Report on pornography policy

(Editor's note: The following text is a summary of a report on the screening of pornographic films. The report was delivered by M. McBay, a member of the Committee on Pornography. The report was presented at a meeting of the Committee on October 16, 1985.)

The Committee was convened by the Dean of Student Affairs during the Fall Term, 1985, in response to the deliberations during the prior year. The Committee, which was comprised of two members from each of the following departments: the Dean's office, called "Reporta Guidelines" drawn up by the Committee, and which was circulated during the fall but did not come up for a vote until January. During the fall, there was some discussion, both within the Committee and in the community at large, as to the aims of the policy and the possibility that the point of the Committee's recommendations might be lost in the current policy. Several specific issues were raised by members of the 1984-85 Committee:

1. Should there be a reviewing body, if so, what should be its membership?

2. One member proposed that the committee should consist entirely of students, and that the committee should include representatives from major student living groups.

3. Another member suggested that the membership of the Committee be "expanded to include, for example, support staff and that a closer look be taken at the relative proportion of members representing different groups."

In summary, while there seemed to be a consensus that the Committee needs to represent a range of elements of the MIT community, and that the current balance of membership (3 administrative, 3 faculty, 3 students, 3 LSC) is one, there is some interest in reconsidering the exact formula and the specific elements of the community which are explicitly represented on the committee.

4. What guidelines should the Committee be asked to apply?

The definition of an "acceptable" film offered by the current Repeta Guidelines seemed to satisfy a majority of Committee members. One member, however, felt that the guidelines should be revised. There seemed to be some feeling that the current version of the guidelines might avoid some of the controversy. There was some agreement that the Committee's recommendations should be expanded to include "the showing of 'unacceptable' films." It was suggested that the Committee be asked to apply the guidelines to the showing of films which are not approved by the Committee.

In conclusion, the Committee had some continuing difficulty maintaining its membership and assembling a quorum. This suggests that the process of selecting members and the frequency of meetings may need attention.

During the year there were frequent discussions about whether the committee's meetings should be open to the public and the press. The Committee repeatedly voted to keep the meetings open but to reserve the right to close the meetings if the need arose.

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