Grades redefined by faculty vote

By Richard Deffy

The Faculty Committee on Grading's proposal to redefine the letter grades given by the instructors passed by a vote of 80 to 49 at the faculty meeting Wednesday afternoon. The move was passed by two votes more than the necessary three fourths majority of those present and voting.

After the meeting, Committee on Educational Policy Chairman Robert Hulsizer said it was "unfortunate" as to exactly when the passed motion would become effective.

The second motion, proposing that grade distribution percentages for the most recent term be posted next to each subject on students' transcripts, was defeated 76-61 after much discussion.

Professor of Management Zeen Zannetos, the grading committee chairman, withdrew the third motion as "not making sense" immediately after the vote on the second motion. This last was a proposal that the Registrar "develop a good system for sorting the information" provided by the second proposal for the "student's academic history." Such information would have been used only for internal MIT purposes.

Hulsizer proposed an amendment to the motion on grade redefinitions, which was accepted as a substitute for an amendment. Rather than the detailed definitions proposed by the grading committee, the CEP suggested the use of "A — passed with exceptionally good performance; B — a good performance; C — a good performance; and D — minimally adequate performance."

The amendment to the original motion was accepted by a vote of 63 to 66. Unlike the grading committee's proposals, this only needed a simple majority to pass. Professor of Philosophy Richard Cary put forth this proposal, challenged the long grade definitions are effective the same as the short definitions proposed in the CEP amendment as they both use relative terms. "Everyone knows a good performance. They are all of little value in determining cut-off points between grades."

Zannetos mentioned that the actual wording of the grade definitions was changed several times due to input from the CEP. The CEP is the Loyd and Margaret School of Humanities and Social Science. He said that grades should be an indication of the matter, and should not simply be given to meet quotas or normal distribution curves.

Zannetos also emphasized that part of the reason behind the proposed inclusion of grade distribution information on internal records is that grading policy at MIT is quite varied from department to department and professor to professor. This "decentralized grading situation needs to be preserved and strengthened," he said.

Professor of Physics Thomas Gregory, a member of the ad hoc grading committee, described the second and third proposals (grade distribution reporting and internal storage) as "an experiment for internal use." He said that place:

LOGO dying from lack of grant funds

By Kevin Osborne

Many people have heard about the "turtle" developed at MIT, but few understand how they are implemented, and even fewer know what LOGO is. This is quite unfortunate for the LOGO group at MIT's Artificial Intelligence Laboratory, which has been doing research in the education of children. The LOGO project may soon be ended because the essential funding and support are falling off rapidly.

LOGO was initiated in late 1971 under a National Science Foundation grant with the purpose of developing a computer laboratory for elementary school children. The original application of power was in the teaching of mathematics, art, music, and in thinking itself. LOGO was also the name of the advanced computer language developed by this group for use in "turtles," small computer-controlled devices that the children were able to control by writing procedures (programs) on the computer. The turtle has a retractable pen, enabling the children to trace the turtle's path, thus introducing "turtle" geometry. By writing their own programs to draw pictures, both with the turtles and on the graphics terminals, they were able to simulate physical systems, the children were able to learn geometry, art, mathematics and even some algebra, music and physics. It was hoped that the computer would provide a rich and challenging environment in which students would learn and expand their abilities rapidly.

LOGO was initially a success. It interested the children and they faced the challenge with determination and vigor. Talents began to develop, and children thought to have learning disabilities displayed normal or even superior progress.

The LOGO group also learned much about the human learning process by observing the children, enabling LOGO and others to improve educational methods implemented in their programs.

Two years ago, much of LOGO's funding was withdrawn. With only one major grant, LOGO began to decay. Children no longer come to the lab to utilize the full LOGO facility because the lack of funding has caused much of the equipment to lie in ill repair.

Determined to make a go of it, the LOGO group launched their most detailed study to date. Using a portable LOGO system, they went into the Brookline Public Schools and proceeded to study, in detail, the progress of sixteen fifth-grade children using the LOGO system.

By the time the study is complete, LOGO's funding status will be clear.