Homesty Colloquium Called Disappointing

By Sarah Y. Keightley

If you're keeping score on November's election, you can almost certainly place MIT into the win column.

President Clinton has chosen MIT graduates to be among his closest, most influential economic advisers. The decisions made by the Clinton administration will have an equally profound impact on campus—or as issues raised from research emphasis to the acceptance of homosexuals in the Reserve Officers’ Training Corps.

Several high-ranking posts in the new administration are being filled by economists who received their doctoral degrees from MIT. “It’s MIT economics that will help shape policy in Washington under President Clinton,” proclaims the Feb. 1, 1993, issue of BusinessWeek.

The underlying philosophy of MIT’s economics department is that public policy should be used to guide the economy, according to a recent article in The Boston Globe. Other universities’ departments of economic as the University of Chicago, MIT believes, lies in a free-market, laissez-faire approach to economics. The Harvard-Boston-Globe syndicate of schools have received degrees from the University of Chicago.

Laura D. Andrea Tyson PhD ’74 and Alan S. Blinder PhD ’71 were both named to the three-member Council of Economic Advisers, which will advise Clinton on White House and congressional policy. Joseph E. Stiglitz PhD ’66 is a potential candidate for the third CEA position.

Furthermore, Lawrence F. Katz PhD ’86 was named chief economist of the Labor Department and David Cutler PhD ’91 is expected to serve as the liaison between the CEA and the new National Economic Council, which will coordinate economic policy. Lawrence H. Summers ’75, who taught economics at MIT for a short time, is Clinton’s choice as international Undersecretary at the Treasury Department.

The Boston Globe also reports that MIT economics professors are expected to have advisory roles in the administration. These advisors will include Nobel Laureate Robert M. Solow, Professor Paul R. Krugman PhD ’77, and Professor Rudiger W. Dornbusch.

Bill Clinton and Boston Mayor Ray Flynn look on as Rep. Joseph P. Kennedy addressed a Faneuil Hall crowd during a Clinton campaign stop.

By Hyun Soo Kim

The MIT administration and students have tried to define and counter academic dishonesty on campus. But although there were many opportunities for discussion presented, including a colloquium and the release of last spring’s academic dishonesty survey results, few actions were actually taken.

The colloquium, “Success and/or Honesty: In Here, Out There” held on Oct. 21 addressed the implications of cheating at MIT and in the work place. Ten panelists from MIT and the professional world voiced their thoughts on honesty to a less-than-packed Kresge Auditorium crowd.

“I think that we have a significant problem,” said panelist David G. Scott ’84, a member of the Committee on Discipline, which hears cases on cheating. “I think we have a significant problem.”

There have been flagrant cases of cheating. There have been horrific cases of unauthorized collaboration. We have to be careful about stating the word of the cheating, as opposed to cutting a corner — like copying a problem set when you have a lot of work due. Cheating is a loaded word, but cutting those corners progressively gets bigger and bigger,” said Scott.

Panelists addressed the benefits and the allowable extent of collaboration as assignments. They offered some remedies to encourage academic honesty, like educating students on ethics and coordinating problem set dates for core classes.

Students attending the colloquium had mixed reactions to its value.

“I felt like the panel was bad in another world and not connected to the students at all,” said Sumit Basu ’95. “The panel did not seem to take a realistic view of the problem of cheating, but told about everything in a theoretical way.”

Other students complained that the discussion was not focused enough.

But Professor of Physics Robert P. Redwine, a colloquium panelist, said, “I think it depends on what you thought the goal of the colloquium was. I think it raised a number of issues and brought about a lot of thoughtful discussion. It may not have been tightly focused, but I don’t think it could have been.”

Survey hints at large problem

The Undergraduate Academic Affairs Office released the results of last spring’s academic dishonesty survey just before the honesty colloquium. The survey results did not reveal any “real surprises” to the administration, said Alberta G. Lipson, associate dean for student affairs. “Faculty aren’t very good at drawing the line,” said Travis R. Merritt, associate dean for student affairs. “Faculty aren’t very good at drawing the line, and students aren’t very good at asking faculty to draw the line.”

Merritt, Associate Provost Sheila E. Widnall, Dean for Undergraduate Education and Student Affairs Arthur C. Smith, and other high-ranking administrators talked with Undergraduate Association Council members in February to try to define and deal with academic dishonesty.

Widnall suggested that the UA create a student honor committee or “honor court” to represent the student point of view about academic honesty. Members of the committee would meet with instructors, thus reducing the problem of miscommunication between students and faculty.

An honor code has also been suggested in the past. But the current UA administration has no plan to work on instituting an honor code, according to UA President Shally Banal ’93.

“Be effective, an honor code has to originate from the students,” said Widnall.

“While an honor code can come into play just as a statement, we want to develop programs that will alleviate conditions which foster cheating,” said former UA president Stacy E. McGiever ’93 at the colloquium.

In February, Smith said that the Dean’s Office planned to write an institute-wide policy defining acceptable collaboration in assignments, which all faculty will have to accept unless they write their own. But he has come upon difficulty since then in finding the common denominator among various department policies to write this default policy for MIT.

Some faculty at MIT have already defined acceptable collaboration on assignments for their own classes. For example, the United Engineering requires that students acknowledge others’ contributions, said Wahl M. Hisselberg, professor of Aeronautics and Astronautics.

Widnall added, “The outside world is paying high attention to ethical standards. They expect it from MIT. It’s important that we internalize the standards. Currently, prominent individuals are paying high prices for cutting corners.”