Plan for change

For once the entire campus agrees on something. Undergraduate student government is badly in need of change. The unresolved question remaining, of course, is that form change is to take.

Five of six teams running for Undergraduate Association president and vice-president are at the center of their platforms. Their proposals, however, ranged from the inadequate to the negligible.

Undergraduate Association president-elect Mike Witt and vice-president-elect Inge Gedo's latest proposals for change in the structure of student government are neither inadequate nor negligible; they are downright dangerous.

What is proposed is a "smaller" legislative body composed of representatives from living groups, class councils, general committees, . . . and other large student activity groups. The Institute Committee failed because it incorporated special interests of students andemployers; their proposed return to narrow representation would merely rekindle the fire of disenfranchisement amongst the broad student population.

It is not surprising then, that Witt and Gedo state they will call upon the current General Assembly, an unrepresentative body composed of the students of the General Executive Committee, to approve their unrepresentative plan. Essential to the success of any new student government is the consent of the governed: Any proposed constitution — or constitutions, for that matter — must be ratified only by a vote of the full membership of the Undergraduate Association.

Witt and Gedo's proposal is sure to offend not of malice, but of principle. Their naiveté, however, could prove lethal to representative student government at MIT.

Potential for abuse

The full faculty will tomorrow consider changes proposed in the humanities, arts, and social sciences requirement by Professors Sylvia Bronberger and Richard Leake. The proposal is to redistribute the content of the humanities, arts, and social sciences requirement from a merely bureaucratic or cosmetic. The part that is not merely bureaucratic or cosmetic. The part that is not, however, presents a potential for great abuse and will have to be closely monitored to fulfill the design — implementation of coherent requirements — is achieved.

The major change, and the possible difficulty, would be the abolition of the Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences Requirement, currently responsible for designating humanities distribution subjects. In its stead, individual depart- ments and fields would construct their own specific criteria under new general guidelines.

The danger is similar to that of making a small child responsible for the contents of a candy store. The humanities distribution designation is attractive to professors and departments because they believe it attracts students to their subjects who might not take them if the subjects were not to fill a requirement. There would be a temptation for the departments to help themselves to a distribution designation or two in marginal cases, not to wholesale inclusion.

These "problematic cases" would ostensibly be handled by the Dean of the School of Humanities and Social Science. The danger here is one of turning the dean into an erstwhile Committee on the Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences Requirement.

The goals of the proposal are worthy. Each department should have more say in what criteria apply to its humanities distribution subjects. The Committee on the Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences Requirement has not been an efficient body, due in large part to its frequent turnover in membership. The solution is to implement the proposed plan while retaining a representative form, so students and faculty would have a meaningful voice in the process of approval of the humanities, arts, and social sciences requirement.