MIT plans $50M DEC, IBM system

By Barry S. Surman

MIT will begin a large-scale experiment in integrating computers and interactive graphics into its undergraduate academic program this fall, the Institute announced today.

Digital Equipment Corp. and International Business Machines Corp., the two largest computer manufacturers in the world, will provide close to $50 million in equipment, software, service, support, research grants, and academic personnel over five years to launch Project Athena, a "coherent" computer network for educational applications across the Institute.

MIT has already begun seeking another $20 million to sustain the project by funding support staff and student participation.

"Athena will integrate computers into the educational environment in all fields of study in ways which encourage new conceptual and intuitive understanding in our students," said President Paul E. Gray '54.

"We believe we can help students learn by using personal computers and computer graphics in new ways, but nobody is quite sure how," said Gerald L. Wilson '61, dean of the School of Engineering.

"Our experience suggests, however, that computers can aid the teaching of difficult concepts." Digital will give the Institute over 300 terminals, personal computers, and graphics stations and 63 VAX 11/750 and 11/730 minicomputers over the next two years and about 1600 advanced personal computers in the following three years. The five-year commitment represents the largest single gift in the company's history.

IBM will provide 500 personal computers in the next two years, and another 500 advanced single-user systems the following year. Each company will have at least five employees assigned to the MIT project.

Wilson would not reveal how much of the $50 million each of the two companies committed to the project, explaining he wanted to avoid strengthening competition between DEC and IBM, but rather encourage each to cooperate.

The Institute has "no plans to charge any of the cost of [Project Athena] to any students now," Wilson noted. Were MIT to require its students to purchase personal computers, arrangements would be made with the computer manufacturers to obtain group purchase discounts, he said, but the Institute will carry through its experiment to determine the value of computers in learning, before considering such a requirement.

Students and faculty members in the School of Engineering will use the DEC systems, while those in the M.I.T.'s four other schools-Architecture and Planning, Humanities and Social Science, Management, and Science - as well as freshmen, will use the IBM equipment. Both will run UNIX operating systems.

"We are working very hard..." (Please turn to page 7)

Mit graduates 1961 today

By Diana ben-Aaron

MIT today holds its 117th commencement exercises at 10am in Killian Court, conferring 1761 degrees on 1616 students.

Today's presentations raise the total number of degrees awarded by the Institute since its founding in 1861 to more than 100,000. Helmut Schmidt, former chancelor of the Federal Republic of Germany, will deliver the commencement address. Schmidt is the second commencement speaker from outside the Institute since 1963.

The academic procession begins at 9:45am as dignitaries, members of the faculty, and graduates march toward Killian Court. A brass ensemble conducted by Herbert Baloff and the John Oliver Chorale will provide music during the procession, beginning with "Killian Fanfare," written for the occasion by Hilary E. Clarke '83.

The stage in set for commencement

Photo by Omar S. Venner

GA postpones constitution change

By Burt S. Kaliski

The Undergraduate Association General Assembly deferred a motion to change the U.A. Constitution following a May 13 banquet which concluded its regular spring meetings.

The motion would have allowed the UA president to appoint a representative to the UA Finance Board. The constitution presently requires the UA vice president to serve as a member ex officio of the board.

The General Assembly reversed the motion at its regular meeting April 14 by a vote of 25 to 4. Amendments to the UA constitution must be approved at two successive meetings.

The greening of commencement

What to do after the commencement is over. In "On the town." Page 11.