In case you were wondering...

Lefties: fewer than you think

By Robert Steinberg

Contrary to the misconceptions of many MIT students, the Institute does not have an abnormally high percentage of left-handed people.

A survey by The Tech of 100 MIT students found 93 right-handed people, 5 left-handed and 2 ambidextrous students. This percentage of lefties is, in fact, probably lower than the percentage of lefties among the general population. The exact percentage of left-handed people in the United States is unknown. Estimates range from one percent all the way up to 30 percent.

The major reason for this uncertainty is that there is no universally accepted definition of left-handed. Some people write with one hand and eat with another. Are ambidextrous people considered to be right-handed, left-handed or neither? What percentage of things does one have to do left-handed to be considered a southpaw?

For these reasons and others it is virtually impossible to determine what percentage of any given group is left-handed. One thing that can be done, though, is to ask people whether they are right-handed or left-handed. While this does not necessarily give an accurate count of how many people are left-handed it does provide a reasonably good method of comparing the left-handed percentage of one group with that of another.

One such survey of 5,800 New Yorker readers in 1962 found that 85 percent of those surveyed were right-handed, 13 percent were left-handed and two percent were ambidextrous. Those people who feel that MIT has an abnormally high percentage of lefties generally seem to feel that this is so because MIT students are more intelligent than the average. If smarter people are more likely to be left-handed there might be a critical flaw in The Tech's survey. The survey was conducted almost entirely in Lodell Dining Hall during lunch time over the weekend. And, as everyone knows, nobody with much intelligence eats in Lodell Dining Hall, especially over the weekend.

Thanksgiving is coming up . . . you'll be going home. Do you REALLY want to spend the entire holiday weekend telling your parents what happened at MIT this term? It's not too late —