Michael P. Witt '84, president of the Undergraduate Association, proposes to present a new constitution for the undergraduate student government by Nov. 1, following the proposals for reorganization he announced at a General Assembly meeting last month. Witt's proposals, though vague and commendable in many ways, are insufficient in others, for he does not address the fundamental issue of funding for student activities.

His proposals legitimately attempt to reassert the purpose of the General Assembly. It must "assert its role as the sole legislative, judicial, and representative body of the Undergraduate Association." The constitution now provides the power for the General Assembly, though the body has not yet fulfilled its role. The first necessary step in making student government effective, as Witt correctly states, is recognition of this role by the students.

The Undergraduate Association, as Witt proposes, must also work more closely with the Graduate Student Council, for the interests of graduate students and undergraduates are alike. Many student activities have members from both groups; they should more easily be able to obtain resources from both student governments.

Witt also proposes that the General Assembly absorb the functions of the Association of Student Activities, the Student Committee on Educational Policy and the Nominations Committee. These organizations, in theory, coordinate to the General Assembly, have in practice functioned independently. Witt's plan here recognizes that the elected representatives of the students must directly control the students' resources—induding less tangible resources like the power to articulate positions on Institute policy and representation on Institute committees.

The General Assembly now has the power, under the Undergraduate Association constitution, to enforce several of the controls Witt recommends. But without motivation or commitment among its members, the General Assembly cannot act effectively and it will not be taken seriously by its constituents. Students who actively participate in the government will be truly a government by the students, one independent of the administration and independent of the whims of cabinet committee and constituent members.

Witt's statement that "all allocations of student resources must be more closely supervised and confirmed by the General Assembly" shows some sense. Without some motivation or commitment among its members, the General Assembly cannot act effectively and it will not be taken seriously by its constituents. Students who actively participate in the government will be truly a government by the students, one independent of the administration and independent of the whims of cabinet committee and constituent members.

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If you ask an Institute official about the purpose of an MIT education, you get a brief sampling of educational philosophy followed by hiring statistics and graduate school acceptance rates. You will not hear statistics on leadership. MIT does not attempt to develop the leadership potential of its graduates or to encourage them to enter politics or government.

This appears to be the job of Harvard, the noble institution that educates the presidents of the corporations that have MIT alumni on their management track.

Unfortunately for us all, our leaders face complex technological problems that require daily decisions, much like toxic waste, nuclear energy, nuclear weapons, water resources, genetic research and technology, are at the forefront of the national agenda. The question is whether politicians and civil servants understand in sufficient detail these problems to make intelligent policy choices. Many such issues require answers free from political partisanship, like patronage and parochialism. MIT has not asked itself whether it owes something to society when designing the educational environment. If a leadership with a broad technical background exists for dealing with all technological issues does not come from the nation's leading technical institution, will it come? Institutions of higher education have a duty to encourage commitment to public participation in their graduates. MIT fees on government grants such grants are a product of public taxes. The Institute should band more back to the public than working papers and research results, including the educated public servants necessary for dealing with the complex problems that arise over the application of technology in the private and military sectors.

Witt's plans for change fall short

MIT turns out management-quality engineers and research scientists. The technical education here is broad and deep. A killer atmosphere for students, but one that provides them with an overview to understand and manage entire systems. A large proportion of MIT alumni is on the management track ten years after entering industry.

The question is whether politics will be able to obtain resources from both student governments. Witt also proposes that the General Assembly absorb the functions of the Association of Student Activities, the Student Committee on Educational Policy and the Nominations Committee. These organizations, in theory, coordinate to the General Assembly, have in practice functioned independently. Witt's plan here recognizes that the elected representatives of the students must directly control the students' resources—including less tangible resources like the power to articulate positions on Institute policy and representation on Institute committees.

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