Committee on Student Life (CSL)
Friday, May 6, 2011
Room 12-196 12pm – 2pm
Minutes taken by Lisa Stagnone

Present: Enectali Figueroa, David Singer, Danielle Guichard-Ashbrook, Lizhong Zheng, Oz Agar

Guests: Maokai Lin from GSC (attending in place of Vivek Sakhrani), Sisi Ni from GSC, Lina Garcia from ISA, Adriana Vazquez from ISA, Yangbo Du

TOPIC: International Students; REX

Danielle Guichard-Ashbrook started the meeting by giving us an international pop quiz:

WHAT PERCENTAGE OF MIT STUDENTS IS INTERNATIONAL?
- 38.4% at Graduate Level;
- 9.28% at Undergraduate level (which is capped at 10% due to financial aid issues)

WHICH COUNTRY HAD A DEVASTATING EARTHQUAKE MOST RECENTLY?
Japan

WHICH FIELD AT MIT HAS THE MOST INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS?
#1 Electrical Engineering #2 Sloan

TRUE OR FALSE: CHEATING IS ACCEPTABLE IN SOME COUNTRIES
You need to define cheating

TRUE OR FALSE: DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IS ACCEPTABLE IN SOME COUNTRIES
In some countries, it’s considered a private family matter and dealt with as such

MOST INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AT MIT COME FROM WHAT COUNTRY?
China (for the last 15 years)

TRUE OR FALSE: MIT HAS STUDENTS FROM EVERY COUNTRY IN THE WORLD
False. Almost every country

TRUE OR FALSE: CANADA IS A FOREIGN COUNTRY
True.

WHAT DOES TOFEL STAND FOR?
Test Of English As A Foreign Language

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING IS A SURE SIGN OF ANXIETY AND STRESS?
- Refusal to make eye contact (in some cultures eye contact is a sign of disrespect)
- Body odor (could be from dirty clothing, something you ate)
- Speaking in incomplete sentences (language barriers)
- All of the above
- None of the above

THE FORMER COUNTRY OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA IS NOW MADE UP OF TWO COUNTRIES. NAME THEM
Czech Republic and Slovakia

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING IS NOT A COUNTRY?
Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan
They are all countries.
Americans have the reputation of not being aware of, or knowing what’s going on internationally. Other countries are more knowledgeable and aware of worldly issues. The MIT community is better informed regarding languages and issues.

Reviewed Statistics (see attachments)

The International Students Office main responsibilities are to assist foreign students regarding immigration issues and visas. The office would like to see domestic and international students mix more with each other. Students tend to cluster with others who are like them.

Understanding the daily language is complicated even though they have high TOPEL scores. Everyone knows that MIT students test well. Graduate students need to be able to interact within labs and small circle so comfort in language is important. When they are unable to follow the conversation and contribute they feel uncomfortable and left out. It’s difficult for some to speak English ‘once in a while’ and then to constantly speak it ‘all day long’. Some try to work up to speaking the language continuously. GSC tries to get people out of their comfort zones so to build experience and become more confident. Perhaps if people were more sympathetic to these situations it could help international students get acclimated.

How do students deal with the language barriers?
Faculty tries to make things clear at the beginning of the year when students arrive to be more defined on what the class requirements are. Communicating is tricky. You may say one thing however it’s not what the international student heard therefore the American students have the lead on what’s expected.

Speaking English is an issue for both under grads and grads. Americans speak quickly and speak with slang terms that are not easy to decipher at times. Pop culture is referred to in conversation and expected to be understood without explanation. Again this makes it difficult to follow and converse. Some students will stay with others who can speak the language well and this in turn with help them to understand what’s being said. It’s hard to speak English all day long when it’s not your first language. It takes a lot of work.

Grad students are finding it difficult even more so because they are ‘adults as opposed to students’. They are expected to be able to converse without issue. It’s embarrassing to not understand what’s being discussed. It’s even more embarrassing to stumble over your responses and not fit in. You get uncomfortable asking for an explanation or asking for a joke to be interpreted for you to understand.

