



Response to the Institute-wide Planning Task Force Preliminary Report

Undergraduate Association
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Response to the Institute-wide Planning Task Force Preliminary Report

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1 Introduction

The Institute-wide Planning Task Force was formed on February 17, 2009 at the Joint Session of the Working Groups in response to declining economies across the nation. In a novel move, the MIT administration made the bold step of opening its decision-making process to the entire MIT community, deepening its commitment to transparency and communication. The Task Force Coordination Team consists of Steven R. Lerman, Vice Chancellor & Dean for Graduate Education; Martin A. Schmidt, Associate Provost; and Israel Ruiz, Vice President for Finance. Ten different working groups, each consisting of faculty, staff, and students, met throughout Spring 2009 to prepare a preliminary report on ways to reduce MIT's budget while preserving as much of the MIT experience as possible. Throughout this process, members of the MIT community not on the Task Force could suggest or comment on recommendations using the Idea Bank¹. The final draft of the Preliminary Report was released during Summer 2009.

A number of the recommendations presented in the Institute Wide Planning Task Force Preliminary Report may have a substantial impact on undergraduate student life at MIT. Some recommendations could ultimately improve undergraduate life, whereas others could put significant strain on undergraduates. In an effort to communicate the potential impact of the Preliminary Report to students, the Undergraduate Association selected twenty-two recommendations that the principal officers felt would have the most significant impact on undergraduates. The Undergraduate Association, which is the governing body of all undergraduates, believes that a thorough report on how these recommendations could impact students will be beneficial both for the Task Force as well as the undergraduate population at large. In addition, the Undergraduate Association hopes to offer advice to the Task Force on how these recommendations can best be implemented.

Several members of the Undergraduate Association met on September 3, 2009 to discuss how we could effectively communicate these major proposals to the undergraduate community and synthesize those responses into a cohesive position statement. After detailing many of the recommendations, it was decided that the Undergraduate Association would write a report in response to the Preliminary Report. In the subsequent days, the Undergraduate Association began to focus on twenty-two recommendations that the Undergraduate Association Executive Committee felt would have the most significant impact on undergraduates. Looking at the descriptions available in the Preliminary Report, it was decided that the Undergraduate Association should prepare short, unbiased summaries of these recommendations in order to present the possible outcomes of each recommendation to the undergraduate body.

The twenty-two recommendations were summarized by seven committees of the Undergraduate Association in a matter of days. Each summary was reviewed by a principal officer as well as a separate committee chair in order to check for bias and content. The summaries were then posted on the Undergraduate Association website² along with three separate methods for determining interest and collecting feedback:

¹An online database of recommendations located at <http://ideabank.mit.edu>.

²The summaries can be found at http://ua.mit.edu/taskforce_summaries.



1. Google Analytics was used to gather detailed statistics such as how many recommendations undergraduates were viewing and how much time was spent reading the summaries,
2. Thumbs up/thumbs down voting was provided to allow undergraduates a rapid method of providing feedback on a particular summary, and
3. A comment box was provided to allow more detailed feedback on each summary.

These feedback mechanisms provided a wealth of information into how the undergraduates perceived the recommendations. In the first four days, the main summaries page had over 1,100 unique views and the total task force summaries had over 19,000 total page views. The average visitor viewed 9 recommendations. Undergraduates took advantage of both methods of providing feedback, with approximately 750 students voting on at least one recommendation. Over 500 textual comments were submitted, many of which were well researched and provided detailed implementation ideas.

The spectrum of support for each recommendation was quickly apparent from the thumbs up/thumbs down voting. The recommendations on relaxing the 4-year housing guarantee and changing add/drop dates were both very unpopular, with scores around -260, while the addition of summer classes was viewed the most positively with a score of about +200.

After reviewing all of the statistics available, seventeen recommendations were identified as high priority issues. These recommendations, along with the feedback provided by the undergraduates, were again distributed to the committees with a request to write in-depth statements detailing the student body's overall position on the recommendation. The position pieces, which comprise the bulk of this report, have two major components:

1. Approximately one-third of the position piece focuses on the undergraduate reaction and viewpoint of the recommendation in question and
2. The remainder of the position piece addresses strategies for implementing these recommendations that would minimize disruption and dissatisfaction to the student body.

These position pieces were collected by the principals officers, who formatted and edited them for consistency along with writing the introduction and the overarching issues in order to provide a more complete picture. The report was approved by Undergraduate Association Senate on October 13, 2009 as an official policy stance of the Undergraduate Association. During the following week, the report was distributed to the following four groups:

1. The Coordinating Team of the Planning Task Force, in the hope that some of the information and context provided will make its way into the Planning Task Force's final report,
2. The Chancellor, Executive Vice President, and Provost, who are ultimately responsible for the delegation of these recommendations to working groups and committees,



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3. The Chairs of the Institute Committees, as well as the Chairs of the Working Groups created to address the recommendations in the Planning Task Force Final Report, and
4. Any other member of the MIT community who expresses interest in the undergraduate opinions on the Planning Task Force's recommendations.



2 Overarching Themes

2.1 Enrollment

President Hockfield and other administrators feel a social obligation to offer an MIT education to more students. There have been conversations about increasing undergraduate enrollment for a number of years. However, with the recent economic situation, the construction of additional dormitory housing, such as the W1 project, has been frozen, which limits the possibilities for increasing enrollment. A number of the recommendations in the Preliminary Report are related to the increase of undergraduate enrollment at MIT. The “Increase Undergraduate Enrollment” (see Section 3.4 on page 13) recommendation specifically cites a desired ten percent increase in the undergraduate class size. There are a few ways to achieve this increase. One is to increase the freshman class size. There are number of challenges with this increase that need to be examined carefully, such as the availability of student services and housing. Another possibility is to increase the number of special or transfer students. Many of these students would already have satisfied most of the GIRs and might not have as strong a desire to live in on-campus housing. This is addressed in the recommendation titled “Increase Number of Special Students” (see Section 3.6 on page 17). A third possibility aimed at spreading the MIT education without directly increasing enrollment is to have summer classes. Although the recommendation does not define the implementation details, many suggest having an extension school like Harvard or Yale, and opening up classes to non-MIT community members.

