Sheila Widnall, Faculty Chairman (Photo by Linda Custer)

Widnall comments on academics

By Rose Marie Damiano

One of the many important positions within the MIT Administration is that of Faculty Chairman. Last spring Professor of Aeronautics and Astronautics Sheila Widnall was appointed as the New Faculty Chairman, replacing Professor of Physics Robert Huber. Widnall is the first woman ever to hold the position of faculty chairman.

The impression received, from Widnall, is one of a woman who knows the issues and has many ideas to contribute. Widnall has held leadership positions previously as a full time professor and as a member of the faculty council. Widnall has been affiliated with the Institute since 1956 when she began as a freshman.

The position of Faculty Chairman lasts one to two years. When the time came last spring to elect a new chairman, a nominating committee created a list of names of possible candidates, who have been active on a number of faculty committees. These candidates were later interviewed, and Widnall chosen.

Widnall's major responsibilities include chairing the Committee on Educational Policy (which discusses Institute requirements and curriculum) and representing the Faculty on the Academic Council. The Academic Council meets once a week and discusses issues such as tenure and promotion. Widnall will be in contact most with the President, the Chancellor, Provost, the Deans and members of the faculty committees.

She had some apprehensions of taking this new position. "I've had to give up teaching completely, and I miss classroom teaching," she said.

"The job of Faculty Chairman is difficult to describe. The real work of the Faculty Chairman comes through the committee on Educational Policy," she explained. "Education Policy, and the organization of policy in general, changes slowly. For example, 8.01 will always remain an Institute requirement, however, its content can change. When the subject of MIT in the '60s was brought up, Widnall commented, "In the '60s the issues were much more complex. Those times are relatively quiet. I remember that at that time when there were two years when finals were cancelled due to external circumstances."

Widnall is concerned with a wide range of issues where she would like to see improvement. "I am now given a special opportunity to work on issues affecting minority students at both the graduate and undergraduate levels." Other topics that will eventually be discussed include reviewing the Experimental Study Group and trying to locate a new home for it, and a study of MIT's advising system, which now differs from department to department. This would be taken up with the Committee for Student Affairs. Other issues include computers in undergraduate education, changes in degree programs, and a study by the Admissions Committee that concerns the recruitment of more women and focuses on the admission requirements for women set by the faculty.

Jailed children discussed

By Kimberly Eccus

"I haven't the foggiest idea what's inside any child," stated Dr. Thomas J. Coddle at the beginning of his lecture on "What's Happening Inside America's Children" as part of the Cambridge Forum's "Problems and Prospects" series. The Cambridge Forum is a lecture series given every Wednesday night at 8 pm at 3 Church St. in Harvard Square. The first Parish in Cambridge, the Lowell Institute, the MIT Chaplains, and the United Ministry at Harvard and Radcliffe co-sponsor the Forum.

Coddle has conducted interviews with children and their families during the past several years. His interviewing techniques are a bit unorthodox. He puts away notepad and pencil, tape recorder, and other interview paraphernalia and becomes "just friends" with the interviewees. The cases Coddle cited Wednesday night dealt with children who have had situations forced on them which tend to nullify their futures. The first was the story of "Ollie Taylor," a black child who was "tracked into a slow class in school based on his I.Q. score. Though he used to feel that he was "all right," years in the "dummy" class have obliterared his self-esteem. What's wrong, according to Coddle, was that Ollie was placed in that class without even having taken an I.Q. test.

When he asked if Ollie should have been placed in a different class, Widnall answered that he had been put into an inferior track. She added that the state of Massachusetts, where Ollie lives, is one of the few states that still use I.Q. scores for deciding on educational placement.

Another case dealt with Fer- nando Hovnavan, a juvenile placed in an adult jail after three appearances in court for breaking and entering and carrying an (unloaded) gun. The real reason for his commitment to prison was not, however, these crimes, but that he fought violently with his sick mother.

Coddle has written a book entitled Children in Jail which deals with the stories of children incarcerated in adult prisons. Coddle found that it is less expensive to send a child to Harvard, Yale, and Princeton concurrently and furnish him with the use of a Lear jet and a pilot than to maintain him in a federal prison.

"When asked by audience particpants, 'What cost do we do about these conditions?' Coddle replied that the best way to attack was to select a single point, gather a group of similarly interested citizens, and apply pressure.

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