How do students deal with the cultural related barriers?
If you are from a country where it’s relatively safe all the time, adjusting here can be trying. If you are from a country where it’s relatively dangerous, that takes adjusting to also. You don’t want to go anywhere unescorted. You ask for someone to walk with you at all times. You make decisions regarding the safety factor.

Are there resources available to help international students get more support?
Being international means never asking for help. Americans have a lot of resources to help you deal with issues (for example: disabilities). Most international students with disabilities are offered these options too however they don’t utilize them. They don’t want to be singled out or treated differently.
Could this be cultural? People want to belong, belonging means not being different. They want to be like everyone else around them. If they are different, they may stick out and be labeled as weak.

At Berkley, they have what’s called an English Proficiency Test. If you want to be a teacher’s assistant you are asked to take the test and pass it. There are classes to help you develop your communication skills. Some may videotape themselves so you can see how you are doing. MIT has an English class in course 6. Maybe we need to have the TA’s here take the class and pass it in order to help students? Is there a chance that Harvard would partner with MIT to do this?

Some students feel that listening, reading and speaking English is what will help you communicate better. Forcing people to take a class will not help the issue. It’s unrealistic. Some feel that they can survive within their community without learning the language. They should be able to make their own decisions as to taking the class or not. It’s been said that this can be used against them in the future when going for employment but it should be their decision not MIT’s.

**Proposed:** We need to find Teacher Assistant training to be evaluated with language proficiency class that needs to be taken and passed.

Is there a speaking center where people can go to talk with others and get experience with language? What is set up now is more from an academic focus with language. It does not deal with socializing. Maybe students can set up to meet to speak with others who are interested in learning another language?

**Proposed:** Students set up and exchange conversation to better your communication skill set. This could be something worked on through the Student Activities Office.

It’s stated that when international students arrive as freshmen, they get a lot of information and attention. But after the 1st year, you seem to have to survive on your own. No one is checking on you to make sure you’re ok. It would be nice to maybe get more emails regarding things that are happening that you should be aware of (issues, group events). It seems that ISO is just responding to issues.

**International Students and Taxes**
This is a very confusing and frustrating issue. Once you go through it, you have it down but it’s very tricky. You don’t want to do the wrong thing for fear that someone will come and get you and take you to jail. This applies mostly to state taxes, not so much federal taxes. You can’t find information that pertains to you as an international student. You can’t ask ISO because they don’t have the resources or expertise to help you. Software packages are available but can you rely on them? What if you make a mistake? There are different tax laws for students who are in a dorm from the students who are in a frat house. Providing services at tax time would be helpful. There is a link on line to forms for federal tax forms now and Massachusetts forms will follow shortly.

**Proposed:** What if we had tax services available for hire should be offered at tax time? Or how about we make this a project for the GSC to post examples of tax forms needed online for referencing? Can they make a video?

International Students Office is primarily focused on immigration issues. The MIT community needs to realize the implications facing these students. Everything can affect their immigration status. Yes you are an MIT student but some people lose sight of the fact that you have a different situation to live by. Any minor issue can set your status off to become a major issue. You don’t want to violate your status.
Understanding within the community would help. Graduate students need to be aware of traveling regulations when attending seminars out of state.

Perhaps in the future we can have workshops for international students. But will graduation students attend? Maybe if we have the grad students organize them it will get a better attendance. They’ll know when would be a good time to have it due to their own schedules. Have them in the dorms would get better attendance. Some people don’t read emails so they miss the notices. Word of mouth is still one of the best ways to get information out there. Advertising through student groups may help too. You can ask someone from ISO to attend to talk about current issues (example: get a lawyer to speak about taxes during tax time).

**REX**

International Students, in the past, arrived the week prior to domestic students. It was always scheduled this way in order to give the students more time to adapt to being here, and have time to get settled. This is their first time away from home let alone in a new country. They don’t get to experience Campus Preview Weekend so this time helps them socially also. Other important introductions are meeting the police department, health services and get to feel more at home. The students really value their trip to Target to help them get their goods for their rooms, cell-phones, adapters…

Once it was stated that changes would be made on the end of the international student orientation period, the students realized that this issue is worth discussing amongst them selves. They felt that they should address it due to the fact that ten percent of the class consists of international students. They had a concern because no one asked them how it would impact them, it just happened.

