President’s report examines education, research

By Tony Zamparutti

The Report of the President on the 1980-81 academic year, written by Paul Gray ’54, analyzes two major sectors of the Institute’s operation, education and research, and recalls statements in Gray’s inaugural speech.

Gray, repeating a common MIT admissions pitch, described the interaction between education and research as a “special synergy.” The interaction between student involvement in research and the application of research to education is “a source of great energy.” The interaction between education and research as a “special synergy” is unravelling, claims Gray.

Gray’s inaugural speech.

During the faculty discussion on the Whitehead Institute, one professor gave a much different interpretation of the administration’s role: MIT is basically a “pervasive dictatorship,” he claimed. Although academic freedom is encouraged and emphasized, the administration holds tight rein on many basic policy decisions.

Gray emphasized the development of “intellectual independence” as the “most important educational goal” of MIT. Describing undergraduate education as “a major unifying force” at MIT, Gray went on to discuss the Committee on Education Policy (CEP) review of the undergraduate curriculum.

CEP recommendations on science and humanities requirements and on the pace of MIT have not yet been released. “The Committee is considering significant changes in the science distribution and language requirements, reported Gray. Adding a biology requirement is a consideration of the CEP review. The basic physics and math requirements have been reaffirmed, as important foundations for the interests of most of our students.”

Some requirement of writing proficiency is also being considered by the CEP. “There has been a marked decline in the literacy of our entering students,” wrote Gray.

Gray declared that there are three major concerns in the ability of MIT to attract applicants: a decline in the interest in science is a national problem, “the quality of MIT applicants is going up,” said Richardson.

The partnership between the government and universities on research and graduate education is unraveling, claims Gray. Decreases in grant size, concern over access to sensitive research, calls for greater accountability of research funds, and new administrators in the government and in universities contribute to the problem, wrote Gray.

Although MIT should attempt to develop a strong relationship with the government, Gray declared that private, industrial sponsorship of research has grown and can be used effectively without conflicts or corruption.

Industry sponsors about 10 percent of research at MIT.

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