

Graduate Student Council

Graduate Student Income and Expenses

Ending the spring 2003 term with the Institute's announcement of a significant increase in premiums for the Student Extended Insurance Plan, the Graduate Student Council (GSC) concentrated on finding short-term and long-term solutions to the problem of the rise in graduate students' cost of living. Working with senior MIT administrators, the GSC Cost of Living Advisory Board was formed. The group's main goal was to present a comprehensive picture of graduate student cost of living so that a more optimal balance between income and expenses could be found. Partly as a result of the work of this group, composed of administrators and students, AY2005 on-campus rents will increase an average of only 3.7% instead of the scheduled 5.2%. In addition, next year, health insurance costs will be fully subsidized for single students supported by research and teaching assistantships and Institute-sponsored fellowships. The rates for students with families will see a significant reduction effective fall of 2004.

Housing, Safety, and Transportation

For the second consecutive year, the Housing and Community Affairs Committee convened the Graduate Rents Subcommittee. Made up of representatives from each of the graduate residence halls, the group met from December to February and submitted a proposal. Some of the proposal's suggestions were incorporated into the structure for the AY2005 on-campus rents.

Other subcommittees were also active this year. In order to help make travel easier to and from the northwest sector of campus, the Safety and Transportation Subcommittee, in collaboration with the MIT Parking and Transportation Office, dean for graduate students, and graduate and undergraduate dorm leaders, worked to establish a Winter Tech Shuttle Route. The new service provided students living in Edgerton, NW30 (the Warehouse), and Sidney-Pacific Residence Halls with a morning shuttle service to main campus, Kendall Square, and the Sloan School of Management, from January through spring break. The year also marked the beginning of discussion about the feasibility of building another on-campus residence hall. While it has not yet been decided if the hall will be built, the GSC will continue to be involved in the ensuing discussions about the project.

New Groups and Projects

This has been a phenomenal year for departmental student governance. The past two semesters have seen the formation of five new departmental student groups in the schools of Engineering and Science, as well as the emergence of school-wide community development programs in the schools of Architecture and Planning and Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences. In addition to the growing assortment of new groups, an increasing number of departmental organizations are playing a more direct role in selecting their GSC representatives by either electing them or having the officers

themselves hold the positions. The GSC Rules Committee was convened this year and has been examining the council's bylaws. Later it will propose changes that will make the process of department and residential representation designation simpler and more efficient.

Increased interaction with Institute decision-making processes has also been a focus of the GSC. Efforts have been made toward maintaining closer contact with the GSC's representatives on the various Institute committees and other governing bodies and creating new levels and means of directing student opinion. The Campus Dining Advisory Board and Campus Activities Complex Advisory Board have both installed a graduate student as cochair, and students have become involved in the Campus Pub Advisory Group. A newly created organization, the Student Health Advisory Council (SHAC), will also help in incorporating student input. SHAC was formed in part to bring the bodies involved in health care at MIT closer together and into more direct contact with the MIT Medical administration. Areas in which the GSC is looking to increase the student voice include the Campus Safety and Security Working Group, the Health Care Task Force, and the Working Group on Student Rights and Responsibilities.

Other Initiatives and Programs

Following work initiated last year by the Corporation Joint Advisory Committee, the GSC Diversity Initiative (DI) continued work on issues related to graduate student diversity. Raising funds from the Graduate Students Office and the Office of the Provost, the group, in collaboration with the Black Graduate Students Association, organized a recruiting trip to the Atlanta area over spring break. Visiting five schools, the group's aim was to increase underrepresented minority interest in applying to and enrolling at MIT for graduate school. The DI is currently in the process of working with a number of other offices and students to organize *Converge*, a preapplication visit weekend, in October 2004.

International student concerns were also among the issues the council addressed in AY2004. Adopting a statement calling for student visa reform in the fall of 2003, the GSC also incorporated special sessions for international students into its Fall Orientation program. Focusing on building a stronger support network for international students, the council helped establish InterLink, a social organization that gives international students a chance to spend time together outside of an academic setting.

Graduate advising remained another important area of concern of the GSC's work. A number of ideas were investigated, including anonymous feedback about advising practices, which has proven popular in some departments. The GSC advocated for the issue of advising to be included on the agendas of MIT Corporation visiting committees.

Following a one-and-a-half year effort by the GSC's Academics Research and Careers Committee, a Childbirth Accommodation policy was announced in spring 2004. The policy guarantees female graduate students up to eight weeks of paid time away from their academic/research duties with no penalty. Drawing on funds from the academic

schools and the Office of the Provost, the policy will be administered by the Office of the Dean for Graduate Students.

Collaborations

A product of the chancellor's spring 2003 Leadership Retreat, the GSC joined with several undergraduate groups in forming the Governance Consortium. A group that includes representatives from the major student governmental bodies on campus, the Governance Consortium has acted as a forum for discussing issues with which each group is dealing. Although not a decision-making body, the group has also served as a venue for looking at topics that affect the student body as a whole.

On the national level, the GSC joined a number of other universities through the National Association of Graduate-Professional Schools in supporting HR3412, a bill that would provide tax benefits for many graduate students. The Undergraduate Association recently voted to support this effort as well, giving it campuswide support.

Historic Events and Activities

With generous support from the dean for graduate students and the dean for student life, the GSC celebrated its 50th Anniversary in October 2003. Alumni spanning 47 years joined in the three-day celebration, which included an Alumni Reunion, Cherry Tree Dedication Ceremony, Banquet, Oktoberfest, and Birthday Party. Kicking off the anniversary celebration was the historic unveiling of the Graduate Ring, or the GradRat as it has affectionately come to be called. The ring has proven very popular, as hundreds of students and alumni have purchased their piece of MIT history.

The GSC also hosted the first-ever Graduate Student Life Week in February of 2004. The program featured talks about the on-campus rent-setting and housing assignment processes, new programs in the Graduate Students Office and MIT Medical Department, and many of the initiatives funded by the Student Life Fee through the Graduate Student Office.

Following the announcement that President Charles M. Vest would be stepping down, and at the request of MIT Corporation chair Dana Mead, the GSC joined the Undergraduate Association in establishing the Student Advisory Group to the Corporation Committee on the Presidency (CCOP). This group solicited feedback, drafted a report outlining student opinions about MIT's next president, and submitted it to the MIT Corporation in March 2004. An oral presentation was made to the CCOP and Faculty Advisory Committee to the Corporation on the presidential search a few weeks later.

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