Committee on Student Life (CSL)
Friday, December 12, 2008

REDACTED DRAFT MINUTES

Introduction and Draft Minutes passed from previous meeting.


Quiz:
1. What percentage of the undergraduate population is international?
   • 9.44%. This is a significant increase from 8.7% last year.
2. What is the overall percentage of international students at MIT?
   • Overall: 27%. At the Graduate level alone it is 39%.
3. From which country do most MIT international students come from?
   • China
4. What is a “Green Card”?
   • A Green Card is permanent residency in the US. Students with Green Cards are not considered to be international (international students must be in the US on a visa).
5. True or False: International Students can go on “light load”.
   • False. International students must be full time students and take the full number of units (a light load is less than 36 units).
6. True or False: International Students are not eligible for medical withdrawal.
   • False. This is unnerving because a student might want to stay in the US if they have medical care undergoing that is not available back home. However, MIT must report medical and this can go on student’s record. Additionally, students can’t work or live in housing while on medical withdrawal and the US government basically wants students to go home when they are ill.
7. True or False: MIT students from Puerto Rico are NOT international students.
   • True: They are not international students, but they are not US citizens either. They have special documentation for being from protectorate territories.
8. True or False: An undocumented “alien” is permitted to enroll at MIT.
   • False: Officially students are not allowed to enroll but there have been situations where students have enrolled: If MIT becomes aware that someone is undocumented (if the visa has expired or the student never had a visa) and the student is actively taking steps to procure a visa then they can be enrolled on a semester to semester basis. If the student lied on the application this is an entirely different matter. This can get very complicated because occasionally undocumented students write they are a citizen on their applications because they genuinely believe that they are citizens. Undocumented persons are not eligible to receive financial aid.
9. International Students are permitted to work on campus for up to how many hours per week?
   • 20 hours per week. This does not mean 10 hours one week and 30 the next. The only exception to the 20 hours per week rule is during summer and IAP. Officially work may only constitute 20 hours, but students can conduct additional independent research.
10. **True or False: International Students are not permitted to work OFF campus under any circumstances.**

- False. International students can work off campus but they need work permission all of the time. The job also must adhere to the condition of being critically related to the student’s field of study, and not just to supplement their income (this is a problem with undeclared undergraduate students). It is foreseen that employment for international students will be a huge issue next year as they already have severe restrictions and with the global economy international persons in the US are often the first to be laid off. International students may volunteer off campus only if it is in an environment where everyone is unpaid (ex. Salvation Army), and it can not be in a business where others are paid and where the experience can be put on the work section of a resume.

**International Students Office Statistics as of October 13, 2008 (Handout):**

These statistics are from Oct. 13 (the 5th week of the semester), which is same day that the Registrar’s Office takes statistics and while they were valid on that exact date they are subject to fluctuation as students come and go.

- The number of international students at MIT is increasing each year: they consist of 27.14% of the student body.
- In regards to gender, there are more females (particularly at the graduate level) this year than the previous year: this year there are 733 female graduate students as opposed to 682 last year, and there are 157 female undergraduate students now in comparison to 135 last year.
- The top ten countries with International students at MIT are: 1) China, 2) India, 3) South Korea, 4) Canada, 5) Germany, 6) France, 7) Taiwan, 8) Singapore, 9) Japan, 10) Italy. India and South Korea have switched ranks of 2nd and 3rd since last year, as have Germany and France as the 5th and 6th ranked countries. Overall these have been the same top ten countries for the past ten years, the main exception being that the United Kingdom has dropped off the list and Canada is moving down the list (perhaps the Universities in these countries are improving?).
- Traditionally, school enrollment does increase when the economy is bad, but it is unknown what will happen this following year.

