Students may suffer from Carter actions

By William Lasser

It may be just a case of paranoia, but college students are beginning to feel harassed by the new Carter administration. First, the President slashed National Direct Student Loans (NDSL) from his fiscal year 1978 budget; the move makes worse, he suggested that students not be given draft deferals if the selective service system were revived. The Congress will apparently ignore Carter's advice and appropriate at least some money for NDSL. Beside, Carter is currently in a series of Presidents who have attempted to kill the NDSL program — President Ford's budget included no money for loans either. The draft problem might be more serious, however, and taken together, these two presidential actions demonstrate a disturbing trend.

The draft plan which has been tossed around by some prominent government officials involves mandatory service for all young men. Some plans include women as well, in either the armed services or in some other form of public service. The latter might include such organizations as conservation corps and groups to clean up the cities.

The merits of the plan, its supporters insist, are obvious. The voluntary army, they claim, is not work- well — its very inefficience of its recruits is too low, and it includes a disproportionately number of blacks. It is argued that mandatory service would cut the army of its ill, lower unemployment in the lower age brackets, reduce crime in the streets and provide thousands of energetic young people who could work for the good of the nation. Some of these arguments may have merit; however, none of them apply to college students. As a group, students are not in the permanent job market; they are not the perpetrators of violent crimes, they would not substantially help out the army, and their time is better spent in college than in any other branch of the military.

This is not an elitist approach. The fears of many of the draft's proponents are that the Vietnam War, which was decided to attend college as a means of escaping military duty. If the program were reinstituted in its proposed form, nothing of the sort would happen; with the alternative of civilian service, conscientious objectors and others would see no need to automatically go to college.

Moreover, Carter himself has said his best place for young men would be a distracting burden. With the demand for specialization and post-graduate education continually increasing, the addition of even a year or two of civilian or military service would force dedicated college-bound students into their late twenties before they would be able to graduate and join the labor force. Furthermore, the break in education — high school or after four undergraduate years — would be detrimental in itself. All in all, a year or two might be helpful, but for most it would be a disturbing burden.

Worst of all, applying the program to college students would be a terrible waste of the nation's intellectual potential. After serving the country, those who would otherwise have gone to college might find themselves too old to go to school. Men and women who could be acquiring the knowledge necessary to eventually lead the nation and provide solutions to difficult problems would be wasting their time in a national service program.

The reincarnation of the draft is at least a few years away. By then, perhaps President's almost casual remark will have been forgotten and reason will prevail. But Carter's perceived tendency to ignore the rights and needs of the academic community is both offensive and, for Carter, politically disadvantageous.

Since the war ended, America's college students have been a quiet group of people, not for the reasons they are politically inactive. Yet, as seen by the storm of antiwar protests in the late 1960's students are easily aroused when their own interests are at stake, and they are not likely to be ignored.

There are two reasons for Jimmy Carter to rethink his statement that college students should not be exempted from a national service program. The first is based on reason — it is simply a bad idea. The second is plain political — before the 1980 election, students could hurt his incumbent's chances at the polls. Judging from Carter's first few months in office, and his previous two-year campaign, he seems to be much more likely to respond to the second consideration.

By David B. Koretz

This is the second segment of a two-part Perspectives. Part I dealt with the history of the Writing Program and of the present crisis.

The problem of Humanities at MIT and at technical institutions in general is an old one, but it has been brought to light again by the imminent demise of the Pilot Writing Program.

The current plan of the Department of Humanities involves a four-fold program of writing courses without emphasis on student-centered teaching that was the primary concern of the three-year-old Pilot Program.

Apparently as a result of pressure from faculty within the department and from certain members of the administration, Harold Hasham and Donald Blackmer, Dean and Associate Dean of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, respectively, as well as Bruce Mazlish, head of the Department of Humanities, have withdrawn the support which they gave the program in its early years.

Without the support and budget of the department, the Writing Program is near its end. With proponents of the student-centered teaching methods — Professors Sanford Kaye and Joseph Brown — out of the way after this year, the Institute will likely be able to implement a curriculum opposed in nature to that laid down by students and educators throughout the country.

Writing part of bigger problem

By David B. Koretz

For the second time in two years, the administration will have abolished a program that had been hard-fought for and generally acknowledged to be effective, but one that went against the traditional doctrines of MIT education. The first was the Department of Philosophy, merged with the Department of Foreign Languages and Linguistics to form the new Department of Philosophy and Linguistics.

Six years ago, Professor Richard Cartwright, head of the Philosophy section in the Department of Humanities, won faculty approval for an undergraduate degree in philosophy and Corporation approval for the formation of a new Department of Philosophy.

Opponents of the move feared that the new department would attract persons interested in philosophy professionally, rather than educators aiming to impart philosophy as a facet of the humanities curriculum.

Cartwright denied charges that the segregation of the section into a department would stifle communication between C'sciplines. Proponents also maintained that departmental status would provide faculty members with higher esteem among professional colleagues.

In January 1976 the Tech reported that the merger with the Linguistics department was in the planning stages. Cartwright publicly offered no resistance to the end of the independence he had once so avidly sought.

Now, the early proponents of the Writing Program have similarly given up. Where does that leave the humanities at MIT?

Here at the Institute, as at every technical institution, the question of properly educating students in the humanities is a prevalent one. Under the guidelines of the curriculum established in 1974, a student can easily graduate with almost no background in the humanities.

Clearly this situation is undesirable, but so was the curriculum required before the changes in 1974. The older requirements restricted underclassmen in their alternatives, but insured that history and literature were included in each student's program.

The administration worrns the situation with its recent cuts. The courses offered in the Writing Program were popular, serving several hundred students each term. More and more students turn to social sciences such as economics to fulfill the humanities requirements. That is unacceptable to students who do not want simply to substitute impersonal lectures on the arts for impromtional lectures in science and engineering.

Student-centered teaching, as evidenced by the turnout for writing classes, is the best way to interest students in humanities. Until the administration and the School of Humanities and Social Science come to this conclusion, humanities will continue to take a very distant back seat to technology here.