Minutes

Present: Muriel Medard, Chris Colombo, Steve Lerman, Vivek Sakhrani, Lizhong Zheng

Minutes from 2/5/10 approved.

Introductions:

- Carol Matsuzaki asked to be released from CSL this term due to a conflicting commitment and so Professor Lizhong Zheng was willing to begin his CSL participation early (he was scheduled to become a member for the next academic year).
- Muriel has also spoken with UA President Mike Bennie about assigning UA representatives to the committee.

Agenda I: Visiting Students presented by Steve Lerman

There is a very large number of visiting students at MIT which is increasing rapidly; the students are mostly international but a fair number of the students appear in one part of the MIT system and not in others, and these students can be divided into three categories. The first group of students shows up in the VP for research system. The second group only appears in the International Student’s Office (ISO) system (which has a much larger number of students). A third group of students doesn’t show up in any system because they are engaged in research for professors but are on a tourist visas (they might not necessarily know that they aren’t here officially and they may still have a MIT ID or after hours access to labs). Consequently, when the third group gets in trouble they go to ISO and the number of unofficial students is calculated based upon the assumption that visiting students get into trouble as frequently as other students. So, the number of unofficial visiting students who show up in ISO is multiplied by the ratio of the number of official visiting students who get in trouble versus the total number of official visiting students.

- A prominent question has been if these students are being properly managed and is the way of management the correct one? Is the MIT system even designed to accommodate a large number of visiting students or will it become overrun?
- Legitimately invited students come to the Institute by faculty invitation, and the faculty member pays $1,000 to the Institute from their own resources (unless the visitor is staying five weeks or shorter in which case the fee is $500). This fee is dealt with by the VP for Research Office (Claude Canizares). The visiting students are a category in ISO and they are members of the community (they receive visiting IDs, they use the libraries and other resources), but they are not in degree programs and do not attend classes.
  - The VP Research Office does receive requests to waive visiting fees, which can happen for quid pro quo situations (an MIT student goes to another school and we get a student from that school in return).
  - Anecdotally we know that many visiting students come from places where they have funds from their government and could pay their own fees (we don’t charge them, we charge our faculty members).
• Every 5th week of the fall semester the registrar compiles the Y Report which is a consensus of students in different categories, one of which is visiting students. There is also a FTE handling visiting students full time.

• The issue of visiting students has been a long standing problem and the numbers have grown quite steadily. ISO registers about 700 forms in a year, and though the students aren’t necessarily on the campus at the same time this is still a large number (almost the freshman class size). These students consume many resources: library space, equipment, lab spaces, and they download huge chunks of online databases. Visiting students are not given housing or MIT Medical Plans (which are paid for by tuition), but any member of the campus can go to Medical even without a plan. MIT does get some feedback money from the VP for Research Office, but the biggest concern is that the MIT experience is being underpriced.

• Steve Lerman has been charged by the Chancellor to put together a working group committee which will come up with concrete recommendations for policies and procedures to double the net revenue derived from the visiting students in order to offset the costs reported by the Y Report. We need a new set of prices and policies that:
  1) Offset compliance
  2) Comparability: the faculty must understand that it is an obligation to pay for visiting students. There will be some kickback from this because it is a source of cheap labor for professors.

• Keep in mind, these issues do not mean that MIT wants visiting students to go away. There are many positive benefits to having visiting students (e.g., they add to the spectrum of linguistic capabilities). MIT just wants for the system to benefit everyone.

Discussion:
• In fairness to the faculty, sometimes professors don’t realize that having unofficial visiting students is a big deal and they don’t see why students on 90 day visas shouldn’t come into their lab for a few months.

• Lizhong Zheng was a visiting student at MIT from Berkeley in graduate school and the entire fee was paid through Berkeley. One way to keep track of students is to give them all IDs.
  o There is an Ivy Plus League agreement which allows students to move back and forth between certain US universities because the reciprocation evens out.

• What sort of legal liability is MIT under if a visiting student is in a lab accident, etc? The larger the group of students the more likely that something may happen.

• Have we looked at how other schools handle visiting students?
  o We have not yet looked at other schools, but it will be an appropriate measure to take.

• The working group will also need to deal with the fact that visiting students can stay up to 18 months, but the duration of their stay should probably only be a year or a single term. It is very awkward explaining why students need to be here for so long when they renew their visas because when professors write things such as “integral or critical to my research” then it seems like the student should actually be admitted to MIT.