An enrollment increase would require improved housing utilization. To ensure that dorms aren’t overcrowded with an increase, a recommendation to relax the four year on-campus housing commitment has been suggested. This would allow for MIT to increase enrollment because it would require many students to find housing off campus. While this recommendation would open a significant amount of space for students, it is strongly discouraged, for reasons cited in the section on “Relaxation of 4-year housing commitment.” Improving utilization of summer housing, however, may be a good idea, depending on implementation (see Section 6.1 on page 29). Optimization of housing space in the summer could allow MIT to save money by closing underutilized dorms and earn money by making summer housing available to those enrolled in summer classes.

2.2 Academics

A number of the recommendations in the Preliminary Report address undergraduate academics at MIT. MIT prides itself on both the rigor and flexibility of its curriculum. Efforts should be made to maintain these qualities while reducing costs. Some recommendations may not diminish the rigor of education but rather change the culture of learning at MIT. No longer grading problem sets, for example, might encourage students to focus on test-taking strategies rather than learning how to apply the material. Changing add and/or drop date could increase the risk associated with exploratory learning, and result in additional stress for students who would like to change their registration late in term. Reducing costs for alternative freshman programs would limit



options freshmen have for completing many of the GIRs, and jeopardize the communities that have developed as a result of the programs.

Two recommendations involve providing new opportunities to MIT students and the community. One of the recommendations involves expanding the number of summer classes, along with who can enroll. Adding more classes would allow freshmen to retake GIRs over the summer, or get ahead in their coursework. If classes are open to the public, high school and other non-MIT students could enroll and receive transfer credit for their work. MIT has also proposed a recommendation that would increase the number of special students at MIT. This includes transfer students and students enrolled in 3+2 programs with MIT and another institution. These students would be able to receive an MIT education while putting slightly less strain on resources than an incoming freshman.

2.3 Student Life

Recommendations affecting student life at MIT were of particular interest to undergraduates. These recommendations range from broad topics, such as housing and dining, to specific issues, such as the Physical Education requirement and shuttle services.

Housing recommendations were focused on improving utilization of existing space and making space more efficient. Metering dorms, for example, could result in 5 to 15 percent savings in energy consumption when residents are made aware of their current energy usage. Improving housing utilization over the summer, if implemented appropriately, could also save money and energy by allowing house managers to close certain wings or perform preventative maintenance.

MIT currently subsidizes dining halls on campus significantly. Two recommendations in the Preliminary Report aim to reduce this subsidy and promote healthy eating habits in dining halls. One of the recommendations calls for implementation of meal plan changes that would have declining meal plans rather than a dining discount. Another recommendation discusses adjusting financial aid to better reflect true food costs. MIT currently provides students with more aid than most need for food. Thus MIT may be able to reduce the board contribution to financial aid as a cost-cutting measure. Incentives for students to enroll in house dining plans could be provided by increasing the board contribution if a student chooses to enroll in a meal plan.

Discussions around athletics and the Physical Education (PE) requirement have been ongoing since eight varsity sports were cut in Spring 2009. One recommendation in the Preliminary Report calls for eliminating the PE requirement. The consequences of eliminating the PE requirement, such as the demand and amount of funding for PE if the requirement is no longer in place, should be evaluated before eliminating the requirement.

Shuttle services on campus have also undergone scrutiny. Most students would prefer not to see cuts to shuttle services, but would prefer a small fee to elimination of a route. A number of routes have a degree of redundancy with the MBTA. However, many students cited that these stops feel



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less safe late at night, and would prefer to have MIT-specific stops.



3 Academic Education Working Group Recommendations

3.1 Recommendation 2: Improve Understanding of Faculty Workloads

3.1.1 Summary of the Recommendation

This involves research into how professors and other teaching staff utilize their time. Since no particular recommendation was made, we interpreted the recommendation in that it could ultimately involve redistribution of teaching resources—such as by having more classes be taught by lecturers instead of research professors, or vice versa. It could also impact the number of office hours held or time required for professors to spend with UROPs and advisees. However, we understand that this first step is just to call for a study to see if a more efficient use of resources is possible, and that no action will be taken until the study is complete.

3.1.2 Position

The MIT faculty and teaching staff are one of the Institute's most valuable resources. Given their limited time, the Institute must determine a careful, efficient balance for them between lecturing, research, and interacting with students outside of class. Students, therefore, understand and are in favor of moving forward with a study to address the possibility of a more efficient time allocation.

While this study has not been completed yet, the student body already is concerned about the possible outcomes. These include faculty encouraged to increase grant-generating research and reduce class time, office hours, and advisory roles.

One possibility is a reduction of class time. Opposition to this idea would be universal. Lectures are one of the fundamental learning components of a class and students have found that in general, faculty tend to be better teachers, as their research and publications result in a deep understanding of the material. Many students mentioned that interaction opportunities with the Institute's world-renowned professors were a primary reason for matriculation.

That said, video and other technologies may be able to mitigate the effects if this possible recommendation was implemented. Online video is already used in some GIR classes, with varying reports of success. Enlarging this system to encompass more classes could in part offset some negative aspects of this potential change.

On the other hand, reducing the faculty-advising requirement — another possible recommendation from this study — would be undesirable but would probably be met with a less negative student response. Students desire various levels of interaction with their advisers. Some professors wish to spend minimal time with advisees, and some students will seek them out. Other professors enjoy advising and other students happily find such advisers. However, feedback regarding the



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freshmen advising system, which uses both staff and professors, indicates that freshmen tend to prefer professors.

As much as the student body understands that MIT is a research institution, we value our interactions with the faculty and hope that MIT will see faculty-student time as an investment in the future, rather than an opportunity cost.



3.2 Recommendation 4: Increase Productive Faculty/Student Educational Interactions

3.2.1 Summary of the Recommendation

This recommendation has two major components. First, there are a significant number of classes here at MIT with low student to faculty ratios or with fewer than nine students per class. This proposal calls for larger class sizes and the possible reduction of classes that have low enrollment.

