Committees review MIT requirements

The Keniston report urged MIT to work toward "dual literacy" in both the scientific and humanistic fields for all its students. The report also recommended overall expansion of the HASS requirement, greater structure and attention to breadth in the requirement and the establishment of more "interface" courses teaching both about technical issues and about their cultural contexts.

The Woodstock meeting in May was "intended to provide a forum for exploring a wide range of concerns . . . to share and stabilize areas of agreement concerning the role of the liberal arts in a scientific and technocratic society," according to Friedlaender's summary.

Participants in the meeting included department and section heads within the Schools of Engineering and of Humanities and Social Science, the members of the Keniston and Merritt Commissions, Deutch, MacVicar, Keyser and incoming Chairman of the MIT Board of Trusts.

The Woodstock meeting covered a range of topics, including much attention to the climate at MIT, i.e., high pace and pressure, and relatively low respect for the humanities (HASS). The meeting agreed that the Insti- tute's main emphasis should continue to center on the education of scientists and engineers, and sought not to dilute that strength, but to broaden it.

Friedlaender wrote the final draft of a paper on an Integrative Education at MIT in June. She hopes to eventually attract 100 to 150 students per class to major in liberal arts while acquiring a strong scientific background. She would also evaluate the extent to which a liberal education achieves the goals and the feasibility of a program of"interdisciplinary study of problems related to both the liberal arts in general and the technical realms. She cited health and medicine as an example of such a problem. Medicine includes "the ethics of saving lives, of scarce resources and of access deci- sions," she explained.

Friedlaender also emphasized the need for interdisciplinary study.

The present curriculum review could be as important to MIT's future as the Institute's self-examination after World War II, MacVicar said. The 1949 Report of the Com- mittee on Educational Survey (The Lewis Report) shifted MIT from a "vocational" to a "profes- sional" stance. The report also proposed undergraduate engi- neering education, established the School of Humanities and Social Science, and recommended a shorter term HASS requirement and provided the general foundation for the three decades that followed.

A combination of national and international concerns has focused attention on the role of science and technology in educa- tion, MacVicar said. "The timing is right" for MIT's self-examina- tion.

"A mature awareness of the interconnectedness of countries, peoples, cultures and economies" is one of the most important of these concerns, she emphasized. She also cited trade competition, a "fluid" political situation, the threat of nuclear war and health care. "Things are more complex than they ever used to be," she said.

Friedlaender remarked on the recent nationwide attention to the quality of higher education in the country and the committee's new entitled An Integrative Education at MIT has a responsibility to respond to a 1984 report by the Secretary of Education William Bennett on American education of general inadequacy, especially in the humanities, she said.

MacVicar stressed MIT's "pub- lic trust" as a reason for reviewing education. Students should be made conscious of "the reasons for being in the greater social impact and good" of their work, she explained. The faculty feels this "greater calling," she said, but students are not aware of it.

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Most professional scholars rely on the boundaries of their disciplines, she continued. "A discipline is all boundaries and no center," but education focuses on the established center. She concluded that education need to "catch up and shew the relativeness of things that MIT takes the "next step".

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