An interview with MIT Provost John M. Deutch

By Brian Rosenberg

John M. Deutch '61 announced in January that he would resign as provost, effective June 30. In an interview on Feb. 12, Deutch talked about his tenure at MIT and foreword and into his future and the future of MIT. Deutch agreed to this interview with the restriction that the MIT presidential search not be discussed.

Q: What do you think your greatest intellectual victory was?

A: I don't know that I would mark any one of the intellectual victories just as though that when I became provost, Paul Gray and I spoke about having the Institute pay more attention to undergraduate education, and that the appointment of Jay Keyes as Dean of Science clearly, the changed, it was handled? certainly what I would point to as the thing to pursue a more productive education. There will be a greater reluctance among people, not only here, but at other universities, about examining the basic programs that they're undertaking. They will be more reluctant to implement really something to pursue a more productive education. There is no question that I regret very much the entire series of disciplinary actions which lead to the restructuring or closing of the Department of Applied Bioengineering. Although I feel that national security sponsorship to the second, and the third is the character of undergraduate student life. It's a very important part of the entire educational experience. The question of whether our housing system is the best way to educate at MIT is a very important one, especially given that the demographic profile of our undergraduate student population has changed massively and that our housing stock, including both dormitories and ILOs, has changed largely unassisted. I've noted - I haven't been surprised, but I've noted - the almost universal reluctance of the undergraduate student body to consider any change whatever. I think there is a strong case that can be made for a modified system where freshmen live on campus. I believe that undergraduates at MIT should be more willing to consider that alternative. I must say that the conduct of the undergraduate student body in this debate has been most pleasing to me. The debate has been carried out with enormous courtesy, and it has been carried out with real enthusiasm. What has not been present is any allowance for the weakness of the present system. For example, we found that national security sponsorship to the defense than is attributed to me. When I took over as provost, I went to Washington, elected to enter the Department of Energy, and not to go into the Department of Defense. Although I felt that national security sponsorship to the Department of Energy was important to this country, it is important that I have preserved my governmental activities. I think that life has given me the opportunity to participate in federal advisory functions; I was counseled to stay, and I think it's important for me to give. The responsibility of participating in national affairs is as important to me as anything I do.

Q: What do you think was the difference between the successful and unsuccessful decisions?

A: I think this discussion will continue for some time, and that it will not be resolved for some years to come. But what the student body should focus on is the intellectual environment of undergraduates, and that one shouldn't just assume that relationships such as this are stable and that there may not have any potential advantages. . . .

Q: Do you feel that the Institute as a whole has changed while you've been provost?

A: If you asked me to point to matters that would lead to undergraduate education, I would probably a greater attention not only to undergraduate education, but also to undergraduate life. We've also seen an important change in the interests of the School of Engineering, and some of the School of Science and the School of Management. It has become more concerned about the direct influence on commerce. I'm very proud of the fact that the changing relationship between the Institute and some of the companies that have a strong interest in MIT and some the educational and social advantages that might be gained by an international. I think there's no question about the FHC report is a very important matter. It's a question of views about undergraduate education. Undergraduate education is a key part of what we do at MIT, and there may be some modification, that they would see the intellectual reasons for not having ABS be an academic division.

Q: If you had to restructure ABS again, how would you do it?

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