Second, there is concern that an excessive amount of TA resources are being used to generate new problem sets each year. In the recent year, some classes have already moved away from graded problem sets and are reusing previous years' problems freely. This proposal calls for further study on the impact of removing graded problem sets from the curriculum. This might lead to the elimination of TA positions.

3.2.2 Position

As an educational institution, MIT is known for its academic rigor. Diluting the rigor in any manner would amount to diluting the educational standards that other schools are measured against. No longer grading problem sets and reducing advanced and specialized classes would diminish MIT's educational mission.

Undergraduates are generally opposed to not grading problem sets. Problem sets serve as a great mechanism for students to gauge their understanding of what they learn in the classroom, and the feedback received on problem sets is a lesson in concise and clear scientific writing. These problems tend to connect classroom knowledge to real-world problems and are more reflective of the problems that society and science will face in the future. Ungraded problem sets would shift grades to be heavily dependent on tests, which are subject to a number of uncontrollable variables, such as illness and family emergencies. Tests also are not substitutes for problem sets as questions on problem sets are usually more thought-provoking and time-consuming. As a result, test-taking strategies would replace innovative thinking.

In addition, we also strongly discourage reusing problem sets, especially in introductory GIR classes. Grading such problem sets, which have their solutions commonly available online or handed down by upperclassmen, would be extremely unfair and would serve to punish honest students. While many advanced classes do reuse problem sets, it requires a certain maturity to understand the long-term repercussions of copying solutions. However, we fear for freshmen as they come into MIT with little understanding of their own abilities in this rigorous environment. Many come from schools where they could finish their homework the morning of the deadline and breeze through tests without studying. Hence, to help freshmen acclimate, it is important not to implement this change in the GIRs and other introductory level classes.



If this change must be implemented, we hope that students will always have the option of having their problem sets graded. Logistically, we understand that grading problem sets is a resource-intensive process, in terms of both time and money, especially as some classes exceed 500 students. However, we ask that this learning opportunity remain for the subset of students who value it. Reading solutions online is not a substitute for honest and critical feedback from a professor or teaching assistant. Corrections to problem sets are often how students learn to write proofs, to show clear and concise work, and to properly communicate their understanding on tests.

As far as lower bound on the sizes of classes is concerned, it would be extremely impractical to implement this. While there are classes that are small due to underutilization, three subsets of small classes are critical to our core mission of education. Firstly, advanced classes tend to be smaller due to their specialized nature and touch upon cutting-edge research in their fields. It is these classes that make the MIT education unique; removing such advanced classes would result in cookie cutter graduates. Secondly, many humanities classes, particularly distribution subjects, require small class sizes to allow for discussion. Finally, smaller departments—such as Course 12 and Comparative Media Studies, to name a few—tend to have smaller classes by default. Having a lower bound on sizes for all classes would strongly affect classes in these majors.

Students understand that careful study into minimizing small classes can result in higher efficiency, but urge caution and discretion.



3.3 Recommendation 5: Develop Summer Classes for GIRs and Other Courses

3.3.1 Summary of the Recommendation

Implementing summer classes be accomplished in a variety of ways. MIT students, including newly-matriculated freshmen, could take GIRs and other introductory level classes in order to free room for advanced subjects in the normal fall and spring terms. As this is not a normal term, the same financial aid procedures might not apply. In addition, summer classes might be accompanied by an increase in enrollment given that the GIR class size is a limiting factor on the freshman class size. It would be important that these classes have the same rigor as those offered during the academic year.

Another scenario involves non-MIT affiliated students and high schoolers taking GIR classes, which could count for college level credit at other peer institutions. Allowing the general public to take MIT classes would also be an option. Non-MIT students are likely to be charged full price.

Over the summer, the dormitories are underutilized. In addition to generating registration fees from summer classes, revenue could be collected from summer housing.

3.3.2 Position

Support for a summer program which would allow both high school and MIT students to take introductory courses is generally positive. Students' desire to complete introductory requirements early, making room for advanced level classes during the term, is unsurprising given the ambition of MIT students. Many even mentioned this as one of their favorite ideas from the Task Force. Citing Harvard and other peer institutions, some even said that a summer term seems long overdue.

However, a strong minority was outspoken in their concern for potential downsides. Indeed, the continuous school year will likely be difficult for both faculty and students alike. In this high stress environment, it is hard to believe that any individual could constantly perform at this level; many believe that a summer term could be overwhelming and dangerous for MIT students. To counteract this, some recommended that the summer term be delineated with at least a week margin on both sides.

Students jealously guard MIT's meritocratic reputation. The administration should take care to avoid an implementation of this recommendation where summer classes are, or are perceived to be, easier than regular semester offerings. Moreover, strain on the Admissions Office should be studied carefully, as a program without rigorous standards would be an affront to our alumni and students. A thorough vetting process would also be prudent for both safety of the Institute's students and property.

This may set a delicate precedent that MIT values classroom knowledge over other learning experi-



ences. In a more extreme outlook, students fear that having summer school will allow for departments to increase requirements, pressuring students to take summer courses. In any form, the mere presence of summer school as an option will make students less likely to pursue other opportunities such as undergraduate research, corporate internships, service projects, and international exposure during the summer months. Simply stated, offering classes increases the opportunity costs of other summer activities that make MIT students exceptional. Though this shift would be subtle, having an academically advantageous option on campus may diminish the need and desire to seek out unique hands-on experiences. This option would also affect incoming freshmen, who often travel, intern, or invent during their transition summer.

Many students are interested in taking a summer class and working a UROP simultaneously. While this may not appeal to those who believe that MIT students are already overworked, 40 hours a week for a UROP and roughly 18 hours a week (12 units, scaled for the shorter summer) may not be entirely unreasonable. This opportunity could be especially useful for freshmen, as many companies scale back internship programs. However, GIR study groups and core freshman classes tend to be a bonding experience for a new class of freshmen. Sponsoring pre-college academics may alter the overall cohesion of the MIT community.

