

Committee on Student Life (CSL)  
Friday, November 13, 2009  
12-2pm, 12-196  
Minutes taken by A. Hansen

## Minutes

**Present:** Muriel Medard, Paul Baranay, Chris Colombo, Liz Denys, Danielle Guichard-Ashbrook, Enectali Figueroa-Feliciano, Shee Shee Jin, Alex Slocum, Vivek Sakhrani,

### Approval of Minutes from October 30<sup>th</sup> meeting:

- The minutes should be changed to give the impression that CSL does have the power to discuss the DAPER issue because finances and sports relate to DSL, however, the academic aspect of the issue is for the CUP.
- Julie Soriero has agreed to come to the next CSL meeting on Dec. 4 to discuss DAPER.
  - It would be beneficial to also invite Daniel Hastings, Dean of Undergraduate Education, as his committee is sub-chairing the issue.
- For those not at the previous meeting, the issue concerns the possibility of a reduction of PE classes and the potential increase of the fee for use of DAPER facilities.
  - If MIT reduces basic PE requirements, this might make it necessary to increase the health budget. We don't want to end up in a situation where the cost of physical education becomes too high for students or where students no longer participate in healthy activities because classes aren't mandatory.

### Agenda I: Update on Mentoring Program

Recap from Muriel Medard: The idea of having a mentoring program was proposed at the previous meeting because there are very limited existing channels for undergraduate and graduate students to interact (existing ways of interaction: UROP, TAs, GRTs). At the end of the previous meeting, CSL had asked GSC and UA representatives to go back to their respective constituencies with the mentoring idea and then report back to CSL.

- Vivek Sakhrani reports that the GSC was completely supportive of the idea. There was a strong preference for the program to be implemented by administration (most likely within the Division of Student Life) as an official program instead of just being run by the GSC or UA in order to give the program credibility. However, there were questions regarding what the incentives would be for graduate students to partake in the program and also if there would be a flexible structure where graduates could interact with either one undergraduate student or several undergraduate students.
- Liz Denys reports that the UA has not been able to officially address the issue of the mentoring program because they are currently very busy writing reports. However, she had bounced the idea off of several people informal and the general response was that people are interested and believe it to be a great idea, but it might be difficult to implement the program.

### Discussion:

- The program could follow the UROP model and graduate students could pay undergraduates to help them with research.

- The idea of this mentorship is not so much based upon research as life in general; informal career advising and advice outside of the research space.
- With this model it will be optional to have a mentor or mentee and so it should first be attempted to launch the program without offering incentives.
- Muriel's faculty acquaintances liked the idea of a mentoring program and thus it shouldn't be hard to find advisors, but it must be kept in mind that this should be a student to student program. In regards to faculty, the most important thing is that there is an institute-wide faculty awareness and recognition of the program; the program should be supported by the faculty, not faculty run.
  - If faculty are aware of the program an incentive could be that participation in the mentoring program will be included in letters of recommendation.
- Were pre-existing models discussed at the last meeting?
  - Shee Shee Jin's department (Urban Studies and Planning) has informal models of mentoring: e.g., a "buddy" system for undergraduate students, a system for first year and second year Masters students, and a system for undergraduate and graduate students. Many graduate students come to MIT without knowing much about the campus and community and want to learn more about the school and Shee Shee has heard that they enjoy having a mentoring system.
  - There are also language programs where an MIT student is paired with an international student to practice language.
  - In ISO there is an unofficial mentoring system for first years and seniors which is very successful and the program is now so big that it probably needs staff organization.
  - Most departments have some form of informal mentoring system.
- Do all of these informal programs suffice as MIT mentoring programs or would there be a benefit to making a more official program?
  - There is a lot of mentoring that occurs at MIT and it typically either develops or stops organically. If you want a formal program you must consider the questions of staffing, funding, incentives, and mission (academic, social, networking, etc.). Sometimes these things happen best within areas of interest (departments, living groups, sports, etc.) because there is already a common ground.
  - However, a universal informal mentoring system would be beneficial to students who aren't involved in sports or don't belong to a department with a mentoring system. For example, MBA students often have professional experience or varied undergraduate experiences and they might not just want to mentor within their specific school.
- Is there a "need" for a mentoring system?
  - There might not be a "need" but a mentoring system would be an opportunity to help people. The idea is to create a mentoring system which is universal and isn't for a specific need.
  - There are programs which already exist, but there is also a large body of undergraduates who have no contact with graduates apart from their TAs. There is an even larger body of graduate students who have no contact with undergraduate students. A universal program would merge these two separate worlds.

