

*Massachusetts Institute of Technology*  
**COMMITTEE ON THE UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAM**

**Report on Alternative Freshman Programs**

**Contributions of Alternative Freshman Programs**

The current Alternative Freshman Programs provide educational experiences that go beyond conventional classroom teaching and that have considerable value to a significant fraction of our freshman class. They have or should have one or more of the following qualities:

- providing a supportive and substantive context for learning,
- offering a different teaching/learning experience, and
- helping to ease transition to MIT.

Current Alternative Freshman Programs also provide a sense of community that has potential to

- support peer learning and provide teaching opportunities for undergraduates,
- foster upper-class involvement in freshman education, and
- provide closer contact between faculty and students than might otherwise be possible during freshman year.

**Resource Requirements for a Successful Program**

No program can be successful without appropriate resources. Current Alternative Freshman Programs have had to be very creative to find the necessary resources for their programs. This difficulty may in part be due to the fact that alternative programs grow up in the cracks between existing, established departments and programs. Thus,

- There must be a clear commitment by departments and/or Schools of the financial resources necessary to run the program.
- There must be a clear commitment by departments and/or Schools to provide teaching staff dedicated to the program.
- There must be dedicated space, which might include dedicated classrooms, lounge space, or other space particularly suited to the particular program.

**Expectations of both Current and New Programs**

CUP has agreed that the Institute should have a set of common expectations of both current and newly proposed alternative freshman programs:

- A clear articulation of novel (non-“traditional”) educational experiences that are provided by the program.

- A compelling argument for the value of these novel experiences and the relevance of these experiences to the freshman year.
- A clear statement of the core elements of the program and what activities the participants engage in.
- A description of the background and interests of students the program is intended to serve and identification of significant groups who might not be eligible (*e.g.*, students with a lot of advanced placement credit may have difficulty taking 36 units of Concourse subjects in the fall term).
- A strategy for how freshman advising will be handled.
- A clearly articulated plan for how students will be admitted — at the beginning of the freshman year and at a later time, if appropriate.
- A plan for how students who leave the program — either midway or at the end — will reenter the mainstream curriculum.
- A plan for ongoing internal evaluation of the program with particular attention paid to impact on student success at MIT.
- A roadmap for lines of reporting and accountability.
- An account of how the program interacts with the GIRS, in particular the Science Core, the HASS Requirement, and the Communication Requirement.
- Evidence of communication and agreement with departments whose subject matter is being taught by the program to ensure that there is equivalent quality in these experiences.

## Recommendations

In conclusion, CUP recommends that

- MIT should be receptive to proposals to create other alternative freshman programs as they appear to offer important educational benefits.
- This document should continue to be used by CUP as a guide for evaluating existing alternative freshman programs and for considering proposals for the creation of new such programs.
- Departments should award teaching credit for faculty participation in the alternative programs, and service to those programs should be considered in tenure and promotion cases.
- The Office of the Dean for Undergraduate Education should provide support to these programs through central coordination of assessment and communication to incoming freshmen.
- MIT should seek to stimulate in other areas of the undergraduate educational experience the kinds of community-building associated with the alternative freshmen programs.

## **Action Items**

This report has been endorsed and adopted by CUP. These recommendations will be forwarded to the Task Force on the Undergraduate Educational Commons; the Office of the Dean for Undergraduate Education (DUE); the programs; the Deans' Group of the Academic Council; the COC; and the Faculty Policy Committee.

Committee on the Undergraduate Program  
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