excerpts from the statement of position

Joseph Brown
Denis DeHeunaut
Sanford Kaye
Stephen Reuys

(See story, page 1)

the present crisis

Both Deans explained that while the Report has been "received" by the Humanities Administration, no action will be taken on any of the Committee's proposals until next fall. Blackmer and Hanham did explain that extensive plans have been completed for what is expected to be a "transitional year" for the Writing Program beginning next fall.

The largely positive conclusions of the Report reflected a substantial commitment by MIT to a permanent program in writing, with a major emphasis on student-centered teaching. The events of the past term do not reflect this sort of commitment.

1. Circulation and Discussion of the Report. In May, 1976, Dean Harold J. Blackmer announced at a public forum that "we should try and produce a sensible climate in which to hold a serious discussion of the Report." Institute-wide circulation of the Report, a necessary and logical first step toward creating a sensible climate, has still not taken place.

2. Evaluation of Current Staff. The Report recommended that the Steering Committee supervise the evaluation of all current staff on the basis of the Committee's recommended criteria and the Dean's new "Guidelines for Appointment and Promotion of Instructors, Lecturers and Senior Lecturers." Instead, the Dean appointed Dean Blackmer to chair an ad hoc committee to evaluate only the five new members, members without providing the Report to the ad hoc committee's mandate or its criteria for evaluation.

In November, 1976, after the four staff members met for the only time with the ad hoc committee, one of them wrote an eight page memorandum to the committee questioning their procedures. The committee declined to discuss her memorandum. Two others could not elicit from the committee any discussion of the role of the Director of the Program (who was a member of the committee and who served as liaison between the committee and the Program) either a clear statement of the positions for which they were to be evaluated, or of the criteria on which they were to be judged. They initiated discussions with Dean Hanham in an attempt to arrive at a more sensible evaluation process. In the middle of these negotiations, they were fired. Five other members of the Program, having to two years of service to the Institute, were also terminated without evaluation.

3. A fair evaluation of the present staff in line with their performance as teachers of writing and literature, and in the context of the Pilot Program, the performance of the Institute's writing program as a whole, and the future of writing at MIT. with the participation of students, staff and administrators.

4. The development by the staff in line with their performance as educational innovators. within the educational psychologists, a member of the Harvard Expository Writing Program, which conducted the surveys for the Committee, reported that "Harvard's program does much less with student reading of papers and with student response to each other's writing. We definitely will seek to build more of these features into our program..."

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The Evaluation Committee undertook an extensive examination of the goals of the Pilot Program.. The Evaluation Committee issued an 83 page report with extensive supporting material. The Report "strongly supports the dimensions and achievements of the Writing Program's pilot endeavor.

pedagogy

The student writing that most MIT faculty see is exposition. They are the most immediately aware of deficiencies in the teaching of writing... Donald Byker, the head of the Harvard Expository Writing Program, who conducted the surveys for the Committee, reported that "Harvard's program does much less with student reading of papers and with student response to each other's writing. We definitely will seek to build more of these features into our program..."

toward a solution

That the Writing Program has survived and grown in a break time and in an unlikely environment is not to be taken lightly. It suggests grassroots strength that no "idiot" program designed by a task force and imposed administratively could have developed.

... We propose the following actions to restore reason and integrity to the process of determining the future of writing at MIT.

1. An Institute-wide discussion of the committee Report and the fundamental issues regarding the future of writing at MIT, with the participation of students, staff and administrators.

2. The creation of a Steering Committee of ten faculty "qualified by proven concern for the quality of student writing and by a sympathetic understanding of the Writing Program's mission" to guide the future of the Writing Program and to oversee the transition of present staff.

3. A fair evaluation of the present staff in line with their performance as student-centered teachers and educational innovators, within the context of the Report.

4. The development by the staff in consultation with the Steering Committee, students, and the administration of a structure to house student-centered teaching of writing.

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