- New graduate students on campus are just as lost as new undergraduate students and it would be very beneficial for them to be paired with undergraduate students who know the lore, where things are located on campus, who to go to for help, and what is going on in general. Additionally, many undergraduates could use the mentoring program for career advice or help applying to graduate schools.
- The program sounds like it would be most beneficial to first year graduate students paired with junior and senior undergraduate students.
- How to determine what the need is?
  - In order to move forward and to assess various needs, an institute wide electronic survey could be distributed (the questions should be reviewed properly before being sent to the student body).
  - The first thing to assess would be the interest and demand for a program.
  - Are there other channels (the latest technologies) that the news of the program could be spread other than a survey? For example, a mentor tweet?
- The Interact website could be used as a vehicle to support the mentoring program. The website is for faculty and students to create profiles; it is not specifically for faculty, the website just started with faculty profiles. Muriel will meet with Beracah to discuss the logistics of using Interact as a vehicle to match people together for the program.
- It would be best to start this program small and organically because students will want anything from a very strong relationship with a mentor for several years to a single interaction. If people find the program useful and fulfilling more people will join and success will be the best advertisement.

## **Agenda II: Freshmen on Campus**

Freshmen on Campus was requested as an agenda topic at a previous meeting. Freshmen used to be allowed to live off campus in FSILGs until the Scott Krueger incident (in the early 1990s a freshman pledge died from overdrinking). Consequently, there is now a policy which dictates that freshmen students must live on campus and this has also caused a change to the operation of FSILGs in general.

- This topic was conscientiously not taken up by the taskforce because it was unknown if this is a policy which is fixed and immutable.
- In order to see if MIT is legally obligated to have the Freshmen on Campus policy, Muriel sent an email to legal counsel and she is waiting for a response. She also spoke with Chancellor Phil Clay who stated the policy is not based on a legal obligation but a choice made by MIT.

### Discussion:

- MIT is physically able to accommodate the student body. There are currently about 4,290 undergraduate students but the goal is to increase this number to 4,500.
- In MIT fraternities you live in the fraternity house if you are an upperclassman. However, most fraternities have a smaller number of people living in them than the number of people the house can actually accommodate (e.g., only one person will live in a double).
- There are 26 fraternities on campus which is more than many institutions have. However, many of these fraternities need more members for their financial existence especially since this past semester more students wanted to live on campus then move into a FSILG.

- The Ashdown (W1) project has been postponed until there are funds (there is currently an active search for funds). Once W1 is up and running it would solve much of the housing problem because it will hold 462 students.
  - However, the issue isn't just housing but the student life issue at large. MIT places great emphasis on choice (being able to choose which dorm you live in).
  - At some point CSL should discuss W1 because there was a lot of student unrest regarding this policy. For example, how to proceed with the dining hall in W1 (which is part of the Thirsty Ear Pub)?
- What is the percentage of students who prefer their own kitchens as opposed to those who like dining?
  - There is a survey about dining (led by DSL) that is very thorough: the survey is done by dorm and section.
  - Seems to be that most students prefer to cook their own food.
  - Most fraternities and sororities have some type of meal plan which tends to work well, but typically these meals are cooked communally or by professional chefs.
  - The majority of international students dislike dining plans.
- According to Dean Chris Colombo, MIT senior administration has stated on multiple times that that they do not want to overturn the Freshmen on Campus policy.
  - If higher administration is not willing to change this policy, there is no further need to discuss it.

### **Agenda III: The Role of CSL**

- CSL doesn't have a direct responsibility for making actions, instead CSL has more of a reporting responsibility.
- CSL could put forth short position papers on what is being discussed at the committee to give to the faculty and student body.
  - Athletics could be the first position paper.

### **Future Agenda Items:**

- Dining would be a good topic for a future meeting.
  - It would be good to invite Rich Berlin to this meeting.
  - It would also be good to invite Adam Bockelie and Sivakami Sambasivam, who are respectively the chair and a committee member of the UA dining taskforce.
- W1(Ashdown) could be an agenda item for next semester.

### **End of Meeting**