

opinion

Editorial

VisComm: look at crises

The MIT Corporation's Visiting Committee on Student Affairs is charged with examining complex issues facing student activities at MIT. In its report to the Visiting Committee, the Office of the Dean for Student Affairs (ODSA) has highlighted the following issues for discussion:

- The Undergraduate Association President's (UAP) role,
- The role of the Association of Student Activities (ASA),
- Issues relating to the Student Center Committee (SCC),
- Student activity accountability and self-governance,
- Operation and maintenance budget for facilities,
- Faculty involvement in student activities, and
- The role of the ODSA.

These issues are indeed important, yet the Visiting Committee should not spend so much time looking at individual trees that it misses the forest. Despite the MIT administration's repeated pronouncements on the advantages of student activity involvement, many organizations currently are not adequately funded. The Visiting Committee should not waste its time concentrating on the accountability of the few privileged and wealthy student activities; it should focus on ensuring the viability of the many student activities suffering from lack of support. While MIT has doubled tuition in the last five years, the budget allocated to student activities has not increased significantly. Many of the over 100 student organizations on campus are slowly dying for lack of financial support. While it is well-known the Institute faces several years of belt-tightening, many activities that are also strapped for finances are not as worried about accountability and self-governance as they are about whether they can attend an out-of-state conference next term.

MIT must recognize that student activities — whether they are defined as those formally recognized by ASA or informally enjoyed by groups of students — are a significant part of the undergraduate educational experience. They contribute vitally to the development of students at MIT, not solely in preparation for future careers, but as sources of learning and enjoyment while students attend MIT.

Insufficient financing of activities has been exacerbated by ten to twenty percent cuts over the next three years in the funds allocated to the ODSA — considered part of the Institute's administrative budget — which provide many support services to MIT students and activities. If the Institute is as committed to the strength and diversity of its student activities as it purports to be, the ODSA budget should be treated as part of the Institute's academic program and not as part of the vulnerable administrative budget.

ODSA cuts not only affect student activity funding, but all ODSA support for students and student groups. In particular, the merger of the Residence and Activities sections in the Dean's Office curtails support for both student activities and independent living groups. Other groups affected by cuts include international and women students.

ODSA is not communicating effectively with student groups, as exemplified by the travails that surround the Finance Board's budget. While many activities need support from the Dean's Office, they do not need to be smothered with attention or bureaucratic requirements. Overemphasis of accountability of student activities obscures the real crises facing MIT student activities.

Editorial

ASA action is unjustified

The Association of Student Activities (ASA) will hold a meeting tomorrow to consider withdrawal of its recognition of 41 student groups and seizure of their assets on behalf of the Undergraduate Association (UA). To continue to enjoy ASA recognition, a group must file a copy of its current constitution, a list of officers, and a completed activity survey with the ASA. The only public notice given of these responsibilities is an advertisement in today's issue of *The Tech*: ASA has made inadequate attempts to contact officers of these activities individually to inform them they have not complied with the requirements.

The ends ASA is attempting to achieve — updating its files — are reasonable; its means are offensive, inept, questionable legal, and downright silly.

The results ASA wishes to achieve could be attained with much less ill-will for all concerned by applying simple common sense. ASA claims it sent notices to all affected groups informing them of their responsibilities; executive officers of some organizations, however, claim to have received no such notice. With a bit of effort, ASA could have telephoned some officer of most of the threatened groups to obtain the information it seeks. The Chamber Music Society can be found by calling the Department of Humanities, the Undergraduate Math Club is easily located through the Undergraduate Mathematics Office, and the Objectivist Study Group lists its address on the masthead of *Ergo*. ASA should obviously have explored such channels.

Without adequately attempting to contact these groups, ASA should not be so zealous in attempts to toss them out. It is entirely conceivable that some group leaders may not be able to obtain the information demanded in one day, or that some have already made other plans for tomorrow night, or that some may not read *The Tech*.

In addition to being irresponsible, the ASA action is neither legal nor enforceable. A number of its member organizations, both threatened and not, such as the Debate Society, the Concert Band, and *Technique* predate ASA. It is ridiculous that ASA dares to seize assets of organizations that existed long before it did, especially when these activities receive significant portions of their financial support from sources other than the UA. The Debate Society is partially funded by the humanities department and the Concert Band is entirely financed by the music department. Yet ASA proposes to seize the assets of these organizations in the name of the UA, which did not provide them in the first place.

It is also difficult to comprehend how ASA plans to attach the threatened groups' assets. The executive committee's notice says "activities without ASA recognition may not be allowed to use MIT facilities . . . and their assets, if any, will revert to the Undergraduate Association." ASA alone does not control MIT's assignment of facilities. Furthermore, if a group loses its recognition, how does ASA believe it can still regulate the group to the extreme step of absconding with its assets?

