Course IV to cut Creative Photography Lab

(Continued from page 4)

But after White's retirement in 1974, no real effort was made to find a new director of his stature; MIT's attitude toward the program since then has been, at best, one of benign neglect. Starr Ockenga became director while an assistant professor, and perhaps to the surprise of those who hired her, she revitalized the program: the gallery space in duPont became one of the most significant photographic galleries in Boston, with frequent exhibitions from Europe and elsewhere; a graduate program was started as part of the Master of Science in Visual Studies program, and the lab began publishing an excellent graduate magazine.

Trouble was brewing, however. Ockenga was interested in the artistic aspects of photography, while the rest of the visual studies program became increasingly electronic; as Ockenga put it: "we never converted to the computer." Conflict between the two persuasions escalated until, in what she described as "an unbelievable nasty political situation," Ockenga was "forced out." She resigned early enough to allow MIT to find a program director to replace her, but the Institute did not do such a thing. Instead, Michael Bishop, who was hired with the understanding (on his part, anyway) that his role would be simply to develop a color photography component for the program, has now been forced to take on the directorship. Since his is the only full-time academic position MIT has been willing to fund, he is also teaching no less than four courses this semester, a workload unheard-of in any other program.

But for all this, the employees and students of the program were never actually told the program was to be completely eliminated. Bishop first heard during a meeting to review graduate applications to the program for this year; in the middle of the meeting, he was suddenly asked how he thought the applicants would do if the program ceased to exist halfway through their studies? Needless to say, he was somewhat taken aback.

For months, however, final word did not come; it arrived only this month, when Bishop was formally told the program would cease to exist June 1, and his contract would not be renewed.

The final decision was made by John Meyer, the new head of the architecture department, after consultation with the dean of the School of Architecture of Planning and the tenured faculty. Meyer said the primary reason was a desire, in a time of declining departmental resources, to "devote our scarce resources as much as possible to the training of architects."

None of the tenured faculty consulted has a professional interest in photography. Indeed, many of those involved in visual studies are not involved in creating very humanistic images. The Architecture Machine Group, for example, is largely funded by the Department of Defense; its projects have included animated training films about automatic transmission engines, and a program whose purpose has simply been described as "put this bright red battleship there!" It is hardly surprising that the tenured faculty were not very interested in preserving conventional photography.

What is surprising is that none of the employees of the lab — let alone interested students — were ever consulted, or even informed, of what was happening in the deliberations over their fate; nor were they given any meaningful opportunity to argue their case. That the fact its students cared passionately about the Creative Photography Laboratory was never taken into consideration in the decision to dismember it.

It would be unfair to say that the photography program at MIT will be completely destroyed, however. The darkroom and camera equipment will be saved, and according to Meyer, some introductory photography courses may still be offered, possibly at the Visible Language Workshop. But this would be a pale substitute at best; no other part of MIT has the interest or the resources to teach photography as artistic expression. The gallery space will cease to exist; the graduate program will be destroyed, and, perhaps most importantly, the place itself will no longer be available, in Ockenga's words, the lab "was a sort of haven, where people would listen, where people really cared about what students thought." Most of the students seem to agree. This is what will be destroyed, unless the architecture department can be convinced to change its mind.

As with Course IV, it would seem that in deliberations over the curriculum, the architecture department places the desires of students at the bottom of the list. In this case, too, the employees of the program seem to have been treated in an incredibly callous way. Unless students and employees are allowed to have a voice in such deliberations, we can only expect more of the same, and MIT will become a less pleasant place to live.

Graduate
engineers.

Put Your Knowledge to Work with The Aerospace Corporation

If you prefer systems engineering and design and development, consider the scope of opportunities we offer. We are working on military space programs like the Space Transportation System, the Defense Satellite Communication System and the Global Positioning System.

If you want a career that includes independent study and professional growth, we want to talk with you. We need professional engineers with advanced degrees in electrical engineering or computer science for positions in the following disciplines:

COMPUTER SCIENCE
Signal Processing
Computer Architecture
Computer Networking
Distributed Systems
Software Engineering
Systems Software
Application Software
Software Metrics
Languages
Computer Security
Data Processing

ELECTRICAL ENGINEERING
Antenna & Microwave Systems
Radar Systems
Command & Telemetry Systems
Communications Systems
LSI/VLSI Design & Analysis
Analog & Digital Circuits
Optical Systems
Infrared Systems
Electromagnetic Compatibility
Space Power Sources
Electronic Devices

We have other positions for engineers with backgrounds in astronomical, aeronautical, and chemical and mechanical engineering.

See our Representative on Monday, March 7, 1983 at Career Planning & Placement Center

The Aerospace Corporation

Professional Placement, Dept. 00324, Mail Station M/118.
2350 E. El Segundo Blvd., El Segundo, CA 90245

An Affirmative Action Employer U.S. Citizenship Required