State should eliminate taxation of stipends

(Editors' Note: The Tech received a copy of the following letter to the chairman of the Taxation Commission of the Massachusetts House of Representatives.)

Dear Representative Flood,

I am writing this letter to urge you to bring forth a bill to relieve graduate students from state income-tax legislation recently enacted which retroactively imposes a tax on graduate student stipends.

Graduate students are the future innovators, inventors, and most importantly, educators of America, but already the percentage of students who are graduate students is less than the Graduate School away from graduate school. So why should they be bad for Massachusetts? The reason is that the future of Massachusetts is dependent upon high technology, and fundamentally, in their quality of life, in order to earn a graduate degree. The process can take six years or more, and unlike medical, law, or business degrees, a PhD has little or no financial reward. I can't understand how the state can justify imposing a tax on graduate student stipends, a move which increases the burden of this already impoverished group away from graduate school. So why should they be bad for Massachusetts? The reason is that the future of Massachusetts is dependent upon high technology, and the main suppliers of high tech innovations are the graduate schools of the universities in this state. Many of the founders of start-up companies in this state come from the graduate schools of MIT, Harvard, Boston University, Boston College, Northeastern, or the University of Massachusetts. These companies are at least partially responsible for the low unemployment rate of Massachusetts and also for the state budget surpluses that we have enjoyed the last few years. Thus I hope that you will support the elimination of taxation of graduate students, not in the context of a loss of revenue for Massachusetts, but rather in an investment in the future of this state, in an investment that will return dividends in the form of more high tech companies, more education, and ultimately, more revenues for the state. It is easier to lose the state than to make up for taxes not withheld.

Sincerely,
Scott Peng, President and four others

Graduate students hurt by stipend tax

To the Editor:

I am writing in regard to the state income-tax legislation recently enacted which retroactively imposes a tax on graduate student stipends. Most graduate students must make tremendous sacrifices in their income, in their family life, and fundamentally, in their quality of life, in order to earn a graduate degree. The process can take six years or more, and unlike medical, law, or business degrees, a PhD has little or no financial reward. I can't understand how the state can justify imposing a tax on graduate student stipends, a move which increases the burden of this already impoverished group away from graduate school. Stipend levels are determined in advance of the academic year to allow for a subsistence-level after-tax income. The tax on stipends was enacted well after the stipend level for the 1989-90 academic year had been set. To make matters worse, the stipend level is retroactive, so there is actually a double penalty - a small income tax - after four months, graduate students must make up for taxes not withheld during the last eight weeks. Imagine my surprise when I learned - seven months into the year - that new legislation had been passed which suddenly put me seven months behind in my state income tax. I doubt many other segments of society would stand for such legislation.

It is easy to see why this tax was enacted - graduate students have almost no political voice. Virtually all of us are too busy in pursuit of our education to take the time to protest this outrage; many of us are from other states, with votes that don't matter at all here. Unfortunately, given our financial situations, graduate students are among those least able to bear this tax burden. There are presently more foreign students than American students earning PhDs at American universities. This is a trend that must soon be reversed, if we are to keep any sort of technological edge in the competitive world marketplace. Government - both state and federal - must encourage education, especially at the graduate level, for it is at this level that the next generation of educators and researchers is produced.

Indeed, the 'Massachusetts Miracle' was fueled by technological innovation. The state should do everything in its power to promote advanced education. There are numerous other reasons why the government should encourage education, and they all come down to one inescapable fact. In the long run, the benefits far outweigh the costs. Why is the state in trouble? One reason is its education policy, which has led to an undervalued education.

While I realize that revenue must be generated to balance the state budget (especially given the governor's presidential aspirations), imposing additional taxes on graduate students is an extremely short-sighted and, in the long run, irresponsible method for raising money. In light of the government's alleged commitment to education, it is a hypocritical action as well. Instead of making the 'sensible decision' to tax those able to afford it, the state has decided to follow unsightened federal policies and tax those who don't have the time or the voice to complain. This legislation shows a severe misunderstanding of priorities and I urge you strongly to_corrrect it, in order to repel the tax on graduate student stipends. This is a chance for Massachusetts to show the country what commitment to education really means.

Andrew Lessin G

Dershowitz is immature self-promoter

To the Editor:

It amazes me that Adam Dershowitz '90 has once again taken himself upon to offer the sensibilities of the MIT community by showing a movie as repugnant as Deep Throat. The fact that this movie is pornographic is not as much a concern as the fact that Linda Lovelace '83 (Marcia) was a victim of a brutal sadistic beating at the time this movie was made. Marcia claims in her book that she was forced to commit the sexual acts seen in this film. Therefore, every sexual act in this film is, in reality, an act of violence - a rape.

That Mr. Dershowitz again chose to show this film as opposed to an erotic (not pornographic) film of less questionable subject matter, lends me to consider him to be more of a thoughtless immature self-promoter than a champion of free speech.

Norman M. Wernley G