Endowment, tuition, enrollment, Simplicity

By Daniel Crenn

The Tech conducted an interview with President Paul E. Gray on Monday, Feb. 4. Gray discussed issues on MIT's endowment, Course VI enrollment, the Simplicity movement, and MIT's relationship with Cambridge.

Q: Do you see the relative balance between research and education at MIT changing over the next few years? And do you think we have the kind of endowment that will support the future? 

A: I don't foresee any change in the near future, in the next ten years, in the balance between education and research. ... I don't foresee any serious concerns or sense of imbalance in the present balance, and therefore don't see any natural problems or forces that are likely to change that balance very much. It seems to me that the balance between education and research... is going to be the same in ten years as it is today.

Q: Do you think it is too serious to deal with in a different direction? -too much research vis-a-vis education or too little? ... I think that the discussions of education and research... discussions which tend to regard those activities as independent, unrelated or separate are probably a little misleading because, after all, we are both in the same graduate education, at least, if... 

Q: Do you think the research would not be in the greater interest of the kind of education that we believe is appropriate. In fact, without this research environment there would not be the kind of important elements of undergraduate education. I'm thinking of the UROP program which involves more than the students in terms of faculty. Without the research undertaking there, there would not be the knowledge of new ideas of the changing nature of science and technology as it is reflected in the curriculum. So these are not separate activities. They're integrated.

Q: How about absolute levels? Do you see MIT growing, remaining at present size, or shrinking?

A: Growth at MIT stopped in the late 1960s. I think we'll stay stable. I think our present size is about the physical size of the government. And we do not have the capacity, neither in land nor in the necessary capital, to expand very much, even if we wanted to. Our present size, roughly 9000 students, or less, is divided roughly between graduate and undergraduates, and has been at that level for the better part of a decade, following a long period in which undergraduate populations were relatively stable and graduate programs were steadily growing.

Q: You mentioned MIT's capital base. I always hear about you and others saying the endowment is too small. But you would like to see it be a lot larger. But isn't MIT's endowment one of the largest in the country?

A: Compared to what? The question is, how do we view it in terms of our relative level of student support? In absolute terms, MIT's endowment is certainly among the top ten in the United States in size. Ahead of us are the University of Texas, Harvard, Yale, four or five other institutions. We're somewhere between number five and number ten in absolute size. That by itself is not a sufficient measure.

Q: Undergraduate enrollment is now heavily oriented toward engineering. Do you think there will be a change in the future? And how does this affect the amount of teaching activity that you have at MIT?

A: No, I don't think there will be a change in the future. And how does this affect the amount of teaching activity at MIT? I think this is a large part of the undergraduate teaching activity, which reflects the research as well as the graduate programs as well. Now it is still true of MIT that some of the departments of the School of Humanities, Social Sciences have a large number of majors in each of those areas and you could ask the question, 'Could you do with a smaller department or no department at all in each of those areas?'

Q: But what about other departments? For instance, I always hear how Civil Engineering has the strongest economics department in the country, has all the graduate students. That undergraduate major in Economics, does it have a large undergraduate enrollment? Is the demand for the major, the major attractive to students?

A: The School of Humanities, Social Sciences, has a large number of majors. And the answer is, is a large number of students. In terms of the undergraduate.l major in Economics, it is a large number of students. In terms of the undergraduate major in Economics, it is true that there is not a large number of students. There are about one thousand students in the Economics major, and there are not a large number of students. There are about one thousand students in the Economics major, and there are not a large number of students.

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