New OME director considers future of program

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tween, as well as determining how they fit in with the OME's objectives. Gibson detailed her learning process, which included: understanding the function of the OME's programs; understanding how the Institute functions; and understanding the OME's relationship with other Institute offices.

She is trying to accomplish this by talking to students, staff and faculty members. She said she understands that the office has been unstable in the past. That is why it is important "to get people to work with us. You don't survive in an institution without working in concert with other people."

Gibson said the OME is needed to support those under-represented minorities who have not had the same educational exposure as other students and to increase the MIT community's understanding of minority life. That is why the OME could have an impact on both minority students and the community as a whole, she explained.

Gibson succeeds Associate Professor S. James Gates '73, who acted as director of the OME last term while a committee searched for a permanent director.

Associate Provost Frank E. Perkins '55 had organized the search committee after dismissing William McLaurin from the OME position on Aug. 24 last year. Perkins based his decision on five points of dissatisfaction, as a group were less satisfied with their academic performance, felt the pace and pressure of MIT was more strenuous, and perceived greater peer competition than the overall student body, according to Brown.

Gates had earlier said minority problems at MIT are the same as those all over the United States. Some of these problems are not academic in nature. Some minority students face problems concerning:

- Financial aid; Nelson Armstrong, associate director of admissions, and prospective minority students are often frightened away by MIT's financial aid package. "It is initially perceived as not being competitive," the self-help package looks very large," he explained in February.
- Athletics. The small percentage of minority students and professors at MIT sometimes creates an atmosphere of social isolation for minorities, according to the forum.
- Lack of role models. "If a minority student has to go into a department where there are no minority faculty members, the student will probably have a much more difficult time trying to adjust," said Clarence G. Williams, special assistant to the president, last February.
- Williams said MIT's long-term plans should be based on producing and retaining more minorities who are qualified to be professors both "here and at other institutions." This strategy is in much the same vein as Gibson's ideas on the adjustment and retention of undergraduate students.

Gibson studied psychology at Howard University and received a master's degree in vocational rehabilitation counseling from George Washington University and the Ph.D. in educational administration from the University of Florida.

She had been an assistant dean at the University of Florida before joining the Dean's staff at Clark University. She has also for the past year been a consultant in the College of Education at the University of Lowell where she has been researching dropout prevention in the Lowell public schools.

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McLaurin had placed too much emphasis on programs for high school students, rather than on programs for the present minority student body.

Gates said difficulties occurred in the past when OME directors tried to impose their solutions to problems without first listening to students. But Gates also mentioned last spring that he was disturbed by what he thought was an "estrangement between students and the office."

In the aftermath of McLaurin's dismissal, Perkins called a meeting for students, administrators and faculty to discuss, in part, the future purpose of the OME.

He said some administrators believed the OME should not exist, but he strongly supported the office. Last September, he indicated two goals for the office:

- The OME should strengthen the relationship between the Core Group, consisting of faculty members who teach core courses, and the Freshman Watch Program.
- The OME should strengthen its relationship with the MIT Admissions Office.

Gibson said the OME needs "to foster greater use of other services offered in the community. Though OME can play an important role in the lives of minority students, the use of a wider range of MIT services will assure its student body."

But questioning minority motions that were raised during an Office of the Dean for Student Affairs "quality of life" forum last November remain unanswered.

At that time, Assistant Dean for Student Affairs Peter H. Brown announced that three quarters of the 87 minority students who filled out ODSA surveys rated inter-ethnic relations as "very good" and perceived MIT as having an open environment regarding racial relations.

The survey also indicated, however, that the minority student population, as a group were less satisfied with their academic performance, felt the pace and pressure of MIT was more strenuous, and perceived greater peer competition than the overall student body, according to Brown.

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