One corollary of this proposal would be to increase the offerings to high school students, such as Research Science Institute (RSI) or Interphase. This could take a variety of forms, from academic classes, research programs, or subject-specific camps. This is an opportunity to capitalize on the increasingly competitive college admissions process while utilizing excess dorm and classroom space. MIT's reputation as a world leading research institution would carry weight on any high school resume, guaranteeing strong demand for such a program. This could be an opportunity for research labs to capitalize on enthusiastic high school students to help perform research experiments. The admissions department could also benefit both by providing students with a sense of MIT and also by collecting data points about potential applicants.

Overall, students find this idea very appealing and can imagine this idea being both productive and revenue generating. Of course, students continually urge administrators to tread carefully as even ideas with good intentions can have unforeseen repercussions on faculty, students, facilities, and culture.



3.4 Recommendation 6: Increase Undergraduate Enrollment

3.4.1 Summary of the Recommendation

This recommendation calls for increasing the undergraduate student body by about 400 members, or roughly 10 percent. Increasing the undergraduate class size could be accomplished by increasing the freshman class size, accepting more transfer students, or enrolling more students in “3+2” programs. An assessment of how a potential enrollment increase would affect undergraduates in areas such as academics, student support, and student life must be considered carefully. Likewise, further investigation into the potential financial gains, and associated risks, is necessary.

3.4.2 Position

Overall, the student body reacted very negatively to this idea, which received a net score of -163. Written comments emphasized the need for additional housing and financial aid support, and many students requested more data and more transparency in this decision. Others asserted that such a change could undercut the desirability and perceived selectivity of MIT as an undergraduate institution. Finally, some expressed concern that MIT was already stretching its resources too thinly with the current undergraduate population. In the words of one such student, *“GIRs are already overflowing. Dorms are crowded. The student center is packed during lunch, and the Infinite is tight during class changes. Please don’t dump even more students in.”*

We recommend that further study be conducted, with the results publicly released to the MIT community for analysis and feedback, before any decisions are made. While students seem supportive of finding new ways for MIT to raise money, most were skeptical that raising enrollment would be an effective way of doing so, given the currently available data.

Beyond examining the effects on housing, financial aid, and academics, we recommend looking into how the overall quality of student life would be affected by this recommendation. For undergraduates, particularly critical areas of student life include Student Support Services, student activities, student leadership programs (especially those based in residences), MIT Medical, and the Career Development Center. From the academic side, maintaining support for HASS classes, Institute Labs, and the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program is also incredibly important.



3.5 Recommendation 10: Change Drop/Add Dates

3.5.1 Summary of the Recommendation

Compared to peer institutions, MIT has a late add date and a late drop date. As a result, the fluctuation of class sizes result in underutilization of resources since the hiring of TAs, the booking of rooms, and other resource allotment occurs at the beginning of the term. Given the high stress environment of MIT, many students appreciate the late drop date deadline as a safety net. From a pedagogical point, however, having a student take a class for eleven weeks only to drop reduces valuable teacher-student interactions with those that intend to finish. Possibilities range from small fees incurred for registering and unregistering classes, moving the add date up since most professors won't sign an add form after the second or third week, and moving drop date earlier.

3.5.2 Position

MIT has historically strived to create an environment of rigorous academics and creative problem solving. Moving either add or drop date would threaten the interests and desires of many students, faculty, and administrators.

Students understand both the pedagogical and fiscal implications of moving add and drop date forward. Every student has witnessed peers who have little interest in a class and detract from valuable teaching time. In addition, students do understand that moving these dates will allow for both the students to focus on their subjects and teachers to focus on their students. By stabilizing class sizes earlier in the semester, teaching assistant numbers and room assignments can adjust accordingly. However, these small gains come at great cost.

The MIT community embraces academic and professional initiative. Not only is it celebrated, but also it is institutionally encouraged. The admissions officers tend to take students who have taken academic and professional initiative, by taking AP or college classes, engaging in learning outside the classroom, leading student groups, or starting their own companies. Academically, the CUP has recommended and retained special first semester freshmen grading, Sophomore Exploratory, and Junior/Senior Pass/Fail. Administrators continue to encourage students to do undergraduate research by providing centralized funding. This policy would reverse an administrative trend of valuing exploration over administrative costs.

MIT students already have a reputation for being focused on their particular major, having very little knowledge of the humanities, arts, or even other scientific majors. The Institute has tried to battle this stereotype by requiring the GIRs in order to ensure that graduates leave with a broad understanding of both scientific and humanistic ideas. Moving these dates would hinder student interest for other disciplines since, unfortunately, exploration is often outweighed by concerns regarding GPAs.



There are those who have not managed this stressful environment in a healthy manner. Over the last decade, the Institute has made student support a major priority. Understandably, some MIT policies do increase stress, such as a plethora of curricular and extracurricular options, but they do so by pushing students to achieve and accomplish more. This proposal will add to the existing undue and unproductive stress.

Most add date changes fall into three broad categories:

1. Students who are trying to stabilize their course load, find interesting classes, and fit requirements into their schedule;
2. Freshmen who are switching between classes of similar content, after finding that they over or underestimated their own abilities (such as changing from 8.012 into 8.01); and
3. Sophomores designating a class as exploratory, or juniors and seniors designating a class as Pass/D/Fail.

Students in the first group would be indifferent as their class list is finalized by the second or third week, a result of reluctant professors who rarely sign forms after this time. However, this would have profound impact on the second two groups.

It is important not to harm existing policies that the CUP and faculty have determined to be academically beneficial. As Sophomore Exploratory and Junior Senior Pass/Fail must be declared by add date, moving this would harm and alter the efficacy of these special grading procedures.

However, this policy will be devastating to incoming freshmen. When they register for classes, they have very little data about their performance relative to this new environment. Often add date is a time for freshmen to reflect on their learning and to change to a course with similar content, such as between 18.02 and 18.022. Forcing them to choose before their first tests would be harmful for their first term. One idea is to introduce the concept of a freshman add date that would allow first year students a couple of extra weeks to switch between different variations of a given subject.

