New fraternity chapter considered

By Drew Blakeman

If MIT and the Inter-fraternity Conference (IFC) give their approval, there will be a chapter of the Zeta Psi fraternity here at the Institute next fall.

Zeta Psi is a national fraternity with about forty chapters. Founded in 1847 at New York University, it was the first fraternity to start a chapter on the west coast — at the University of California at Berkeley in 1870 — as well as the first to have a foreign chapter, founded at the University of Tokyo in 1879. Among the more famous Zeta Psi alumni is Institute President Emeritus Julius A. Stratton, who graduated from the University of Washington.

According to Associate Dean for Student Affairs Kenneth Brown, ’66, MIT will expand the fraternity system if it were found to be defensible by both the Institute and the IFC.

Browning said that there were two questions that needed to be answered before expansion of the fraternity system can be considered: “Can the system take expansion? And is there enough demand for another fraternity?”

Browning recalled that both these questions were asked last year before Alpha Delta Psi opened its chapter here, and at that time the answer to both was “yes.”

This year, however, the fraternities pledged fewer freshmen than expected. Browning said that the causes of the slow rush would have to be found and that they would play an “important” part in determining whether to add another fraternity.

Browning said that he would use the system expanded if it would make existing houses “more workable.”

Gregory E. McElroy, Executive Director of Zeta Psi, said that “if we get an OK from MIT and the IFC, we will start a chapter here.”

He added that he wanted to get started “as soon as possible.”

McElroy stated that Zeta Psi felt it had a “good product” to offer and that it would have to decide whether or not there would be a “strong addition” to the fraternity system. “We feel the fraternity system here is very good and very viable, and that there is room for other fraternities here.”

Browning and McElroy will meet this week to discuss forming a chapter of Zeta Psi here at MIT. If approval is given, McElroy is hoped that the first “rush activities” can begin during the week of October 18.

According to McElroy, these “rush activities” would consist of, as first, a few parties to attract people interested in a “second floor” of a new chapter. “This is a unique opportunity,” he asserted.

After a concentrated effort in initiating interest in a Zeta Psi chapter, some interest in Zeta Psi at this point, McElroy said he foresees a nucleus of “a few interested students” who would handle most of the organization. He noted that since Zeta Psi would not have to compete with other fraternities at this point, there would not be as much pressure on anyone as there is during the traditional rush week. “People will not need to commit themselves at any time,” he emphasized.

Finding a house for the fraternity may be difficult. Browning said that the Boston building code forbade the use of existing parts of some buildings for fraternity purposes, and McElroy noted that Cambridge is the only visible alternative since other locations would be “too far away to be practical.”

“Housing would have to be found one way or another,” said McElroy. A condition of admission would be for interested alumni from other area Zeta Psi chapters and would hold the mortgage on the house.

Zeta Psi has started four new chapters within the last two years, and all four were “more workable” within their first year, McElroy noted. “I know we can count on our other chapters to cut our coat,” he asserted.

Browning said that two other fraternities have expressed an interest in expanding to MIT, but that Zeta Psi has been the only one so far to send a representative to see here. He noted that there are usually “a few” inquiries every year, but that this year they came “earlier than usual.”

“We would like to present the charter sometime in spring if all goes well,” McElroy stated. He said that a minimum membership for a workable chapter would be “about 35,” although a larger number would be more desirable.