• MIT is a “brand” name Institution and people will pay a lot to have an experience here, so a higher fee might not necessarily deter visiting students from coming.

Conclusion:
Steve Lerman is in the process of creating the working group to review visiting students and will update CSL on the group’s progress.
Agenda II – Report on International Students presented by Danielle Guichard-Ashbrook

This is essentially the “Y Report” for International students. The statistics are similar overall to last year, but the number of students is growing and there about 80 more students than the previous year.

- The statistics are taken in October because many European schools start in October and therefore the number of international students at MIT goes up in this month. As of October 9, 2009 there were 3,150 international students at MIT. This number doesn’t include dependents (spouses and children) who are also considered to be MIT’s responsibility. It is rare for visiting students to bring dependents but those who do tend to be in executive programs such as Sloan or long term Ph.D. programs.

- Forty percent of MIT graduates are international students. The overall percentage of international students at MIT is 27.78% which is one of the largest percentages (but not the largest number) of international students in the country.

- MIT has far more Chinese students than any other nationality. Indian and South Korean students interchange on a yearly basis between the second and third most common nationality. Canadians are in the fourth spot (the number of Canadian students has decreased in recent years because Canadian schools have greatly improved).

Several primary issues that international students have are student life issues.

- The biggest issue for international students is immigration security checks which are happening more frequently. These checks are not just in sensitive fields (e.g. science, nuclear) but in fields like urban studies because they embassy is concerned not just about what you study but what you may have access to. After 9/11 these security checks increased, then reached a plateau, and now they are on the rise again (last year there were 30 checks, this year about 50). The security checks are done because the embassy wants to know if you have ulterior motives for coming to MIT, and therefore they send your application to Washington where it can often get held for several months. Homeland Security won’t tell MIT anything because it isn’t under the purview of MIT. This happens mostly with graduates, but it is also picking up with undergraduates which is a real problem because if they start the first term late they get behind in coursework and with freshmen you can’t defer them for the second term but must defer them for the whole year.
  - Every one of these students eventually gets cleared to come to MIT but it leaves a bad aftertaste for both the student and MIT. It also has a lasting effect because it makes it more difficult for the student to go visit a parent or go to a conference outside the US because they are afraid they might not be able to return to MIT on time.

- ISO keeps hearing more complaints about housing, particularly regarding married students. For example, several Westgate residents brought to attention the fact that they feel uncomfortable in their lobby because there are often elderly people playing with children and the graduate students want an area that is their own space to hang out in (grandparents can get up to six month visas and often stay in housing to help take care of their grandchildren).
  - If students want to set community standards for Westgate they can (e.g. set aside the lounge for studying) but it must be the Westgate community which decides the rule. These students can also be sent to Donna Denoncourt if the issue is affecting the MIT community as a whole.

- Domestic violence is also a huge issue with international students and a large percentage of domestic cases are international students. Many graduate students have families and having more than two people living in a space meant for only two people might exacerbate tensions.
Domestic violence is very serious because by Massachusetts law people reported for domestic violence must be arrested. If you are an international student this will stay with you forever because the records don’t mention conviction, just the charge.

- These are issues which have been brought to the attention of DSL and it has been suggested to emphasize this issue at orientation.
  - The Campus Police do discuss these issues with international students upon their arrival to campus, but often they aren’t paying attention because so much is going on or because they just don’t expect to have domestic problems.

- The final issue with international students is academic integrity, which happens at a disproportionate level. It primarily occurs at the undergraduate level (graduate students can also be brought to the COD level but it is more often dealt with within the department or the professor just fails the student). If you are expelled due to academic integrity it must be reported to homeland security and that sticks with the student.
  - Often the issues are misunderstandings about doing one’s own work while in a group project, not understanding the difference between take home tests and homework, or different cultural understandings (not using quotes to reference material discussed in lecture because they assume that the professor will know it wasn’t their original idea). International status is never an excuse for academic integrity, and though information is discussed during orientation the students are so inundated with everything that they don’t absorb all the warnings.
  - There is an academic integrity brochure which comes out of student life.
  - Danielle Guichard-Ashbrook is concerned because domestic students are more aware of the consequences of academic integrity because it has been emphasized in previous schooling, but international students often don’t understand that what they did is wrong and then they are shocked when they are suspended.

Conclusion:
There are a lot of international students so only a small percentage are involved in the previously discussed problems, but those are the main issues seen in the International Students Office. These issues need to be managed to give the students the right experience and determining the status of international students at the Institute will help with these issues.

End of Meeting.