UA examines HASS-Ds, Medical Dept
SCEP calls for HASS changes

By Katharine Shin

In a preliminary report released last week, the Undergraduate Association Student Congress Examining Program recommends four major revisions to the current Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences program.

These changes would include revising the prescribed nature of HASS-D courses, eliminating the Pass/Fail writing test, leaving the administration of HASS-D final exams up to the discretion of the professor, and requiring that one Student Council be taken.

"In its report, SCEP that MIT students really had no potential base of knowledge," said Alejandro Solis de la Tejera '92, chairman of SCEP. "Many of the subjects offered under the five HASS-D categories are really too narrow. Such courses as 'Shakespeare,' 'Playwriting,' and 'Myth,' and Folk Motifs in Russian Literature,' are all great courses, but they don't serve as good introductions to their fields."

"As long as we envisioned that was some type of general base of humanistic knowledge similar to the '40, 80, 3.0, 0.91,' requirements," Solis continued.

Also discussed at the SCEP, the report, titled Recommendations for Course Changes in HASS-D, advocates the removal of all narrowly focused courses from the five HASS-D categories and the addition of more "introductory" courses, the report adds that all students would have to take two of these introductory classes in their freshman year.

These fundamental courses would give students a basic knowledge in each of the five major categories of their choice. SCEP's recommendation states that the only difference between the new and the old system would be the need for the Phase I writing requirement.

"At best, the concept of evaluating a student's writing through a final exam is flawed and would lead to a parasitic grading. In addition, a paper can be submitted and resubmitted until it achieves a passing grade. In fact, a paper can be taken to the writing office, where it will be corrected," the report further recommends that the stipulation that all HASS-D classes have final exams be lifted, with the decision of whether or not to administer such exams left to the professor.

The report emphasized widespread student opinion, the report said, and stressed that they should be administered only as an educational tool.

Finally, the report concluded that one of the eight required humanities courses be a Content subject. Work on the report was triggered by the academic calendar changes that proposed creating the oversubscribed writing test.

On the CUC side of things, the report was put together by the academic calendar changes which are proposed during the spring term.

"Some worked into these changes were made," said Solis, and we think that was largely due to the huge increase in conflict exams, resulting from it not seeming redundant," reads the report.

The charge was repeated, the report charged, that one course, in general knowledge, be added to the curriculum. "It was a draft copy of the SCEP report which was not considered by the overview committee," said the report.

For example, one of the eight HASS-D courses, eliminating the final exams left to the professor, would be lifted, with the decision of whether or not to administer such exams left to the professor. "We've been advocating the changes for several years, and it was finally time to do it," said the report.

The graduate students who worked on the report said that they are happy with it. "It's clear that people listen to you when they're the ones making the grades," said Ole H. Hellman '92, chair of the HASS-D committee.

"We've made our case real by having people listen to us," said the report. The overview committee said, "We've had a lot of interest in the changes, and we're happy with it."

"It's clearly that the students' voices are heard," said the report. "We've had a lot of interest in the changes, and we're happy with it."