Minutes

Present: Barbara Baker, Alex Evans, Enectali Figueroa-Feliciano, Muriel Medard, Cinjon Resnick, Vivek Sakhrani, David Singer, Alex Slocum

Updates: Lizhong Zheng, a Professor of Electrical Engineering & Computer Science, will be replacing Carol Matsuzaki as she is unable to attend the meetings spring semester

Minutes from 1/8/10 approved.

Item I: Mentoring Program – Updates from the GSC (presented by Vivek Sakhrani)
The GSC has been communicating back and forth with the UA about the mentoring program and the summary of these conversations is that their already seem to be many mentoring programs around campus that are based around specific needs for specific students. So, students are wondering what this program will give them since they already have more specific programs. The GSC also has concerns about how the program would be housed and organized and how the program would relate to the needs of the graduate student body at large (especially in regards to leadership). Therefore, the current stance of the GSC is that they are hesitant to start a new program since there are pre-existing programs that they can work with and also because it seems like this program might benefit from the support of the new Associate Dean for Student Activities & Leadership, and as the search for this position in progress the GSC thinks that it could be wise to wait and see what new developments of the position are and see if the mentoring program should be discussed with the new dean.

Discussion:
• The new Associate Dean would be a position that is a reorganization of two previous positions and the PSC, CAC and SAC would fall under the umbrella of the new position.
• A couple of years ago there was some concern in the Committee on Student Life to see how things were shaped within DSL; this might be a good topic to revisit.
• There are several items of issues on their agenda about leadership, DSL, and the ties between the undergraduate and graduate community that are larger than just mentorship and these need a lot more discussion (in addition to waiting to see what will fall under new positions) before they can move forward with thinking about the mentoring program. The GSC also understands that there is an obvious benefit for undergraduates from the mentoring program but they don’t see what the precise value of a mentoring program will be for graduate students.
  o What are they referring to exactly in regards to leadership (what programs, what are they developing, etc)?
  o This conversation is very similar to a conversation that happened a couple years ago in the committee discussing leadership (Muriel has the hard copy of the conversation, would it be good to distribute this to the current committee?) because the committee had felt that the definition and goal of leadership wasn’t clear and that is should be developed in conjunction with the academic portion of MIT that studies these matters.
• About two years ago DSL held some meetings with various stakeholders (about the Gordon programs, etc.) to discuss leadership which were a think tank style where people were offering their perspectives and ideas about leadership models.
• It seems as though the notion of leadership is difficult to define and might encompass mentoring, but Muriel had thought of mentoring as connected to leadership but ultimately its own entity.
• Perhaps there is not so much a need for a mentoring program at MIT as a program which will bridge the gap between pre-established programs at the Institute (departmental mentoring programs, UROP, alumni association, etc): is there the potential for broadening or strengthening these programs instead of creating a new program?
• Mentoring is very important, but with all of the pressure that graduates are under to publish, etc. will they have time for a mentoring program? Graduates who are GRTs or TAs already have very little time to complete research.
  - Most graduates are under the impression that professors want graduate students applying for positions to have had teaching experience with undergraduates. Is this not the case?
  - Professors do want their graduates to have experience with undergraduates, but it should be made clear that mentoring should be done only by graduates at times that they aren’t going to be in the lap and aren’t already TAs or in UROPs.
  - In order to have a mentoring program be successful it would be necessary to have articulation by a diverse group of faculty who support the mentoring program and want students to have the experience.
  - Encouragement from professors also depends on timing: some semesters a professors will encourage their students to take on more activities outside the research setting whereas other semester they strongly encourage students to not be involved in as many outside engagements.
  - The mentoring program would not be a huge time commitment, it would probably just be a lunch every once in a while which wouldn’t require enough hours to conflict with student’s other responsibilities. However, it would be good to define the amount of time the mentoring program would necessitate so that students can decide if it would work with their schedules.
  - Keep in mind that the number of students has gone up but the number of faculty has not and so there are fewer faculty-student mentoring interactions for students to benefit from.
• Has the GSC done a survey on the mentoring program?
  - The GSC hasn’t done a survey yet because the GSC limits the number of surveys they do each year, it takes time to create a comprehensive survey, and there are already several surveys in the queue.
• One large element of the mentoring program is that it wouldn’t necessarily be connected to departments but would instead provide students with someone from a different apartment (some departments have better advisors or mentors than other departments).
• Given everything it might be difficult to integrate faculty members into this program and therefore faculty should not be required for the program.
• The mentoring program should require training for mentors in order to avoid jaded perspectives and telling people what to do; mentee should be made to consider all options and then make their own decisions.
• Who would run this program since the committee is only advisory. Should we wait and present the idea to the new Associate Dean?
  o The role that CSL plays in the program is to:
    1) Decide if the program would be worthwhile to research
    2) Decide if resources are needed at this point in time in order to start the program.
  o At the beginning, CSL discussed the program to see if there was interest before trying to move forward. With the feedback from the GSC it seems as though there is some interest but nothing concrete at this point in time to move forward with.
  o Also, it may seem like a small program to add to someone’s agenda, but it should be kept in mind that the new dean will also be inheriting several other programs which would take priority.

Summary:
There is concern how this program with interact with other programs. At this point in time it seems best to keep communication open with DSL and speak with Chris Colombo about where this program might fit in the scheme of things.

Future Agenda:
Danielle Guichard-Ashbrook will be giving a report on International Students and Muriel Medard will ask Chris Colombo about giving an update about Summer Housing for students. Enectali Figueroa-Feliciano has the suggestion to discuss diversity at MIT: though it might be difficult to assess the health of all of the diversity programs, it would be possible to hear directly from some students in several groups.

End of Meeting.