Economics Department to Initiate Optional Thesis

By Sarah Y. Kbitchay
ASSOCIATE NEWS EDITOR

Starting with the Class of 1993, undergraduate majors in economics will no longer be required to write a thesis for graduation, said Gary J. King, administrative secretary of the Department of Economics. The decision was made at a recent department meeting. The policy, announced by the White House last week, reflects the current economic climate. "It's a bad time — this may be a better arrangement. In principle the thesis requirement was a good idea, but in practice it was flawed," Professor Peter Temin '64 said. The proposal was sponsored by the Committee on Undergraduate Thesis, said Professor Economics Jerome Rappaport, explaining that "The information has gone into the [upcoming MIT Bulletin] that the thesis will be optional," King said. The requirement for those who choose not to write a thesis will be an extra elective subject, he said. Professor Temin Temm '64, head of the department, said that the thesis was made optional because the "department discovered it's not always a useful experience." He noted that the economics department will continue to offer the Undergraduate Thesis Seminar (14.99), which prepares students for writing their thesis during the fall semester.

"For some students the thesis works, but for other students, the unstructured nature of the thesis proved to be very difficult — it was not a productive use of their time," Temin said. "An elective would be more useful for these students," he said. Temin said the department hopes students will be "self-select appropriately" whether or not they should write a thesis. He said the department will see in a couple of years if the new arrangement is working well.

The annual thesis issue had been a topic of discussion for almost one year, said "Temm. "We hope to improve the quality of life for the undergraduate pursuing an economics education," he said. Professor of Economics Jesse L. Lieber said, I am one who liked the thesis requirement. It was a capstone for the entire undergraduate educational experience. He concurred that there were administrative and operational problems with the thesis requirement. "It's worth a trial — this may be a better arrangement. In principle the thesis requirement was a good idea, but in practice it was flawed," Professor Temin said. Professor of Economics Richard S. Eckman '54 said the new thesis option gives flexibility without reducing standards.

Professor Arthur C. Smith. He added that the people who make these allocations "make decisions contrary to what students' priorities are," he added. He would like a chance to give the campus a choice on activity funding, although some activities are under-funded and others are over-funded. "There are people who still feel that their allocation decisions may be "out of touch" with what students' priorities are," he added. He would like a chance to give the campus a choice on activity funding.

Some activities are under-funded compared to other campuses or other MIT activities, Kirby said. He would like to help fund living group-based activities which sponsor events that are popular on campus. "We surveyed 19 colleges that UA Council, Page 10

Students to vote in referendum

Under the proposal, the UA Finance Board would continue to allocate money to student activities as it currently does. The allocations, however, will be voted upon by a student referendum, said Kirby.

The ballots would be multiple choice, and, if students agree, the median response for each category would be used to determine the total amount to be billed, he said. Some dollar amounts suggested at the UA meeting were $17 for student services in general (the current amount), $5 for the Center Evaluation Guide, $30 for A Safe Ride, and $25 for an athletic card.

UA more 'in touch'

Kirby said that the administration "makes decisions contrary to the interests of the student body," the people who "should have the decision-making decisions may be "out of touch" with what students' priorities are," he added. He would like a chance to give the campus a choice on activity funding.

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