Stephanie Pollack

Wrong policy for the right program

MIT has produced four presidential science advisors, three of whom are currently at the Institute. It would seem that these men and their accomplishments would create an atmosphere where the potential role of scientists and engineers in governmental roles would be appreciated.

Why then is the only program at the Institute designed to place students from all departments in public sector internships in danger of being eliminated?

The Public Policy Program is a relatively small endeavor, seeking $25,000. This must cover expenses and adds up to tens of thousands of dollars to provide its much-sought-after internships. In its first five years, the Program has created an immeasurable amount of goodwill and support for volunteer internships, both here in Boston and Washington. The Program is a critical link between MIT’s scientists and engineers and the real world in which decisions affecting their research interests are made.

I am distinctly objective on this topic. I received a summer internship from the Program immediately after my freshman year, and the three months I spent working for Senator Paul E. Tsongas completely changed my career plans. Havingexplored nuclear engineering and interdisciplinary science, among others, I settled on a combination of mechanical engineering and public policy to further my interest in employment.

Many of the students who have received internships are, however, solely engineers or scientists. These students realize that even purely technical work affects, and is affected by, larger problems in society. Of MIT’s major goals, as espoused by President Paul Gray, is production of more students aware of their role outside the confines of science and technology. This awareness is more easily achieved through experience than classroom lectures.

In the past, internships are also placed in public interest groups, where a little technical knowledge goes a long way. Groups trying to fight government decisions based on inadequate or inaccurate technical information are often frustrated by the lack of scientific expertise. Discussion of controversial issues ranging from nuclear power to governmental dealings in dollars to provide its much-sought-after internships. In its first five years, the Program has created an immeasurable amount of goodwill and support for volunteer internships, both here in Boston and Washington. The Program is a critical link between MIT’s scientists and engineers and the real world in which decisions affecting their research interests are made.

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