New courses will bridge fields

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instructors, Professor Sarah J. Deutsch of the history section of the humanities department and Professor Aron A. Bernstein of the department of physics, differ on the answers to the major the- matic questions of their course. Deutsch believes, "technological imperative determines political policy," but Bernstein said that "very often politicians describe decisions to make something as being driven by technology — I don't think that's really the case."

The course will examine its questions through in-depth analy- sis of the decision to build the hydrogen bomb. Bernstein said the goal of the class is to make students "understand both sides of the argument" by participat- ing in them. "This will be accom- plished by having each student read papers and biographies of a person involved in the debate to determine why that person took his stand," Deutsch said. "The class will finish with a re- examination of the debates."

Evolution of context courses

The history of the context courses begins with the wider hu- manities reform movement "initi- ated by the School of Engineer- ing," explained Associate Dean of Engineering Jack Kerbsmack. They felt that humanities distri- bution subjects were not coherent enough to serve the purpose of providing a liberal education at MIT. As a result, a joint meeting between all School of Engineer- ing dean and department heads and many senior HASS faculty members was held in Woodstock, VT, during the spring of 1985. Much of the action that followed was initiated during that meeting.

The Committee on the HASS Report was formed and issued its report in June 1986. The report recommended "that a new Institute Requirement be estab- lished consisting of a subject or subjects on the human contexts that shape and are shaped by the worlds of science and technology."

The report said "the contexts approach seeks to provide an integrated perspective by bringing humanities and social science and science and engineering teachers together in the classroom to ana- lyze, assess, and debate the hard questions that inevitably have shaped and are shaped by the worlds of science and engineering."

The report concluded "our call for a contexts requirement repres- ents a broad vision. Its specifics must be carefully worked out. The focus, however, should not be on substantive issues of sci- ence and engineering as ends in themselves. Technical matter should be considered only where relevant to the interplay among science, engineering and society."

Once the HASS report came out, the School of Engineering once more took the initiative by forming the Interdisciplinary Working Group. But Group Chairman Eli- a F. Gyftopoulos PhD '86 stressed that "while the School of Engineering took initiative in seeing that something started being done, the Interdisciplinary Working Group contained faculty mem- bers from all the different schools."

Professor Morris R. Smith of the history section is now chair- man of a new committee that will work along side the Gyftopoulos group in soliciting proposals for context subjects. Smith was on the role of the committees in looking into the context subject program. "Is this something we should do at MIT, or is this something we should put aside? I'm excited, but it's early to tell if it's viable."

Smith said that he is interested in "finding alternative ways by which context experiences can be give to the students. He pointed out that the classroom is only one medium and noted that at Worcester Polytechnic Institute, every student is required to do URUG type research projects on context topics.

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