Three dept's have new heads this year

By Rick McIntosh

Three departments, Chemical Engineering, Political Science and Psychology, have recently appointed new departmental heads. A fourth, Earth and Planetary Sciences, is currently in search of a new head, with a bid currently out.

Dr. James Wei is to head Chemical Engineering. He is nationally recognized for his pioneering research at Mobil Oil Corp. in the development of nanomolecular theory for the structure and analysis of complex systems.

Although his appointment became effective Sept. 1, he will be fulfilling a commitment at the California Institute of Technology from Sept. 1 to Dec. 1 as Sherman Fairchild Distinguished Scholar of Chemical Engineering. He is expected at MIT the first week of January.

Psychology's new head, Professor Richard Held, is a well-known authority in the field of perception and its development. He was appointed following the drowning of his predecessor, Retired-Lieutenant Teuber in January. Held joined the Department of Psychology in 1963, having served previously as the head of the Department of Psychology at Brandes University.

Held told The Tech that there have been no radical changes in policy. The department is continuing along the lines of the goals set by the retiring Teuber, who headed the department since its founding in 1964 and helped to develop it into an international research center. Because excellence can only be the result of an ongoing effort, Held said Psychology is also looking in new directions. "While preserving what we think is valuable, we are also considering new efforts in teaching and research," he stated.

The department has new (non-faculty) members Dr. David Marr, who brings a new range of skills with his work on computerized models for visual processes, and Dr. Suzanne Carkin, who is proceeding with Teuber's well-known work concerning the visual and behavioral changes observed in people who have suffered brain damage. Held's current work involves the study of infant perception and its development. Additional insights are obtained through similarly oriented studies of monkeys, with which a greater degree of experimentation is possible.

A personal tour of the department with Professor Held revealed studies of everything from vision and language to the neural morphology and physiology of the communicating circuitry of the brain on the structural and functional levels.

Psychology is continuing its collaboration with other MIT groups, including Health Sciences and a new group, Cognitive Sciences. The objective is a mutual enrichment through the sharing of recent breakthroughs, which, as witnessed in the past, often leads to even further developments.

Although it grants only graduate degrees, the Department of Psychology offers various undergraduate electives.

Professor Alan Altshuler is the new head of Cognitive Psychology. He has been a professor at MIT since 1966, except for the interval 1971-75, when he served as State Director of Transportation. Historically, the department has been oriented toward the international level, with comparative and defense-related studies at the forefront. Within the last several years, however, it has become increasingly evident that a substantial body of undergraduates are interested in government primarily as a means of understanding psychology as opposed to the institutional approach or the international focus. In light of this, a program was developed last year with emphasis in American politics and policy. Altshuler (please turn to page 7).