Editorial

New SCC funding proposal unwise

The students of MIT enjoy certain resources, including money and activity space. Several groups allocate those resources, such as the Undergraduate Association's General Assembly, the Finance Board, Social Council, and Association of Student Activities; the Office of the Dean for Student Affairs; and the Student Center Committee. The proliferation of allocators contributes to disunity of student government as a whole, for no one is singly in control of the resources and responsible to the students. Only one group, elected by the students and exclusively responsible to them, should distribute money and space to student activities. An attempt proposed this week to the Student Center Committee's bylaws, permitting it to fund activities not located in the Student Center or on Kresge Oval, is good only to the extent that it begins to remove the divisions between the several allocutors. But to a much greater extent, the proposal would exacerbate the problem of representative student government and move resource allocation even further from the students' direct control.

The Student Center Committee's desire to share its wealth with the student activities beyond the committee's usual domain is commendable. Providing money directly to student groups, however, is an improper method. The committee should instead give its additional funds to the General Assembly which can more fairly disburse them.

A Sigma Phi Epsilon casino-crime may or may not be a worthwhile recipient of student funds. The Student Center Committee is not the proper organization to make that determination. The committee should reject the proposed amendment. Should it fail to do so, the General Assembly should assert its authority to reject changes to the Student Center Committee's bylaws.

The huge undergraduate enrollment in the School of Engineering and more specifically in the Department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science (EECS) has put a critical strain on MIT's teaching and support resources. The problem has reached the point where MIT must stop talking and implement a solution. Some of the proposed alternatives are:

- Restricting enrollment to only those sophomores who indicated a preference for Course VI on their applications for admission. This policy would be effective for one or two years, the time necessary for word to filter back down to the high schools. After that all applicants would probably indicate an EECS preference just to keep options open.
- Having applicants to MIT apply only to Course VI. This would intensify academic pressure on interested high school students to spend more time studying EECS-related subjects, further limiting diversity at the Institute. Such a policy would also further the department's elitist image, exacerbating the overall enrollment problem by increasing social pressure to declare EECS.
- Limiting enrollment in Course VI after academic realization arrived at MIT. The obvious method would be to allow only the sophomores with the best academic records into the department. This conflicts with the current pass-no credit policies in force for the freshman year and could only turn MIT into a greater academic pressure cooker than it is now. Clamping enrollment also conflicts with the long-standing Institute philosophy of academic freedom of choice. These measures are all flawed because they are institutional solutions to a socio-economic problem.

The recent experience of several medical schools suggests a better solution. Medical schools have for years stressed academic excellence as the primary prerequisite for admission. Their students had narrow backgrounds with minimal experience in other disciplines and in extra-curricular social activities. A disturbing trend emerged: Graduates of medical schools were going into medical research or into narrow specializations in a ratio disproportionate to the demand for general practitioners. The most effective solution was not institutional in character. Some medical schools implemented a policy of accepting B-grade students with broad backgrounds and commitments to helping people, instead of an interest in research. The schools did not attempt to unfairly coerce their students or their graduands. Those medical schools attacked the real problem, not its symptoms.

If MIT wants to reduce enrollment in Course VI, it should follow the lead of the medical schools rather than unfairly imposing on the rights of students to study what they choose. The Institute must actively recruit students who have shown diversity in high school, with interests in fields such as architecture, political science, or English literature. This proposal also implies accepting students with less competitive academic records.

This last condition is unfortunately the coup de grace to the proposal. The current economic situation dictates that we need a vigorous electronics industry to stay competitive on the international market. The public is just as aware of the fundamental importance of electrical engineering as MIT. Students know that a degree in EECS offers job security. To quote from President Paul E. Gray's report on academic year 1982-83, "For students in many disciplines, 1982-83 was a difficult year to look for a job. Employers sent out fewer recruiters and were slow in making offers... The demand was strongest in electrical engineering and computer science."

MIT has strong ties in industry. Industry needs electrical engineers. MIT is not as interested in diversifying the student body so much as just reducing enrollment. MIT should not be interested in accepting students with broad backgrounds and lower high school grades. It will not base its policies on fairness to the students if the students is who accepts. Gray and the Office of the Dean for Student Affairs have scheduled a colloquium on the Course VI problem for Nov. 8. Students must make their views known to the Institute implement its policy.