Potential and merit, not racial proportion, should decide admission

(Continued from page 4) crease was largely due to Asian American women, who benefitted from the overall increased admission rate for all women. In this later period, one could say that MIT became much more optimis-tic about the qualifications of mi-norities and women than the ap-plicants themselves.

And what of national propor-tions? Let's compare MIT stu-dents with two such populations, first with all students, and then with all students who scored over 750 on the SAT mathematics sec-tion. [See graphic, page 4.1]

While many believe that the ability to succeed in college is equally distributed among all groups, the ability to score 750s is not. Minorities and women are overrepresented compared to the SAT sample of people who scored above 750. But MIT looks at things other than SAT scores, as the wide range of interests and activi-ties at MIT shows.

A similar trend is also seen, mostly due to a strong cultural bias which favors engineering. Though Asian Americans only make up four percent of students nationally, they are often 20 per-cent or more at many engineering departments nationwide.

MIT has no fixed quotas that I could find. A particularly suspicious trend was that total minor-ity enrollments stood at a con-stant 28 percent between 1983 and 1985. But this did not apply to the actual admissions group, where any quota would have to stay. Assistant Director of Ad-missions Marilee Jones said that, unlike other schools she has seen, MIT is proud of its diversity and does not believe that any group is unfairly overrepresented here.

Harvard is another story. A 1981 study by Asian American students showed that Asian ad-mittance rates were lower than average, and falling. Enrollment data at Harvard indicated that the combined share of the two fastest growing groups, Asian Americans and Hispanics, was limited to 15 percent for the five years between 1980 and 1985, whereas the share had doubled in the previous five years. Limiting enrollments of Asians may be justified, but it is quite an alarm- ing trend. After I had pointed this out, they told me the 15 percent was a "fair percentage in light of the national share of 5 percent."

One could also argue that advanced Asian Americans are not graduated at a fair rate, and that perhaps they are not taking the SATs. However, Asian American students are heavily represented, and their scores are very high.

Another issue is that Blacks are heavily represented, but are often taught to stay away from engineering. Here, we are probably seeing self-fulfilling prophecy. The effects of the disintegration of the Black middle and upper classes have had their own. Drops in black engineering registration are caused by the 50 percent of black college students at lower levels who do not take the SATs.

Feminists argue that the MIT really believes that it does not use race or gender discrimi-nation in admissions. But the evi-dence presented here strongly suggests that much of what MIT calls "sensitivity" may really amount to preference. The origi-nal intent of affirmative action was to eliminate preferences, not sanction affirmative discrimina-tion. While many reasons remain for retaining preferences at some level, it is clear that MIT should not blindly set goals based on na-tional racial proportions. MIT should concentrate on the merits and potential of individuals, in whatever proportions they may be.

Next: living with diversity.