**Visiting Student Statistics:**

- Visiting students are students from other universities, both national and international, who are invited by faculty members to do research in a lab, etc. The Vice President for Research and Associate Provost Office approves the visiting students, and the International Students Office monitors them.
- The number of visiting students is growing every year, but it is hard to categorize them as many students straddle being undergraduate and graduate students (i.e., fifth year European students). Additionally, visiting students can come at any time of the year and their stay may last from seven months to 18 months. Since October 13 there are 67 more visiting students at MIT. Currently there are 341 visiting students at MIT, 25 pending students, and in the course of a year there are a total of about 600-700 (unduplicated) visiting students at MIT. Visiting international students at MIT are primarily in engineering, but if you count US visiting students there are also many in biology (at The Broad Institute).
- Professors do pay a $1,000 fee for visiting students (which goes to the Provost’s Office), but the funding for visiting students comes from student tuition which they don’t have to pay.
This is a cost issue because visiting students use every aspect of student life (the gym, libraries, etc.) and the need for a new identification card (which costs $10) every semester gets expensive. Another issue is that faculty members occasionally forget that they have visiting students or they go on sabbatical and the students end up using the library as office space. Visiting students are not offered on-campus housing, however, if there are spaces available they can get in (and most visiting students end up living on-campus in graduate housing). Finally, visiting students are required by Massachusetts law to have MIT health insurance or an equivalent.

- Legal issues are a concern: Homeland Security will audit MIT in 2009 and they have mentioned that they will look into non-degree students with the question of why are there so many here? Is MIT using them as cheap labor for research? Homeland Security will probably get more bureaucratic in the next few years because of the perception that international students are taking jobs away from US citizens.
- Visiting students do great things for MIT, but the number is growing so exponentially that at some point a number will be reached where there are too many and too much paperwork and the growth will have to stop.

Discussion Regarding International and Visiting Students:
- One solution regarding costs could be to increase the fee professors pay for visiting students so that it can cover actual costs, or the money can be taken out of a contract. This is something to bring up at Academic Council. Academic Council originally set the fee to curtail the number of visiting students (they had hoped for no more than 100 at a time).
- Though it is not automatic for faculty to invite a visiting student to the Institute (they must make sure there is enough room, etc) perhaps there should be better faculty control over visiting students once here. If a student is essential to research and needs to be at the Institute for an extended period of time, they should be admitted into the school.
- There is concern over increasing education costs: will financial aid to international students take away from financial aid for US Citizens?

Item II: Continuation of the discussion on communication, transparency, and hacking issues from the last meeting.
Perspective of a former UA member:
- Last year there were several big incidents that caused student outcry:
  1) The Green Hall Transition from graduate women’s housing to an undergraduate sorority
  2) The renovation of the old Ashdown building the way that affected dining.
  3) The Star Simpson case.
- Last school year the UA decided to research to see if communication with Administration was a real problem and so they created a committee that looked through the Tech Archive for examples of good and bad cases of communication from the past. Numerous cases were discovered and the trend was that most cases involving good communication between students and Administration in the past were in the Academic realm whereas cases of bad communication were in student life (housing, dining, and student support). Essentially, the protest in Lobby 7 during family weekend centered on serious issues that have been around in one form or another throughout time and result from a lack of transparency regarding student issues. For example, students perceived the police arresting hackers during
orientation as a change in policy that has come down from Administration which displays the lack of communication.

- Last year the UA worked with an administrative task force on student engagement where it was discovered that the decisions that students were unhappy with were ones that didn’t fall under typical faculty or presidential procedures or were from committees that didn’t have student representatives. It was perceived the heart of the issue as once again being communication between Administration and students.

Discussion:
- Need a better representative system or structure in order to get student voices heard. How can these broken channels of communication be fixed? These tensions are only going to get worse with foreseen financial cuts in the student life realm.
- How to resolve issue of who the Dean of Student Life speaks to? There are so many different cultures here and so many individual entities that make up the community. It also doesn’t help that student leadership structures are competitive, i.e. DormCon has told the Dean go straight to them, not via the UA, regarding housing issues. The UA and DormCon need to collaborate instead of being competitive in order to better represent the student body. Administration has made some suggestions on outside help that will make the student leadership structures more effective. Campaign for Students should also be reached out to for collaboration with the UA. Additionally, the students themselves need to be aware that there are already multiple advising structures in place (GRTs and RLAs) where they can get their problems addressed.
- When should students (and faculty) be in advisory consultation with Administration and when should they be making decisions with Administration? Steps to take for student representation:
  - 1) Strengthen the student government.
  - 2) Put student representatives on Administrative Committees unless there is a compelling reason not to do so.
  - 3) Make it clear that there are certain domains in which students can’t be involved (i.e., tenure and court cases) and that there will be trade-offs in many situations where decisions won’t always please everyone but clear reasons will be given towards that choice.
- Make Agendas, Minutes, and Topics from meetings open publicly so that the reasons behind sensitive issues that might be misunderstood are clear.

End of Meeting (the last one of the semester). Happy Holidays!