Dropped classes tend fall into three main categories:

1. Students who have stopped attending classes and have not dropped by add date out of sloth,
2. Those who have taken too many classes and are now in danger of doing poorly in all of them, and
3. Those who have done poorly on the first or second test and would like to avoid a black mark on their transcript.

Moving drop date has little effect on the most egregious use of a late drop date: students who have stopped attending classes and have not dropped by add date out of laziness or inattentiveness.



There are other ways of encouraging students to keep their registration accurate. A nominal fee for dropping classes after add date would discourage idleness and could help administration better allocate resources. It is important to say that this fee should not be considered as revenue generating in any way, as it would disproportionately impact financial need students.

It is important to allow for interdisciplinary study. Any increase in GPA risks would hinder students' desire for classes that are not directly related to their major. This would increase the potential cost of taking a risk, which would hinder MIT's ability to produce well-rounded and innovative graduates. While it may be possible to implement a policy which allows for non-majors to drop later in the term than majors, it seems unfair and an administrative headache.

Moving the drop date earlier in the semester would be a psychological blow to the student body. The late drop date is viewed as a safety net. Regardless of whether or not students need it, its existence is highly comforting. From the student survey responses, anger would be both widespread and intense.

To address the financial benefits of such a move, we would like to mention the administrative rhetoric that the marginal cost of a student is minimal. The cost to educate one more student or the cost of excess capacity as a result of a late drop is minimal compared to the initial investment.

Historical data should be examined to determine if there are classes for which registrations have fallen to such low numbers that the class would not have been offered. These border cases are important, but it seems that the Registrar has enough data points that trends can be modeled and predicted.

Regardless, it would be unfair and shortsighted to put a price tag on a dropped class. Two thirds of a subject's material is still knowledge. While it is not quantified in a grade or listed on a transcript, this experience is worthwhile to students. It may be that a student finds that they have very little interest or aptitude in a subject, or that they perform better in their own major by seeing a concept from a different viewpoint. MIT has consistently believed and should continue to believe that learning is inherently valuable.

While students shouldn't take coursework casually, most measures disproportionately damage MIT's reputation and ability to advance knowledge by hindering intellectual stimulation and diversity of ideas. This proposal to move the add date and drop date seems contrary to MIT's history and future trajectory and is strongly discouraged in any implementation.



3.6 Recommendation 13: Increase Number of Special Students

3.6.1 Summary of the Recommendation

There is a proposal to increase the number of special students at MIT. Special students are non-MIT students who are allowed to take classes at MIT. This may include high school students from the area or other people who may want to take classes.

Increasing the number of special students can be manifested in many different forms. First, it may include public listing of MIT classes and opening up registration to the general public. This could entail Boston area adults attending lectures and recitations, taking exams, and receiving a grade. Second, it could involve allowing visiting students (typically graduate students here for research) to pay to audit or take classes.

Not explicitly mentioned in this plan, but a similar plan would be to expand on a 3+2 program, where a student would attend 3 years at a liberal arts college and spend 2 years at MIT, resulting in two bachelors degrees. Additionally, MIT could increase the number of transfer students, who we admit at a far lower rate than either regular admission or peer institutions. Both would be paired with an increase in enrollment, but this allows the Institute to bypass two significant roadblocks to a simple increase in enrollment, namely GIR capacity and on-campus housing for freshmen.

3.6.2 Position

This proposal concerns an effort to increase revenue at MIT by increasing the number of special students on its campus. Ideas to increase the special students population fall in many different categories:

1. Opening registration to general adult public,
2. Requiring visiting research students to pay for a larger portion of their costs,
3. Encouraging 3+2 plan students to take their two years at MIT, and
4. Increasing the number of transfer students.

Students expressed concern regarding adding students from any of the aforementioned categories. In particular, students were concerned that adding such students would lessen the value of an MIT degree for all graduates, strain the limited supply of resources originally meant for MIT students, and increase the overflow of people taking GIR classes. Specific feedback was mostly focused on how the effect of educating the general public and transfer students would impact the learning community.



Most students are not strongly opposed to having a limited number of members of the general community sit in and take exams in the large lecture setting. However, sharing recitations or small discussion-based classes with adults would make students uncomfortable and awkward. There are also serious concerns about logistical issues. Creating a thorough admissions process for all registered adults would be prudent. It would also be important to consider the effect of special students on grade distributions and averages. There are many other concerns regarding the extent and coverage of MIT benefits these students would receive. Athena usernames, Stellar access, student ID's, dining plans, medical coverage, and other student benefits systems need to be analyzed as to if they will be provided to registered adults and the cost of any additional strain.

Several students suggest adding an extension school, similar to those provided by peer institutions such as Harvard and Yale. This idea might alleviate many of the concerns shared by students, including overloading undergraduate classes and placing additional strain of resources meant for MIT students. One concern is that there would be little demand for an extension school, as it would not be what students call an "*MIT education*," but this could be alleviated or eliminated with proper branding.

There is also a general consensus that MIT creates a strong culture of students working together. Accordingly, students are worried that an increase in transfer students could disrupt that collaborative atmosphere. Students feel that transfer students and 3+2 participants could be alienated from campus, as GIR study groups are essential community bonding for many MIT students. Undergraduates understand that part of the reason that more transfer students are being considered is that they might feel comfortable living off campus and forgoing the core GIR experience. However, students who do not or cannot participate in the general community may be less likely to prosper and enjoy their time at MIT. This lack of attachment, and the corresponding effect on alumni giving, should be closely examined.

Moreover, students surveyed consistently observed that too many different ideas were being presented as one. While it is true that all of these ideas are inter-related, we trust that the administration will be diligent and cautious, and that all of the different facets of this idea will be explored separately. As it stands, a slight majority would like to see one version or another of these recommendations occurring, but rarely did a single person express satisfaction with the proposal in its entirety.



