Panel Discusses Revision of GIRs

By Kathy Lin

At a presentation on MacVizual last Friday, members of the Task Force on the Undergraduate Educational Commons presented their ideas about the future of the General Institute and Social Sciences requirement.

The purpose of the committee is to "conduct a fundamental, comprehensive review of the undergraduate common experience," said Robert J. Silbey, chair of the Task Force and dean of the School of Science.

The last major revision occurred in 1964, he said.

Flexible science core proposed

The Task Force is faced with the challenges of optimizing the four years that undergraduates typically spend at MIT, which are too limited for all the items the Task Force would like to include in the undergraduate curriculum, Silbey said.

One requirement under discussion is the six subject required science core. According to excerpts from a draft report of the Task Force Subcommittee on Optimizing the Science Engineering Components of the GIR, page 17, the new requirement would not be that there is a newly discovered "high-quality educational program for all students," said Dean for Undergraduate Education Robert P. Redwine in a press release.

"This year’s tuition increase will enable MIT to maintain the high quality of its educational programs for all students," said Dean for Undergraduate Education Robert P. Redwine in a press release.

The breakdown for projected costs next year is tuition, $32,100; student activity fees, $2,000; housing, averaging over all offered rents, $5,250; meal allowance, $4,250; books and supplies, $1,100; and personal expenses, $1,700.

Expected student earnings same

MIT will not expect its students to earn more during the academic year than it has in the past, Hicks said.

Students receiving financial aid from the Institute will be expected to cover $5,500 with loans or term-time jobs, the same amount as last year.

Hicks said MIT has no current plans to follow the decisions of Harvard and Yale to fully fund the cost of education for students under $40,000 or $45,000.

"We are very happy with the way that we assess need," she said. "We look at both income and assets, and we actually are very proud of the number of families making less than $45,000 who are here at MIT as a result of our generous financial aid policy."

About 16 percent of students at MIT are from families earning less than $40,000 per year, significantly less than the 40 percent of families with $45,000 income nationwide. The nationwide average for universities, however, is only three percent, Hicks said.

While Harvard and Yale’s recent policy changes were specifically aimed at increasing the number of students from the lower income bracket, MIT is looking at that regard, she said. "We have one of the highest ratios of undergraduates getting financial aid compared to similar universities, she said. "Almost 58 percent of the undergraduates will be receiving scholarships from MIT next year."

Motives Revealed by Athena Hacker

by Marissa Vogt

The person responsible for stealing over 600 Athena username/password pairs last Tuesday night released a statement via e-mail late Friday night.

The e-mail was sent from a quickstation in the Stata Center, with the same Yahoo! account used to send out the username/password pairs last week.

Jeffrey J. Schiller, ’79, network manager for Information Services and Technology, said he received an e-mail from the perpetrator on Friday night and has since received several more, though he declined to comment on the nature of the other e-mails.

"The point that I’m out to prove is not that there is a newly discovered vulnerability in Athena,” the e-mail stated. “I just believe that the current level of security that is pre-

S chiller declined to comment on developments in the investigation or whether the recent e-mails had provided any clues to the identity of the perpetrator.

"I will keep trying, we will catch the person, or we will keep trying until we keep trying them," Schiller said. Once the perpetrator has been identified, said Schiller, "we will be referred to the appropriate authority.”

Martin M. Fischer, associate dean for student conduct and risk management, or the Committee on Discipline, indicated that the identity of the perpetrator would be released as soon as they were made available.

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GIR Panel Aims to Make HASS Requirement Simpler

The committee believes that it is important to “maintain the current rigor of the core, regardless of any other change,” Silbey said. HASS revisions considered
The “current HASS requirement is a complicated requirement” because “we are trying to do a lot,” said Professor of Political Science Charles Stewart III, a member of the task force. As a result, the HASS requirement is “just a mess” and like “a thorny cactus,” Stewart said.

There have been many simplification proposals over the years, Stewart said.

One idea under consideration is to provide a common HASS experience for students. Students could be given the choice of small classes in five categories, such as evolution, love, creativity, democracy, and Shakespeare, Stewart said.

Options being considered in relation to this idea include the duration of the classes (one semester or two), whether Communication Intensive elements would be embedded in the classes, and whether this sort of requirement would ensure a sufficient breadth of experience to eliminate the HASS-Distribution requirement.

This plan “looks sort of like a unified freshman experience,” Stewart said, but still permits flexibility. “Would MIT be better if there was this extra common experience?” Stewart asked. “It’s not clear this would be the right thing to do,” he said.

The report suggests changes
A draft report from the Task Force Subcommittee on Balancing the Majors and the GIRs proposes additional recommendations: encouraging interdisciplinary education with new degree plans, initiating a freshman design project, advocating international educational experiences, better introducing freshmen to the goals of an MIT education, improving academic and career advising, stipulating that departmental programs look at how science and engineering affect society, and rethinking the use of advanced placement credit in core subjects.

To fulfill the recommendation of encouraging interdisciplinary education, one idea is to change the double major so that students must complete all the requirements for both majors, but no additional units, as the current system requires. Another possibility would be a dual or combined degree, which would include reduced requirements for both degree programs, as well as an interdisciplinary capstone project.

The report also suggests that MIT set up a “central office to coordinate and expand the opportunities for students to study or intern abroad.”

Framing the goals
According to a document handed out at the presentation, “in the early stages of its deliberations, the Task Force developed a set of working principles about MIT’s educational philosophy in order to frame its review of the General Institute Requirements.”

The Task Force’s draft goal statement is the following: “an MIT education is one grounded in science and technology that ignites a passion for learning, provides the intellectual and personal foundations for future development, and illuminates the breadth, depth and diversity of human knowledge and experience, in order to enable each student to develop a personal, coherent intellectual identity.”

The document also lists the expectations of the faculty for an MIT undergraduate education as: a persistent passion for learning, intellectual diversity, an innovative approach to core knowledge, collaborative learning, and education for responsible leadership.

Silbey, who called his presentation on Friday an effort to be “provocative,” expects to receive more suggestions from the MIT community. “You open up the box, and people start thinking about it,” he said.

No entire draft has been released, and no date has been set for a release, said Anne McLeod, staff associate for the office of the Dean for Undergraduate Education.

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