Report is first step in fighting racism

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to Wilson, an associate in the Analytical Studies and Planning Group of Gray's office.

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"Broad discussion is the first step in dealing with the problems which are addressed in this report, the first step in making this environment more supportive of black students and all students in general," Gray commented.

The fact that other predominantly white universities have racial problems should not keep MIT from trying to improve its own situation, Gray stressed. "This is a fact, it is a problem here, a reason to try to deal with it here, and what the circumstances may be elsewhere are not at all that important with how MIT comes to terms with these matters."

Racism is especially unacceptable at MIT "because of our historic, appropriate and entirely necessary attention to individual performance and individual achievements, and the way in which individuals grow in this community," Gray said. "There must be no acceptance at MIT of any intolerance, or racial or sexual discrimination or favoritism."

S. Jay Keyser, associate provost, said, "We are now in a position to show how this problem can be dealt with in a creative way, and hopefully, that by doing so, we will be a model for other institutions in the country."

Faculty "shocked" by report

Professor Mary Potter, chairman of the faculty, remarked that faculty members are "enormously shocked" that some of the incidents related in this report could have occurred in the past five years.

Potter said she was concerned over the "negative and very damaging ripple effect" of such incidents.

Potter mentioned another kind of "benign" intolerance, a sort of "softness" to students in the classroom, she said. "We must not substitute for racism a kind of kindness, asking easy questions, giving easy grades, don't make hard demands on the papers. That's pernicious, it's another form of low key racism which must be wiped out," she emphasized.

The report revealed that many faculty members have substantially different expectations of black students than other students, Gray observed. "What is unique, and particularly troublesome in the revelations of this study, is that expectations of poor performance, expectations of lack of ability, or assumptions about improbity of presence, which are held by some members of this community, reflect a racially based stereotype which is shocking and simply out of place at MIT."

Some faculty members suggested forming more specific grievance procedures for racial incidents, being sensitive to the use of metaphors drawn from the minority such as "a mark against someone," achieving a greater representation of blacks in all levels of the MIT community, and holding an institutional dialogue on racism.

Faculty discusses Interphase

Some faculty members at the meeting asked whether Project Interphase, or an equivalent program, might be extended for another semester, during the freshman year or earlier.

Project Interphase, a transitional summer program for newly admitted minority students, has already been extended, in the form of the "Second Summer Program," one professor commented. This program takes students who had been through Interphase the first year, and provides them with summer job opportunities and some access to educational opportunities, he said.

Project Interphase has also been extended in the other direction, in the form of the "Minority Introduction to Engineering and Sciences," a program run by the School of Engineering for high school juniors, another professor noted. A substantial fraction of the students who attend that program come to MIT, he added.

MIT ran two different versions of Project Interphase this summer, another faculty member said. In addition to the full seven-week program, the institute held a shortened two-week version, he explained. As a result of this change, a larger number of the students MIT targeted for the program were able to attend, he pointed out.

But appraising the impact of Project Interphase can be difficult, Gray noted, because MIT invites all students who they think might benefit from it, almost all of them come. This prevents MIT from assessing whether the program substantially improves the performance of minorities at MIT. Nevertheless, most of the students who attend Project Interphase report positive experiences there.