3.7 Recommendation 14: Eliminate Athena Clusters

3.7.1 Summary of the Recommendation

This idea involves an evaluation of the current placement and usage of Athena clusters, closing underutilized clusters, and potentially moving clusters to new places on campus. Given that most students have laptops and the usage pattern of clusters has changed drastically since their inception, the current number and locations of clusters might not be optimal. If a cluster is closed, there is a question as to how the space will be reallocated (whether it will remain collaborative work space or be open to reassignment as offices or classrooms).

3.7.2 Position

Above all, students do not want to lose access to convenient printers as a result of reducing the number of Athena clusters. Even students who were in favor of reducing the number of clusters wanted to keep printers in those locations.

Despite the fact that most students have laptops, many students do not carry those laptops with them during the day. As one student said, *"It is one thing to own a laptop, and another to carry it around all day."*

Out-of-the-way clusters, in particular, are good because they provide students with uncontested access to printers. Also, under-utilized clusters were preferred by some students because they are quieter, and students feel more comfortable *"camping out"* for 12 hours doing work in a quiet cluster. Students found that it was hard to work for extended periods of time in some of the bigger and more popular clusters because of the noise.

Students emphasized that there are several clusters that are full during the day, to the point that it's impossible to find an open computer at peak times of day, such as between classes. The clusters that were specifically mentioned as crowded were the ones in buildings 56, 12, and the quickstations in 11.

If some clusters are closed or moved, care should be taken to ensure that they are still evenly distributed around campus. In addition, students would like to see more quickstations around campus. One person commented that students *"really should not have to leave a building to get to a quickstation."*

Students see Athena clusters as a good academic workspace. Increasing the amount of study space—such as by removing some, but not all, computers in a cluster, and replacing them with educational tools like white boards—would be appreciated.

First, current cluster utilization should be evaluated. The number of computers in some existing



clusters could be reduced with no harm to students, and the extra space should be converted into quiet study space. In addition, IS&T should evaluate the feasibility of placing more printers and quickstations around campus, or leaving just printers and quickstations in locations where clusters are closed.

The number of clusters should not be significantly reduced as a majority of surveyed students still want a distributed set of clusters around campus. The best cost savings without harming students would be achieved by reducing the number of computers in existing clusters, and moving some clusters to better distribute them around campus.



3.8 Recommendation 15: Limit Printing in Athena Clusters

3.8.1 Summary of the Recommendation

Athena cluster printers consume a vast quantity of paper and toner. This idea is to explore options for incentivizing students to not print as many pages. The Institute-wide Planning Task Force Report specifically calls out the idea of charging a per-page printing fee, but other options are also being considered.

3.8.2 Position

Student responses to this recommendation almost all mentioned a single reason why they often needed to print documents: many professors have stopped having paper handouts, and have instead told (or even required) students to print course materials on their own. Students universally do not want to see quotas or charges implemented without first changing professors' policies so that they do not require printing to be performed by the students.

Students do not generally oppose per-week or per-term quotas, with charges for exceeding quotas. Few students were in favor of charging for every page printed, without first exceeding a quota. Some students pointed out that the infrastructure for implementing charges would be expensive and create a significant added hassle for printing.

Students expressed frustration that some printing waste comes from reprints due to long queues and broken printers. A public relations campaign similar to the Dorm Electricity Competition, where printing statistics are posted near printers and publicized, might help to reduce printing waste and convince people to print less. Moreover, IS&T should work with departments and faculty liaisons to strongly encourage professors to accept online submissions and not force students to print out course materials.

Beyond that, if printing costs are still too high, the Undergraduate Association recommends that a generous per-week printing cap be implemented to stop the most egregious cases of printer abuse. A significant portion of printed documents are abandoned (such as in the case of reprinting due to a long queue), so if possible, a system should be implemented where pages are returned to the user's quota once they are printed and picked up. This could be accomplished by printing a code on a job's header page that can be used to restore that job's pages to the quota.



3.9 Recommendation 17: Reduce Costs for Freshmen Alternative Programs

3.9.1 Summary of the Recommendation

MIT currently offers several unique freshman programs (including Terrascope, Concourse, and ESG) that focus on a diverse variety of objectives. This asks for a reevaluation of the core objectives of these programs and cutting costs that are not directly related to these objectives. The plan could also involve removing program-specific staff members, making teaching for these classes a rotating assignment among professors, or combining programs together to reduce costs.

Note: Summary was changed on the website due to an email from Holly Sweet informing us that our summary online was incorrect. As such, we are not evaluating the votes on this issue.

3.9.2 Position

This issue was posted to the mailing lists for these programs and generated a massive amount of feedback from both current students and alumni of these programs. As one might expect, the feedback from program participants was almost unanimously against this proposal. The feedback tended to be well thought out; some extended pieces went on for paragraphs, suggesting a great deal of time and effort invested and indicating the importance of the issue to students. Students asserted that these programs provide a unique and invaluable educational experience, allowing them to experience very different approaches to pedagogy and helping them develop a nurturing community that helped ease them through the transition into MIT. In a very small number of cases, however, some program alumni indicated they did not gain any benefit from these classes. People who did not participate in these programs seemed to approve of cutting them. Again, this group was very small compared to the number of people that supported the programs. In general, we can expect implementation of this measure to be strongly opposed by program participants, alumni, and friends, apathy from most of the rest of campus, and mild approval from the rest.

There appear to be no real benefits to undergraduates for this measure, aside from cutting costs. The majority of students believe that cutting funding to these programs (some of which are already under financial duress due to budget cuts) would have a significant detrimental effect. In fact, since some of these programs offer an alternative to the GIRs, cutting back significantly could lead to an even greater overcrowding of the GIRs.

It is dubious if there would be any real gain to MIT from cutting funding for these programs. A report by Prof. Kim Vandiver, Dean for Undergraduate Research, submitted to the Institute-wide Planning Task Force Education Working Group and summarized for us³ indicated that ESG and Concourse cost 2/3 as much per credit hour as the mainstream curriculum, while Terrascope costs 4/3 as much per credit hour as the main curriculum; staffing costs apparently dominated this calculation, at least for the first two programs mentioned.

