Changes to IAP discussed

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they don’t like seeing students flapping around," it was Lieberman’s belief, however, that changes as dramatic as a calendar change would not occur in time for the 1988 IAP.

Students bored during IAP

"The reason we're considering more serious changes this year, I think, is because we have found that a large percentage of people don't spend their time wisely during IAP," Wilson said.

Wilson’s main evidence was a survey done last January by the Undergraduate Academic Support Office. The USASD randomly selected 246 seniors representing all four classes and asked them to keep detailed journals covering their IAP activities.

The results were analyzed in terms of total number of hours spent doing a productive activity during a 45-hour week, said Assistant Dean for Student Affairs Mary Z. Enterline, the administrator in charge of IAP.

According to the final report, "productive" activities included: studying material from prior courses, travelling, and working on an Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program project. The report also defined "non-productive" activities such as: reading popular novels, watching movies, and socializing with friends.

The report concluded that all classes except the seniors spent more than 60 percent of their time "non-productively." It also stated that 17 of the 18 freshmen surveyed participated in six or fewer activities that were listed in the IAP guide.

"Our main concern were comments like 'it's too bitter,' I want the term to start," Wilson said. "If it became clear to us that freshmen weren’t getting involved in IAP," he added.

Enterline pointed out, "This really isn’t limited just to the freshmen. Out of 10 juniors, none of them participated in any institute-sponsored IAP activity."

Attitudes like those that have many faculty wondering whether students are getting an education in January, Enterline said. "There is a sentiment among the faculty that if IAP is not being used educationally, then it should be eliminated," she added.

It costs $12 million each year to keep MIT running during January, according to MacVicar. "If you don’t put that time to good use, can you justify such a huge expense?" he asked.

"Many fraternities just write the word ‘vacation’ across the entire month of January," MacVicar continued. "In fact, it is not since rest and relaxation miss the boat as to what IAP is all about."

Faculty participation in IAP is also not what it should be, according to Wilson’s memo. In 1971, the first year of IAP, 243 activities were led by faculty; by 1987 that number had fallen to 125.

Various changes possible

Wilson’s memo suggested that the committee select one of several broad options, including eliminating IAP, leaving it unchanged, or proposing changes for the faculty.

Some members of the committee favored requiring students to participate during IAP at some point during their undergraduate years, Wilson said. Students would have to submit proposals describing what they planned to do during January or their advisors at the end of the fall term, he explained; after IAP, they would write a short report on their IAP experiences.

The committee is also considering offering three- and six-credit courses during January, shortening IAP to one week. Every Monday or Wednesday during the spring semester would then be offered as an "IAP day," with various lectures and seminars available, Wilson explained.

"Though the idea of having Wednesdays as IAP days might sound good, it really wouldn’t work here," MacVicar said. 

"Type A MIT people don’t know how to be reflective and do things in a new way. The temptation would be to just cram all the studying and work into those days."

Peter Child, IAP coordinator for the Music Section, expressed confusion as to why people were so unhappy with IAP that major changes need to be discussed. "Among all the faculty in the Music Section, all want to keep IAP the way it is now," he said.

Part of the reason why there may be such a compliant attitude towards IAP among the majority of the faculty is because all these changes would require more work, Wilson said. "Traditional -- we have been a time for faculty to catch up with their research," Wilson added.

Kyle G. Fetterman/The Tech

IAP Policy Committee Chairman David G. Wilson said there would coexist with the one-day seminars currently being offered.

Creation of the 3- and 6-credit courses would aid in providing more structure to IAP and would promote its intellectual goals, Wilson said. "We are getting signals from the students that they do want more structure to IAP. They get so used to being told what to do during the semester that when January rolls around, they don’t know how to organize their time," he added.

More drastic ideas include a calendar change would not occur in time for the 1988 IAP.

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