Course 6 subjects crowded

By Barry S. Surman

A substantial number of students enrolled or intending to enroll in classes in the Department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science were forced to drop certain subjects or have been denied the opportunity of adding them this term.

Students in classes ranging from a introductory digital lab to a graduate core requirement found overcrowded enrollments that forced many of them to be dropped by instructors. Popular subjects with limited resources were most affected, required laboratory subjects and courses in very large scale integration were most overcrowded.

According to Professor Richard B. Adler '63, Assistant Head of the Department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science, the departmental problems are responsible for the current crisis: a lack of facilities, a lack of faculty, and an inability to find qualified Teaching Assistants (TAs).

The lack of TAs is the most pressing of these problems. "We haven't had time to build a backlog of graduate students . . . who know the subjects, have the skills, and wish to do it," said Adler. Both he and Assistant Professor of Computer Science and Engineering Arvind, the instructor for an advanced grade level computer architecture course, cited the greater desirability of research assistantships, and the novelty of subjects offered needing TAs as reasons for the shortage.

Arvind faces a difficult decision: over 100 students attended his first class session of the term, but he can only accommodate a class of 40 students. Arvind has tried unsuccessfully to find another TA to handle the course, but has abandoned the effort. Arvind planned to take no action until he could assess his workload based on an evaluation of the problem set turned in yesterday.

When asked how he would curtail class size, Arvind responded, "I don't have a plan . . . it's a departmental problem, not my problem." He had been told by the department to expect 30 students to enroll in the class.

Steve Weiss '81, a Course VI-A Co-op student was one of those dropped from an EECS class. "I'm quite disappointed," he said, "and so are many other people. It's not a good way to run a graduate school, or an undergraduate school."

Assistant Professor of Electrical Engineering Donald Troxel '60, promised that those students dropped from his lab course would be guaranteed places in the class in either term next year. His resolution to the overcrowding problem included a lottery to eliminate sophomores and juniors, guaranteed places for graduate students and seniors, and special consideration for dropped students who presented written proposals for reinstatement. Troxel said the number of students in his class had to be restricted to 150 because there were simply "not enough lab kits."

Adler blamed the problems in part on the tremendous growth of the department in the last ten years. The undergraduate student to faculty ratio has soared from 5:1 to 1 in 1970 to almost 10:1 last year. Enrollment has increased by 50 percent in the same period, but the "increase in budget has not been proportion- nal." He also noted that in the last few years there has been "more money for TA's than bodies."

Adler suggested controls on transfer admissions and an effort to improve the attractiveness of TA positions as a means to alleviate the problem.

Professor Arthur Smith, Head of the Graduate School, described the overcrowding as "an impossible situation in which we cannot meet all our responsibilities. Smith blamed "inadequate resources" for the situation.

Weiss said that a group of dropped students has been discussing their grievances with students in his department, and administrators. Smith sympathizes with the students. "I can't blame them," he said, "they should be unhappy. I'm unhappy."