New privacy issues explored

The student-faculty Committee on Privacy, formed last fall in the wake of publicity over legislation dealing with privacy of student records, is preparing an interim report to be presented to the faculty this fall. The committee has been studying the issue of record privacy for members of the MIT staff and junior faculty members, according to Professor Arthur C. Smith of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science, chairman of the committee. "We've agreed to work on a report that will go beyond the issue of the Buckley amendment and student records and will deal with new privacy areas," Smith explained. "The basic question we're considering is do we have the same privacy obligation to protect the privacy of staff and faculty as we have, under law, to students?"

The Buckley amendment is the provision passed by Congress in August, 1974, which required schools and colleges to make personal records on students available to the students' parents if the student was 18 years old or older, or the student himself. Although the act was aimed at elementary schools where abuses of records have been reported by the loss of two student members, both of whom left the Institute during the summer, "We've been in 'inactive' mode, and we're still recovering from the summer," Smith said, "but I've been pushed to have new students appointed so we can get going again."

Most of the committee's work so far has been concerned with "operations people" who deal with records, getting their opinions on what privacy rules would mean to them. "One of our problems has been a lack of input from the other people - the people whose records the policy will be concerned with," he said. "It's not an issue many people get upset about."

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Most of the students making schedule changes are freshmen and sophomores who especially need assistance, Smith said. "But I'd be afraid to trust that advisors wouldn't do all that was necessary," Smith concluded, "so we know whether we'd get them all if we left it to the advisors?"

"We have no way of knowing who would actually go to their advisor if we registered that way," Smith explained. "Besides, we do other things like collecting address cards - how do we know whether we'd get them all if we left it to the advisors? "I'm not saying faculty advisors wouldn't do all that was necessary," Smith concluded, "but I'd be afraid to trust that kind of system."

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