OPINION

A Plan to Fight Sexual Harassment

MIT is, as a university, a leader in identifying and dealing with sexual harassment. Ombudsmen Mary P. Rowe and Cheryl S. Williams tackle a variety of problems brought to them by members of the community, about 20 percent of which were due to sexual harassment. MIT has the highest collegiate reporting rate of such incidents. However, as Rowe herself will point out, MIT is not yet doing enough to prevent harassment. The booklet "Stopping Sexual Harassment" is a start, but the need persists for a consistent framework for dealing with harassment.

First, MIT needs to strongly recommend that every single member of the MIT community attend an "awakening session." The purpose of these sessions would be to give examples of sexual harassment so that the community can begin to understand what it is and to encourage victims to report incidents as soon as they occur. This would serve to combat the ignorance that many harassers claim contributes to their actions.

More importantly, it is time for MIT to create a standing committee dedicated to hearing cases of harassment. Analogous to the Committee on Discipline, this Committee on Harassment would be a valuable option for victims who wish to have their cases heard by a representative group chosen from the MIT community. Such a committee would be a vast improvement over the current system, in which a new committee is formed for each harassment case. A standing committee would provide a stable alternative for victims put off from filing charges because of the uncertainty in who will make a decision regarding their case.

Even if official action is undesirable or impossible, the harassment victim should still realize the importance of reporting incidents. Most of the harassers will not take action on their own, but they will explain the options for action or non-action available to the victim. If there is any question, the victim should ask the counselor directly, "Will you listen to my story without taking action?" Reporting is important because it can help awareness about this problem and may even prevent harassment from taking place by causing cultural change in the community.

In summary, MIT needs to do two things: educate the community in a more formalized way and create a standing committee to deal directly and consistently with these issues.

Victims need to understand the importance of reporting harassment even if they decide not to pursue the issue any further. And each member of the community needs to make sure he or she personally takes the lead in fighting the specter of sexual harassment.

John H. Morrison Jr.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Campus Police Unfair For Pressing Charges

The Tech received a copy of this letter addressed to President Vest.

According to The Tech, two suspects were arrested after menacing some students one evening and pointing what looked like a gun at them. The gun turned out to be a water pistol. Nevertheless, the suspects were charged with assault with a dangerous weapon. I don't have to state the obvious, but a water pistol is NOT a dangerous weapon! The suspects should not have to state the obvious, but a water pistol is NOT a dangerous weapon! The suspects should be charged for threatening or menacing people, but not for assault with a dangerous weapon.

What should the campus police do? They should press all charges, even though they may not hold up in court, indicating that the practice of bringing false or exaggerated charges is routine. She displays here the same lack of respect for the truth that she displayed two and a half years ago when she pressed false charges against [undergraduate students] Steven D. J. Penn and [Ronald W.] Fracis in the Committee on Disciplinary Action.

This is a matter of principle, and I'll say it again: We must not tolerate police officers who knowingly falsely charge people. The judge in this case should not only dismiss the charge of assault with a dangerous weapon, he should also lay sanctions for provoking a frivolous charge.

We've been talking about honesty in the academic community for two years. Let's start talking about honesty in law enforcement.

John H. Morrison Jr.