Hagelstein joins MIT faculty

By Seth A. Gordon

Peter L. Hagelstein '76, an 11-year employee of the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, has joined the MIT faculty to become an associate professor of electrical engineering. He declined to comment on the reasons for this move. Three other schools and three or four labs were interested in giving him work, Hagelstein says, but he just "wanted to go to MIT." His associates have said military research made him uneasy, he said.

Hagelstein was a 20-year-old graduate student when he joined Livermore, the largest nuclear weapons research lab in the country. He helped develop the X-ray laser while he was at Livermore. "I'm probably the only X-ray laser expert at MIT," he said.

Hagelstein said his primary interest is in lasers using "soft" X-rays (about 10^-4 meters in wave length) instead of the visible light commonly used now. Because of the X-ray's short wavelength, an X-ray laser would be more precise than a visible-light laser, although its high energy makes it more difficult to build. Hagelstein said he intends to focus his research on "numerical simulations." Current X-ray lasers have to be "pumped" by large glass or carbon dioxide lasers. Engineers at Livermore are designing an X-ray laser pumped by a nuclear explosion, a satellite carrying such a device would be a major component of the Strategic Defense Initiative.

Hagelstein hopes to develop systems that are smaller, cheaper and more accessible. He expects the X-ray laser would be used as a research tool, but "the applications are still under study." Richard M. Adler '43, associate head of the department of electrical engineering and computer science, said Hagelstein will spend about half of his time in research and the other half teaching. Hagelstein has applied to teach core undergraduate EE classes and will begin his first teaching appointment next spring.

Adler described Hagelstein as "an extremely smart fellow. I think students are going to be very happy to work with him." Hagelstein's master's and Ph D theses were "remarkable," said Adler.

Associate Professor Peter Hagelstein '76, a new electrical engineering faculty member.

Isaac Chiang

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