There is no precedent for such disciplinary action because there has never been any security violations of this type before, Lemann added.

The Committee on Discipline (COD) will consider the case and issue a ruling only if the student decides not to accept Lemann’s decision.

The COD will not review the breach of Project Athena’s security unless a complaint is filed by a member of the MIT community, according to COD chairman Eli P. Gutfman ’54.

“Do not take a complaint to create a case against a student,” he said.

“I think that the response to the individual incident has to be tailored to the particular incident,” said Project Athena Technical Director Jerome H. Saltzer ’61.

“You can’t generalize. I think that ruffling through a person’s files without permission is something very comparable to going through their desk without permission.”

“It is certainly unenlightened” for a student to write a “Trojan horse” program, Saltzer said. “That is the reason why the Athena statement of principles of responsible use points out explicitly that one should not.

“Do a really simple Trojan horse program is an easy task,” said Henry N. Holtzman ’86, MIT Media Laboratory’s system programmer.

“A user can never tell that he has a Trojan horse” by a “good Trojan horse” program, he said. A bad “Trojan horse” program is one that gives “bogus error information,” he continued.

Somebody wrote a good Trojan horse, it would have made the curiosity that it could be written.

But why would they run it? To actually go ahead and set up a break-in has got to be some sort of masochism,” Holtzman said.

Lemann said that the UNIX operating system used by Project Athena is not very secure. Students should change their passwords periodically … about every four months. Also, students should use long passwords: at least four, [but] preferably eight characters,” he said. “Passwords should never be common words [like] names, instead they should consist of strange characters.”

“I think that the protection provided by the Athena systems is very comparable to the protection provided by a dormitory,” Saltzer said. “If you come to a locked door, you know that the owner of the room doesn’t want you to enter it. If you have burglary tools … [or] happen to know how to pick locks, we don’t provide terribly high security locks on our dorm rooms.”

“As a dorm resident, you would not be able to keep millions of dollars in diamonds in your dorm room,” he continued, “because you know the security is not appropriate. But at the same time, you do not keep your textbooks there.

“I think that the protection afforded by the Athena system is similar in that it provides a way for users to mark information as private and those privacy marks should be respected by everybody else, even if someone happens to have special knowledge that would allow him to bypass the usual protection systems.

Others working with computer systems at MIT feel that no amount of computer security is sufficient. "In general, wherever people are dealing with any computer system, they should assume that anything stored on the computer system is readable by anyone," said William C. Saphir ’86, chairman of the Student Information Processing Board.

"Users should not assume that anything on the computer is protected from anybody else. As long as people take this attitude, then no damage can really be done," Saphir added.

Sensitive files, such as administrative records, are not kept on Project Athena. They are kept on systems with guarded terminals and no telephone dial-up access, according to Lemann.

MIT is currently developing a policy pertaining to theft of computer resources or information, according to COD Chairman Gutfman. He declined to comment on the proposed policy because it "may change as the result of current discussion.

"Eventually, the Institute is going to have to develop a position that is uniform and understood. At this point, many of the organizations such as Athena have suggested positions with respect to institutional behavior," Saphir said, "and I believe that the principle committee has said anything in the past which are consistent with this approach."