Grade inflation is a national problem, as well as a concern for many faculty members at MIT. Over the past several years, the number of C's and D's has dropped, while the number of A's has risen sharply. This trend, combined with the fact that many students are going on for graduate work, has led to concerns among faculty and administration. The problem of gauging the abilities of students is serious when trying to compare MIT students with each other, and becomes even worse when MIT students are compared with those from the "outside world." "If MIT students were getting A's at some other school if they weren't here," one student argued at a recent hearing on grading, "why shouldn't their grades be inflated to show their true worth?"

A graduate student at the meeting, however, challenged what he called "distorted view." "I did my undergraduate work elsewhere, and I know that there are a lot of people out there who are every bit as smart as MIT students." Still, there is sentiment that a C from MIT is better than a C at many other schools, and that giving Cs to students will hurt them in competition with students from other schools. "Many decisions which affect graduate admissions are made on a low level, a level where perhaps knowledge of MIT's strengths and weaknesses is not good," Kaplow said.

The major problem with grade inflation, as many faculty see it, is that it makes it more difficult to differentiate between students' work. If all students are getting A's, they say, there is no way of telling good work from bad on the transcript. Also, faculty say, if a student is accepted as a B or C, the extrinsic influence of grades is less than if he might expect a C or D for poor work.

What's being done

The actual work of the latest review of the MIT grading system began more than a year ago, when the Ad Hoc Committee on Grading was approved by the faculty. As the report notes, hundreds of working hours and long, involved discussions at several levels over the past month, the final result of the grade review will not be settled in the near future - perhaps not for several more months.

The debate to date has centered around proposals of the Ad Hoc Committee, which worked for more than a year to bring fourteen recommendations to the faculty in a report published Nov. 13, 1974. Those recommendations, after consideration by the Committee on Educational Policy, were debated at a special faculty meeting called late November for consideration of the grades issue, and at the regular December meeting.

The Committee recommended, in summary: that the faculty retain existing forms of grading; that the "grade be retained in their present forms;" that the mechanism for comments to be attached to grades be established; and the system be clarified.

Also, that changes in grading be made in registration, including prohibiting addition of subjects not included on the final grade be retained in their present forms; that the mechanism for comments to be attached to grades; and that cumulative grade point averages not be included on the transcript. Also, faculty say, if a student is accepted as a B or C, the extrinsic influence of grades is less than if he might expect a C or D for poor work.