International orientation needs to adapt. Networking is important for these students. There’s a lot more involved for them that you realize. Decisions have been made before asking for feedback (such as Walker Memorial). Senior administration shouldn’t make these decisions without student input. This new schedule, the overlap into FPOPS, is a problem and puts the domestic students ahead of the international student body.

Do the international students pay more to come in a week earlier? They’ve been told it’s a time issue. Everyone comes in for FPOPS. Sports community comes in a week early to get settled. Housing at this point is only temporary which is good. It’s all budget related. MIT could be trying to generate more money for summer housing fund.

Where did the change originate?
The change came from the Chancellor’s office by trying to align our orientation program to other universities. Feedback from faculty is that the students are tired by the time they start classes. Julie Norman’s office makes the decisions regarding orientation. It’s funded by the Admissions office. However the ISO pays for the international orientation.

Once the students heard of the changes, feedback was given about it as being a problem. A committee was formed to research the subject more however no one from the ISO or any international student is on the committee. Since this has been brought to the committee’s attention, it’s being addressed. Decision-to-committee is not the right process.
Students were not aware that orientation would be changed. When things that affect them get changed, they want to be part of the solution. (Examples: Walker, Rex, Food Plan, Sports groups.) These can’t all be just cost issues. Students are trying to develop leadership qualities but they are not given the opportunity to exercise it here.

Concrete Proposal by Committee: Currently it’s been stated that there is no funding for (the 2 dozen) foreign students without American passports. Issue arose in the past but there was no one to help these students. The Committee for Student Life can advise for finding funding to support these students.

Attachments included:
International pop quiz
International statistics
INTERNATIONAL POP QUIZ!

What percentage of MIT students is international?

Which country had a devastating earthquake most recently?

Which field at MIT has the most international students?

True or False: Cheating is acceptable in some countries.

True or False: Domestic Violence is acceptable in some countries.

Most international students at MIT come from WHAT country?

True or False: MIT has students from every country in the world.

True or False: Canada is a foreign country.

What does TOEFL stand for?

Which of the following is a sure sign of anxiety and stress?
   A. Refusal to make eye contact
   B. Body odor
   C. Speaking in incomplete sentences
   D. All of the above
   E. None of the above

The former country of Czechoslovakia is now made up of two countries. Name them.

Which of the following is NOT a country: Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan
International Students Office Statistics
As of October 18, 2010

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Degree Level</th>
<th>International</th>
<th>US Citizen</th>
<th>US Perm Resident</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
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<td>3627</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>4311</td>
<td>9.28%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>2331</td>
<td>3517</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>6128</td>
<td>38.04%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Special UG</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>85.71%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Special G</td>
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<td>104</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>17.99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exchange/Visiting</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>552</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>966</td>
<td>41.41%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3168</td>
<td>7802</td>
<td>588</td>
<td>11558</td>
<td>27.41%</td>
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General Statistics 2010-2011

- International 27%
- US Citizen 60%
- US Perm Resident 5%
- International 27%
International Gender Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Undergraduate</th>
<th>Graduate</th>
<th>Non-Degree*</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>% of Int'l</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>650</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>970</td>
<td>30.62%</td>
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<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>1681</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>2198</td>
<td>69.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>2331</td>
<td>437</td>
<td>3168</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Non-Degree category includes all special, exchange, and visiting students.
**Top 10 International Countries Represented**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Undergraduate</th>
<th>Graduate</th>
<th>Non-Degree *</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>% of Intl Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>China PRC</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>358</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>452</td>
<td>14.27%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Korea, South</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>8.96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>279</td>
<td>8.81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>7.99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>3.38%</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>2.97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>66</td>
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<td>87</td>
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<td>Singapore</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>2.71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td></td>
<td>64</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>2.49%</td>
</tr>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>2.40%</td>
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<td></td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>2.40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Non-Degree category include all special, exchange, and visiting students.*