Committee on Student Life (CSL)
Friday, October 9th, 2009
12-2pm, W20-407
Minutes taken by A. Hansen

Minutes

Present: Muriel Medard, Barbara Baker, Paul Baranay, Alex Evans, Enectali Figueroa-Feliciano, Shee Shee Jin, Carol Matsuzaki, Christian Ternus

Agenda I: Minutes

- This year the Minutes for the Committee of Student Life website will not be redacted (names and all other information will be shared) so that all committee discussions are entirely open to the community. If any member wants to introduce an agenda item of confidential nature please discuss before the next meeting with the Committee Chair. The Minutes will be distributed to Committee members several days before being posted on the website and during this time Committee members may request to edit any statements or information made in the Minutes.
  - An email will be sent before the next Committee meeting to make sure that the members absent from this meeting are aware and agree that the Minutes will not be redacted for the website.

Agenda II: Discussion of the Taskforce Interim Report presented by Muriel Medard

- The sub-committee of the taskforce that deals with DSL has a deadline of October 30th. In the process of writing recommendations the taskforce went to the UA, GSC, IFC, International Students Office, Athletics, Performing Arts, and open forum dinners were held at Simmons, East Campus, and Sidney & Pacific. The interim report was then brought to a few recommendations (which were all quantified which was an aspect which did not show up in the report) and the report has now been widely circulated.
- Keep in mind there were smaller recommendations which were less policy and more operational that are not in the report because they were immediately picked up, e.g., metering the dorms for utilities (DSL pays for utilities according to square footage).
- Last year CSL did have several discussions near the end of the year regarding the taskforce. Several items recommended on the interim report are relevant for the committee to discuss today.

1. One main recommendation (which was in the back of the report) is the topic of visiting students. MIT has a large population of visiting students (this number could be as high as 1,000) who are in a degree program elsewhere and come to MIT under the supervision of a faculty member for a term or a semester (they are essentially doing a master’s thesis). Most of these students are graduate students (although many come from schools where they would be considered undergraduates) and they are not degree students at MIT nor are they taking classes here.
   - A problem is that a year and a half is the max amount of time that visiting students are allowed here, but often faculty members request that the students remain longer because they are crucial. This makes students almost like unpaid TAs.
   - The visiting students don’t fall under an overarching office, but they are primarily handled by the International Student’s Office. According to the ISO in actuality there is a
larger number (about 3 to 4 times that of the number of official visiting students) of unofficial visiting students who have MIT identification cards, work in offices, etc. and it is worrisome that they are here for a year unofficially. Additionally, professors pay a fee for visiting students but when the students are here unofficially no fee is paid.

- The estimate of the number of unofficial students comes from looking at the number of official visiting students and how many students come to the office for help; this shows the ratio of people with a problem to the population. Then you measure the number of unofficial students who show up at your office and multiply it by the same ratio in order to get an estimate number.
  - Many of these students are not aware of their unofficial status. Others are aware.
- The taskforce has suggested charging tuition for the visiting students. The idea is that instead of 1,000 visiting students you end up with 500 unofficial visiting students. Then out of those 500 students you charge them something pro-rated for research tuition. The purpose of this would be to make up for the expenses occurred by visiting students at MIT (time, resources, offices/space used, etc. Faculty can essentially use a visiting student as a free RA for almost two years when this work should be done through an actual MIT student who is paying tuition or who is being paid through grants). This would also bring in money for the Division of Student Life.

Discussion:
- This enforcement will make some of the non-legitimate students become legitimate, but it will also make others just not come to MIT.
  - There can always be exceptions to a policy (e.g., for students coming from third world countries).
  - There is also the idea of reciprocity in the recommendation, i.e., send a student in exchange for the one you are getting. Hopefully this idea of reciprocity will keep our own students’ opportunity for studying elsewhere from being impacted adversely.
- Some other institutions have even more drastic tuitions for visiting students.
- Is this controversial?
  - Doesn’t seem to be controversial, but it is also possible that faculty just haven’t read the interim report yet or faculty with unofficial visiting students aren’t forthcoming about it.
  - Bear in mind that while some faculty might be very unhappy with this recommendation, other faculty members are very responsible with their visiting students.
- Can ISO change the tuition themselves?
  - ISO doesn’t make the rules. The $1,000 fee currently set for visiting students was created by MIT (possible proposed by the Academic Council).
- Be aware that the role of the taskforce is not implementation but one of recommendation. They also can’t suggest recommendations which can’t be enforced. The point of discussing the recommendations with the Committee on Student Life is not to receive more recommendations, but to inform the committee of the report and get feedback.

