Students hit Writing Program cuts

By Jeane Brady

Students and staff members of the MIT Writing Program are processing a proposed budget cut by the Department which would terminate six of the Program’s seven part-time instructors and eliminate its undergraduate Teaching Assistant program.

The Program was informed Monday by department head Professor Bruce Mazlish and Associate Dean Donald Blackmer of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences’ new intentions for lecturers and senior lecturers.

The topics change. But the underlying fight remains the same. It’s a battle between two different views of academic standards in different organizational structures, between different ideas about education. Reduced to its essentials, it can even be seen as a struggle between two differing cultural viewpoints.

The battles haven’t been made any easier by the Program staff’s feelings that the department faculty have opposed them from the very beginning and are still trying to discredit the Program. The faculty aren’t made any happier by what they see as preferential treatment for the Program because of Dean of Humanities Harold Hanham’s promise to give the writing free rein during the experimental early years of the Program and tightened budgets haven’t improved anyone’s attitudes.

"Long-Hairs" vs. "Academics"

"We’ve tried to fight our way along, every step of the way, and nobody’s given us much of a chance,” one staff member told The Tech. “They’ve tried to discredit us, going so far as to say we’re ‘long-hairs’ who smoke dope and fuck students on the classroom floor, things like that.”

"Of course they got a lot of students,” another department faculty member said. "If you ask one of their courses, all you have to do is write and talk about writing. There aren’t any standards and there’s no grading to speak of, and if you take a course one semester, you can be a TA and get paid or get credit the next. It’s a sweet deal."

The Program was set up as an experiment in the fall of 1974 by Dean of Humanities Harold Hanham told the staff it’s a place to try new ideas. - people on both sides admit to being frozen into immutable attitudes. The present system, where proposals are reviewed by six or seven people before they go out, works well when consensus is reached.

The second issue stems from an alleged spying incident at a forum about the deal, in which a Taiwanese naval officer enrolled in a normal graduate program was seen taking pictures of other Taiwanese students at the forum.

Professor of Aeronautics Walter Van der Velde, administrator of the program, argues, "It would be impossible to set such standards in advance. The present system, where proposals are reviewed by six or seven people before they go out, works well when consensus is reached.

By Thomas J. Spisak

Coming into the middle of the debate, the MIT’s Taiwan Training Program is like walking into a petrified prairie forest.

Positions of the participants have hardened to the point where, during Tuesday night’s teach-in, speakers seemed to be talking not to each other but to themselves and their supporters. Well-intentioned, honorable men appeared frozen into immutable attitudes.

Despite the fact that the program has focused on two issues: standards MIT should apply to its involvement in such programs and its concurrent problem of science education; and Institute’s responsibility to ensure foreign students can enjoy the same rights as American students.

Citing possible military applications of the training and apparent Taiwanese duplicity about the backgrounds of the program candidates, some critics have called for written guidelines to prevent Institute involvement in future programs.

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"We’re sure we have the support of the student body on this," Moore said. "We will continue."