Minority numbers lead to feelings of isolation

By Michael J. Garrison
Second in a series examining minority issues at MIT

The small percentage of minority students and professors at MIT creates an atmosphere which makes many minority students feel isolated, according to Lynda M. Jordan, chairman of the Black Graduate Student Assn.

"If a minority student has to go in to a department where there are no minority faculty member[s], the student will probably have a much more difficult time trying to adjust," explained Clarence G. Williams, special assistant to the president and assistant equal opportunity officer.

"You walk into a classroom and you are the only black person there," Jordan said. "Not only are you dealing with culture shock but also . . . the pressure of being an MIT student.

"It's hard to be accepted into study groups . . . until you either are doing academically or they can get to know you as a person," she added.

Maximum enrollment in 6.001 is set at approximately 450 students

(Continued from page 1) number of students who will actually attend the first lecture Tuesday "would be 400 for all we know, but also could be 428.

Last term 'we had fewer students in the class, a Hussman noted.

The EECS department has not decided how students will be cut from freshmen in the current class, he noted.

Prospective minority students are often frightened away by MIT's financial aid package, according to Nelson Armstrong, associate director of admissions.

"It is initially perceived not to be competitive; the self-help package looks very large.

MIT's public image presents another major barrier to minority recruitment, Armstrong said. "When the black faculty members . . . comprise less than two percent of [the MIT faculty], it is very easy to see MIT as being 'illy white.'

"We are not doing as well as we would like so attracting minority professors, Williams said.

"The problem goes way beyond MIT; the numbers [of minority PhD graduates in the country] are so small.

"Who does the American Indian set to make him feel that he is not the very first to go to MIT?'" Armstrong asked. "It's always nice to see somebody like you — to not feel alone.

Subjects in a recitation must be based on the production of more minority who are qualified to be professors both "here and at other institutions," Williams said. He added that the younger professors who are here now seem to be "frustrated . . . they lose their vitality and don't tend to stay.

Some departments have done better than others, Williams explained. He noted that the Physics Department has been particularly open to minorities. Others, however, "are still saying the same things they said fifteen years ago" about why they have few minority professors, he said.

"This year has seen a concerted effort with the ODSA and other groups trying to address the problem," Jordan noted. The Office of the Dean for Student Affairs held a series of public meetings on the quality of life at MIT last term. One of them focused on minority and women issues.

"I don't know if the meetings are a sign of things getting better or ... whether this is simply an at least recognizing the fact that problems exist," Jordan added.

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Three limits to class size

Garrison described three factors limiting class size. The first is the physical size of the planned lecture hall, 10-250.

The department is also concerned with the number of recitation instructors and the size of the section. "30 to 35 students in a recitation" will still probably keep the dynamics of the teaching at a reasonable level, but more than thirty is pushing it," he said.

The EECS department is "trying to set up filters [selection] sections of about thirty students each," Moses said. "This would bring the upper limit of the class to 400.

The final limitation on 6.001, according to Grimson, is the number of computers available to the students for the required laboratory. The class has 48 personal computers.

"I'm not certain whether one can say that the number of computers is adequate, but it is hoped that the students do not have to go in at three in the morning to do their projects," he said.

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