Institute not attracting black faculty

By Kevin D. Hurst

First of a two-part series

The ability of financial aid programs at MIT have shown no improvement in the small percent of black faculty members, according to Patricia Bell-Scott, assistant equal opportunity officer for the Institute.

There are currently 16 black professors at MIT's faculty of 1,045, said Scott. "I firmly believe that we have reached a critical point," said Bell-Scott. "The number of black professors is at the same level which we started in the mid-60s. We should not settle for that.

Blacks constitute about 1.5 percent of the MIT faculty — significantly below the national average, according to the National Urban League. The number of black professors at MIT peaked at 23 in 1975.

"There is a general resistance within the Institute to being aggressive in reaching out for more minorities," Bell-Scott said. "Responsibility for the inequity lies not only with individuals, in positions from sub-departmental levels to higher level administrators," Bell-Scott continued. "The issue is involved with many complex factors and should not be taken lightly."

Provost Francis E. Low advocated the Institute is "not doing very well" in hiring black faculty members. "We are trying to improve the situation," he said, "but I guess we haven't been trying hard enough."

One reason often cited for the low number of blacks in academe is that high-paying industrial positions attract many candidates with doctoral degrees away from universities. "There is a very limited pool of qualified blacks available to us," said Professor Howard C. Bell-Scott, director of the Office of Minority Education, "and in a certain sense, it is only natural to seek out your own kind of people. It's the 'birds of a feather' idea."

The primary method of selecting new faculty is still the "old boy network," McLaurin explained. This means that an applicant with connections to someone in a department has an advantage over other applicants.

Low said he agreed in a sense with McLaurin, explaining. "There is indeed a network of the best schools that is used to aid the process of recruiting new faculty members. The best Ph.D. programs, graduate from the best schools. The people we want are not hidden from us." Bell-Scott said the "cannot emphasize enough the need for departments to be aggressive in searching for minorities... particularly in forming ties with minority networks."

"Not making these contacts results in leaving the search without uncovering some well-qualified blacks that are out there," she said.

"More comprehensive searches are not the answer to the problem, according to Low, "It's not how you dig for them, it's how you grow them. That is the real issue. We need to work like hell to get minorities into our graduate school," he said.

Another key factor is the low retention rate of black junior professors, Bell-Scott said. "It is not enough to get people here. Once they are here we must make a continuing commitment to help them succeed."

Kenneth R. Manning, associate professor of Science, Technology and Society, said, "There have been instances in the past of serious problems resulting from tensions when black faculty arrived in a department."

William McLaurin, director of MIT's Office of Minority Education.

Whitehead Institute rises in Kendall Square

By Wei-Chung Hu

The Whitehead Institute, an MIT-affiliated independent biological research center, is "clearly going to lead to an expansion of biological and cancer research at MIT," said Associate Director John Pratt.

Construction of the Whitehead Institute building, located at Cambridge Center — the intersection of Main Street and Vassar Street — is on schedule and should be complete June 1984, he said.

The building's top floor will house boilers and air conditioners, and its fourth floor will contain laboratories, Pratt said.

The first floor will include administrative offices, an auditorium and cafeterias, as well as facilities for building and supplies, he said. The second floor will have computer facilities, a reading room, and a library.

The faculty of the Whitehead Institute includes Prof. David Baltimore '61, director of the Whitehead Institute; Harvey Lodish, professor of biology, Robert A. Weinberg '64, associate professor of biology, and Dr. Rudolph J. Jaenisch from Germany.

The building, a gift from Edwin C. Whitehead, will cost between $22 and $23 million. It is designed by the architectural firm of Gooldy, Acheson and Associates, and is under construction by the Turner Construction Company.

A brief history of the Whitehead Institute:

• Sept. 1981: Faculty de-

- bates Whitehead proposal.
Science Writers' sympo-

- sium: independence: enti-

- ties have opportunities for lo-

- tions?
- Nov. 1981: Whitehead pro-

- jaunts for science.
- Dec. 1981: MIT Cor-

- mite on the Whitehead Insti-
- tion.
- Mar. 1982: City Council pas-

- Whitehead Institute to be built.
- June 1984: Whitehead Insti-

- completion.

Construction continues on the new Whitehead Institute building in Cambridge Center.