2. The second recommendation concerns housing. MIT doesn’t guarantee four years of housing, but it is the status quo that if a student wants to stay on campus for four years they will be able to (but not necessarily in the dorm of their choice). This is a problematic “guarantee” because in actuality there isn’t enough housing for undergraduates for four years.
If FSILGs lose licenses, it often happens that students end up living in lounges. If MIT has a guarantee then we also need to make sure that there are the means necessary to follow through with housing. There is already crowding on campus freshman year. There is no policy that says if you move off-campus you can’t move back on, however, there is a form that if you move off-campus you lose the guarantee to be able to move back.

Additionally, MIT has been talking of increasing enrollment (by about 400 more students a year) and if this does happen, there would have to be a more official non-four-year commitment for housing so that there isn’t overcrowding on campus.

If it were to go into effect to not guarantee four years of housing, it would not be applied to any students already at MIT but only to future incoming classes. The process would have to be very transparent.

Another separate recommendation was looking at Ashdown and the amount of money put into it, how much more will be spent, and how much MIT stands to gain from future rent. The cost of developing under current plans is very high and Ashdown is a cash negative. Ashdown would also not entirely be able to solve the problem of increased enrollment (Ashdown could only house about 350 students). Therefore, the recommendation is to drop development of Ashdown until there is a donor.

Discussion:
- Freshmen get the worst end of the deal due to overcrowding because they don’t have the choice of living elsewhere. Would it be possible to repeal the “freshmen on campus” policy? Fraternity recruitment has not done as well since the Scott Krueger decision because freshmen can’t live in fraternities and therefore the dorms are too full and the fraternities are not fully filled.
  - It was not clear how much leeway there was with freshmen on campus because the decision had been linked to a legal issue and the taskforce didn’t have the resources to call a lawyer.
  - Should movement into the fraternities for second year students be encouraged in the community?
- Another possibility is to not give transfer students the same benefits (they currently receive the same housing and benefits as all students). If this were to happen there would have to be an explicit policy.
  - Also consider that there are more vacancies in housing the second semester. Does it make more sense to look at transfer applications in the spring when there is more available housing.
- Does the committee believe it would be acceptable to put unaffiliated students in FSILG housing?
  - No. MIT cannot guarantee housing in FSILGs. Who can live in FSILGs is entirely up to the discretion of the house and MIT cannot plan to use these spaces for housing (FSILGs are all run differently; some own the buildings outright and some rent housing from MIT with leases which state the house is responsible for selecting people who live there).
- Re-Implement Senior Segue?: This was a policy where undergraduate seniors were placed in graduate housing and were subsequently giving priority in graduate housing as a graduate student.
  - This won’t solve any of the current problems because it only worked for a particular slice of people.
  - Seniors moving out of undergraduate dormitories was also detrimental to the dorm communities.
There is a suggestion for future CSL agenda items to be: freshmen living off-campus, Rush, and REX.

3. Another recommendation on the interim report concerns summer housing. Dorms are kept open during the summer but are very under populated. The recommendation is to encourage the use of dorms for conferences or high school to collegiate level summer programs.

Discussion
- Having more summer programs is a good idea. Can more organizations be reached out to about hosting camps at MIT? → Yes, this was recommended in the report.
  - People like the idea of using the dorms more, but there wasn’t a clear sense of the actual vision in the report. Appeared to be several options.
    - The report didn’t specify one option because there were several.
  - There is currently no active recruitment to find people to live in the dorms because there is no person with the job to find people to live in dorms over the summer. Programs that come year after year to stay in dorms are already affiliated with MIT.
- What about the many people who like to stay over the summer in their own rooms?
  - Students are already often allocated to certain room or floors over the summer.
- Many students leave MIT dorms over the summer to live in less expensive FSILG housing. Would it be possible to make the dorms less expensive over the summer to encourage more students to live in them?

4. The final recommendation to discuss in this committee is the way that dining is computed in financial aid. Currently the student budget for financial aid includes costs for dining which presumes students dine on campus at all times. The idea is to recalibrate the dining budget for students based on if they will actually be using campus dining. If they choose to use other dining the budget will be smaller.
- On campus dining is a service provided and the idea is not to penalize students for eating less but to budget the amount according to what they actually use. The problem is that students often use excess money towards buying a laptop instead of using it towards dining.
- The benefit to MIT is that this would make more money available internally for grants and loans.

Discussion:
- Several students strongly object to this idea and believe that reducing the budget for dining would be seen as a penalization to students, especially for students who prefer to cook their own food and opt out of the dining plan.

END OF MEETING.