MIT: “Calling all prefrosh”

By Steve Pao

Feature

All MIT students have the opportunity to make contact... with prospective students, as part of Project Contact. The program, managed by the Educational Council, aims to gather current students interested in informing others about MIT.

“The effort is to clear misinterpretations that MIT is more narrowly focused than it is,” said Bonny S. Kellermann ’72, director of the Educational Council. Applicants are better able to decide if MIT is for them after talking with people who recently lived through the experience, Kellermann said, and those who decide to attend MIT “will know somebody when they get here.”

Student volunteers “talk from their personal experience. We never prepare a script. The volunteers reminded them of items which they may want to mention to prospective students, such as academics, financial aid and living situations. As well as reaching prospective students directly, the program tries to inform others, including high school teachers, counselors, and the MIT alumni that act as educational counselors. Informing the educational counselors is especially important, Kellermann said. “Some graduated last June and some graduated 60 years ago, and their experiences are different.”

Project Contact focuses on high school students in the junior and senior years. MIT students often visit their local high schools while home on vacation, bringing brochures about the departmental programs, the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program, and student profiles. They also answer questions from seniors who have filed their applications. The program follows up on those who are admitted to MIT, Kellermann continued.

“Typically, a surge of interest among current students arises just before spring break, when the list of admitted students becomes available. Last year, 350 volunteers participated in Project Contact. There are currently 340 volunteers.”

“The problem this year is in distribution,” Kellermann said. At the first meeting in October only two of the first 80 volunteers belonged to a fraternity. There are also relatively fewer volunteers from remote areas, although “most large cities are covered,” Kellermann noted. The geographic distributions of the student body and the group of Project Contact volunteers are otherwise nearly equal. However, Project Contact still needs volunteers from over 40 areas including some entire states. Coverage is more spotted for international applicants, Kellermann noted. One person covers all of South America, while the Asian countries are better represented. Several volunteers come from India, Malaysia, and Hong Kong.

Those interested in minority recruitment may also request a list of minority applicants from certain areas. Although other offices direct their efforts at minority recruitment, some students have asked for lists of minority applicants to contact.

“I would like to see a more comprehensive network,” Kellermann said. Of the more than 12,000 preliminary applications received each year, only 600 applicants follow through to turn in their final applications. “It may be unreasonable to assume all of the applicants can be contacted, but reaching all of the final applicants would be nice if possible,” she said.

Another meeting will be held before spring break for those interested in Project Contact. Members of the Educational Council also organize meetings to talk to admitted students. “People can do as little or as much as they want to. It’s not too late to get involved,” Kellermann concluded.

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