³We were not granted access to the report itself.



As noted above, program costs for at least two of these programs are less than that of the mainstream freshman curriculum, perhaps due to their use of undergraduates as TAs and graders. This suggests that rather than scaling them back, we should consider using them as models for the mainstream freshman curriculum. Indeed, in using undergraduates as TAs we can not only save costs but also provide valuable teaching and leadership experience.

If implementing cuts, we should do so by turning to the programs and asking them to refocus on their core educational purpose, cutting out extraneous costs. Travel might be one such cost. For example, fieldwork could be done locally or within the country as opposed to internationally. However, it should be stressed that these decisions must not come from the top down. A core part of these programs is the community they build⁴, and to avoid impairing these any cost-cutting decisions must ultimately be made by the program staff that is in close contact with these communities.

We would also suggest looking into the possibility of corporate sponsorship for some of these programs. It is our understanding that Hewlett-Packard sponsors Interphase. Similarly, energy companies may be interested in sponsoring a program like Terrascope.

We recommend the Institute avoid combining programs. Feedback on this score was unanimous: the programs are significantly different in character, and combining them would be both pedagogically challenging as well as severely damaging to the community and culture in these programs. Similarly, cutting instructors runs the risk of impairing both community and the pedagogy of close personal contact that underlies these programs.

We may point out here that MIT may suffer financially in the long term from cutting these programs. These programs build a strong sense of community. Reducing these programs might induce their alumni to scale back their donations to MIT, which would preclude the community formation necessary to generate additional gifts to MIT from current and future students.

Overall, while it may be possible to cut some extraneous costs with these programs, this should be done with great care, taking care to preserve the advisory role and community that makes these programs valuable and unique. Two of these programs are cheaper than the mainstream freshman curriculum; it may be worthwhile to try to adapt their model to the mainstream freshman curriculum. We strongly recommend making any budget decisions only in close cooperation with the directors of these programs; to do otherwise invites the destruction of the communities that are instrumental these programs. We suggest exploring corporate sponsorship options to lend further support to some of these programs.

⁴Mentioned in almost all of the comment pieces.



3.10 Recommendation 24: Eliminate the Physical Education Requirement (Alternate Models)

3.10.1 Summary of the Recommendation

Currently, MIT provides a large and diverse array of Physical Education (PE) classes. The main issue with the PE requirement is that, aside from playing a varsity sport or participating in the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC), there are no alternative ways to gain PE credit. The Undergraduate Association Athletics Committee has been informed that alternative ways to gain PE credit might not be feasible given the current level of Institute staffing.

A portion of students would prefer not to have a PE requirement at all. However, the Institute points out that students who are not athletes by nature or do not work out regularly can be inspired by the PE requirement to expose themselves to new disciplines, take on a healthier lifestyle, and get involved in athletics.

Within the requirement, the student body as a whole seems to enjoy the PE options they are given. This is apparent based on the speed at which some classes now fill up. If this variety were to decrease, however, Physical Education at MIT might be viewed in an entirely different light.

3.10.2 Position

Students enjoy taking PE classes and believe that the availability and diversity of PE classes is an important part of the MIT experience. In regards to the current PE requirement, there are three major viewpoints on campus. A majority of students enjoy the PE requirement and do not want it to be removed; another significant portion would prefer if students could substitute varsity sports, club sports, or PE classes to fulfill the requirement; and a smaller segment of students think the requirement should be removed, but that PE classes should remain available for students and the MIT community.

As a whole, students do not want this requirement to be eliminated. In a survey of 300 MIT undergraduate students, 82 percent enjoy taking PE classes and 76 percent want to keep the PE requirement⁵. Many students commented that taking PE classes:

1. Helps them to learn something new,
2. Is a great break from the academic stress of classwork,
3. Inspires them to workout more and live healthier, and
4. Allows them to make new friends within the Institute.

⁵Survey conducted by UA Athletics Committee by email to dorms.



At an Institute level, there are some changes that can be made to improve this requirement for both students and MIT. The major issue with this requirement is the limited means by which a student can successfully complete it. Although students can fulfill the PE requirement through playing a varsity sport, organized club sports receive no credit. Many efforts have been made by the Club Sports Council to allow club sports to fulfill the requirement; however, DAPER has so far deferred investigating a solution for this issue.⁶

Many students have noticed that the variety in PE classes has been declining in the past few years. This perturbs many students, such as those who may not have been able to take a class one semester and then realize it is no longer offered in the next. MIT constantly prides itself on the diversity and range of options students are given with everything in the Institute, especially athletics. After the varsity sports cuts last spring, this decrease in breadth is particularly upsetting.

In order to help balance out the cost of PE classes, students commented on paying for optional PE classes and opening the PE classes to members of the Z-Center. Only 22 percent of students would pay to take PE classes, although 55 percent would take PE classes if they were free, but not required. 64 percent of students would be open to having the PE classes available to the public for a fee, as long as MIT students had first pick in the classes.

These student opinions suggest that opening some PE classes to the public may be a good option to slightly increase revenue for the classes. In addition, this study suggests that if the PE requirement were to be eliminated, MIT should continue offering a variety of PE classes for the students to optionally take, free of charge.

There exists a virtuous circle within the PE requirement though. Many students mentioned that had they not been required to take a PE class, they never would have done so. But after taking one, they are much more likely to want to take more, whether it is required or not, because the classes are enjoyable and also offer many additional positive benefits. This finding should emphasize the need for MIT to require PE classes at least for the first year or so, such that students can see the benefits taking these classes.

In conclusion, students at MIT enjoy taking PE classes and are in support of the PE requirement. If the requirement were to be abolished, then PE classes should remain available for students to participate in. PE classes are a great way to increase the mental and physical health of students while also broadening their experience at MIT to extend beyond just academics.

⁶While meeting with the Carrie Moore, the Director of Physical Education, last winter, she revealed attempts to allow club sports for PE credit have been halted until a new position in DAPER is created to be solely responsible for Club Sports and Intramurals. When and if this position will be created was not mentioned.



