to put these grades.\"

\"So no, we haven't set a timetable for that,\" he said.

\"We have on the system,\" he noted, \"that the system does have a number of problems.\"

\"The system does have a number of problems,\" he said, \"but we need a new system to deal with this.\"

\"We need a new system to deal with this,\" he added, \"and a way to look at the problem,\" to ourselves yet.\"

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