Given this arrogance, it is not surprising that ASA's action violates its own constitution. Article 1 states: "The purpose of this organization shall be to promote student activities on the Massachusetts Institute of Technology campus, serve their common interests, and arbitrate conflicting interests."

"The rights of the ASA members shall be subject to definition by the ASA, but shall include the right to use the MIT name, MIT facilities, and to receive funds from the Finance Board (subject to the terms of its constitution)," says Article 3 of the ASA Constitution. These are affirmative rights; just because ASA may exercise these rights does not mean it may restrict them.

While ASA probably harbors no malicious intent, its methods are inexcusably slipshod. Threats to withdraw recognition from clearly extant student activities will not promote the respect and unity ASA so desperately needs. Members of all student groups are urged to attend tomorrow's meeting at 7:30pm in room 400 of the Student Center to rectify ASA's bungling and to protect themselves and the rights of their fellows.

The members of ASA are:

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|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| African Students Assoc. | Environmental Theatre | Pro-Life Community |
| Aikido Club | Equestrian Assoc. | Radio Society |
| Alpha Phi Omega | <i>Ergo</i> | Republican Club |
| Amnesty International | European Club | RUKU |
| Appropriate Technology Group | Exotic Fish Society | Rune |
| Archery Club | Festival Jazz Society | Sangam Club |
| Armenian Club | Filipino Students Assoc | Science Fiction Society |
| Arnold Air Society | Folk Dance Club | Seuba Club |
| Assoc. for Computational Machinery | Football Cheerleading | Seekers |
| Assoc. of Mid-Western Commuters | French Club | Shakespeare Ensemble |
| Assoc. of Puerto Rican Students | Frisbee Club | Shokotan Karate Club |
| Assoc. of Recording Science | Guys At MIT | Shuttle Bus Project |
| Assoc. of Women Students | Goju-Kai Karate | Soaring Assoc. |
| Baptist Student Fellowship | Gospel Choir | Society for Creative Anachronism |
| Australasian Club | Guild of Bellringers | Society of Women Engineers |
| Baha'i Discussion Group | Hellenic Students Assoc. | Spelunkers Club |
| Ballroom Dancing Club | Hillel | Strategic Games Society |
| Baptist Student Fellowship | Ice Dance Club | Student Art Assoc. |
| Black Students Union | Intelligence Agency Study Group | Student Center Committee |
| Bowling Club | International Relations Club | Student Information Processing Board |
| Brass Ensemble | International Students Assoc. | Students Against Regist. and the Draft |
| Bridge Club | Investment Analysis Society | Students for Exp. and Dev. of Space |
| The Bus | Islamic Society | Students for a Libertarian Society |
| Campus Crusade for Christ | Israeli Student Organization | Symphony Orchestra |
| Campus Match Service | Japanese Assoc. of MIT | Tau Beta Pi |
| Canadian Club | Jazz Dance Club | <i>The Tech</i> |
| Caribbean Club | Juggling Club | Tech Catholic Community |
| Chess Club | Korean Students Assoc. | Tech Model Aircrafters |
| Chamber Music Society | Kuo-So Martial Arts | Tech Model Railroad Club |
| China Study Group | L-5 Chapter | Tech Squares |
| Chinese Students Club | Latter Day Saints Organization | <i>Technique</i> |
| Choral Society | Lebanese Club | Technology Community Assoc. |
| Chorallaries | Lecture Series Committee | Tech Video Productions |
| Christian Science Organization | Lesbian-Feminist Alliance | Tidlywinks Assoc. |
| Christian Students | <i>LINA</i> | Turkish Students Assoc. |
| Club Latino | The Listeners | Udayan Club |
| Classical Guitar | Logarithms | UHF Repeater Assoc. |
| Committee on Central Africa | Lutheran and Episcopal Ministries | Undergraduate Math Club |
| Community Players | Malaysian Students Assoc. | Unicycle Club |
| Concert Band | Magic Society | <i>La Union Chicana Por Aztlan</i> |
| Concert Jazz Club | Marching Band | United Christian fellowship |
| Dance Workshop | Musical Theatre Guild | Urban Action |
| Debate Society | National Society of Black Engineers | Video Club |
| Disarmament Study Group | Nichiren Shoshu Buddhist Group | Vietnamese Students Assoc. |
| Dramashop | Objectivist Study Group | Way Campus Outreach |
| Early Music Society | Outing Club | White Water Club |
| Educational Studies Program | Peoples' Environmental Awareness | WMBR |
| Electronics Research Society | Pershing Rifles | Wu-Tang Chinese Martial Arts Club |
| | | Zionist Alliance. |

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