4 Academic Space Working Group Recommendations

4.1 Recommendation 2: Invest in Preventative Maintenance

4.1.1 Summary of the Position

This recommendation would assess deferred maintenance needs on campus. While large scale classroom and other facility maintenance is common on MIT's campus, the biggest impact of deferred maintenance on undergraduates would likely be in the dormitories. This recommendation would have the Institute make a plan to improve the level of physical condition in dorms such that they can be sustained by routine maintenance. A number of dorms such as Bexley, Burton Conner, Random Hall and East Campus have needed extensive repairs for years. However, the repairs needed would probably require relocation of students in those dorms for an extended period of time. Many students are concerned about the freedom of expression that might be lost in the repaired living spaces, such as the ability to customize rooms or paint on the walls. With these concerns and constraints in mind, the sooner the maintenance is performed, the more money MIT will save in the long run.

4.1.2 Position

This recommendation is fiscally responsible, regardless of budget cuts, and we fully support it. Investing in preventative maintenance not only cuts net cost and energy usage; it also improves the quality of spaces and facilities used by the MIT Community. As with many of these ideas, however, the method of implementation is extremely important.

Relocating students during the academic year for dorm renovations could have negative effects on their academic performance, health, and social life. Given the current state of crowding, this would also be impossible. We strongly urge MIT to consider making repairs to residence halls during the summer.

Another essential consideration is the preservation of dorm culture; renovations should not be cause for new restrictions on painting or pets. Renovations should not be undertaken without a frank discussion and agreement among the current residents and administration about the importance of certain areas or features that must be retained for dorm culture. Kitchens and lounges are an important aspects to many dorms and although we could squeeze a few extra dorm rooms into these spaces, it would result in a severe reduction in student life.

The current mindset of students is that they have to prevent renovations at all costs, because if renovations were to take place they believe that aspects crucial to dorm culture would be removed without consultation. This has led to the current situation, in which several dorms are poorly maintained. As one student put it, *"What the heck is the problem with a physically sound dorm*



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that allows painting? Just because the place has functional sinks doesn't mean it has to look like a hotel."



5 Administrative Processes Working Group Recommendations

5.1 Recommendation 17: Shuttle Services

5.1.1 Summary of the Recommendation

This recommendation calls for the evaluation of MIT's shuttle service. Redundant routes covered by both the MIT Shuttle Service and MBTA buses might be eliminated. In addition, some shuttle routes might have reduced frequencies of operation. There is also the possibility that some non-core routes might require fees.

5.1.2 Position

Shuttle services bring the MIT community together. They facilitate on-campus community interaction by providing timely transportation around MIT, and they promote linkage with off-campus residents and the greater Boston area. We believe that increasing the efficiency of shuttle services is indeed a worthwhile pursuit, but we have concerns about the implementation of such a plan. For example, while the reduction of overlap between the Boston East and Boston West Saferide shuttles is agreeable to almost everyone, some students feel less safe at MBTA stops, especially late at night. We therefore oppose the elimination of Saferide routes based on redundancy with the MBTA.

Comments on the potential fees for non-core routes were all negative, but most students would prefer a small fee over the elimination of their route. Students were generally opposed to reduced frequency of service for any route, but if such an adjustment becomes necessary, there are ways to limit the negative impact on students. Service reductions should be minimized during the winter months, when walking and biking are less enjoyable. We also suggest experimenting with a mechanism to determine usage of routes in advance, such as an online system for booking times for a given route in advance. This could eliminate unused services and save money. Similarly, a student-developed alternative to NextBus would provide cost savings and improved methods of gathering usage data. The system could be implemented as a multidisciplinary design project, and could be maintained by a student group.

As with several of the other recommendations, the outcome of this proposal is highly dependent on the interpretation of the implementor. Does this recommendation seek to end Saferide or the Tech Shuttle or the Northwest Shuttle? If Saferide is being evaluated, then why is this recommendation categorized in the "Administrative Processes" section?



6 Student Life Working Group Recommendations

6.1 Recommendation 2: Improvement of Housing Utilization During the Summer

6.1.1 Summary of the Recommendation

Students living on campus over the summer would be consolidated into a reduced number of dorms. The other dorms would be used to generate revenue by renting and/or subletting to other parties.

6.1.2 Position

This recommendation is a good idea, given proper implementation. Summer residents living in MITs dorms over a given summer include current undergraduates as well as high school students participating in summer programs affiliated with MIT. Many undergraduates who decide to live on campus over the summer prefer to live in their own residence hall for reasons of convenience, culture, and comfort. Consolidating all these students over the summer would likely cause tension among students and create the perception that MIT is unaware of the diversity of its dorms.

One simple option would be to consolidate all of the summer programs that require MIT housing over the summer into one dorm. For example, this summer, students in Women's Technology Program (WTP) resided in McCormick, students in Minority Introduction to Engineering & Science (MITES) and Research Summer Institute (RSI) lived in Simmons, students in Project Interphase stayed in Next House, and students in the Amgen Scholars Program inhabited New House. The consolidation of these summer program participants into one dorm would lead to better efficiency, without disrupting the established culture of the dorms. The remaining residents could be consolidated within their own dorms in order to rent out sections of the dorms to third parties (this is the current practice in Senior House).



6.2 Recommendation 3: Relaxation of Four-year On-campus Housing Commitment

6.2.1 Summary of the Recommendation

Students would no longer be guaranteed four years of on-campus housing. The desired result would be the ability to increase undergraduate enrollment without finishing the renovation of the W1 dorm. The process to reduce the population of overcrowded dorms might be unpopular and getting back into on-campus housing might become even harder.

6.2.2 Position

This recommendation has been met with resounding disapproval by the undergraduate community. On the Undergraduate Association's summary and feedback web site, it received a score of -269, the lowest out of all the recommendations. Comments ranged from general dismay to outright contempt.

The four-year housing guarantee is central to MIT's culture and identity. It is also a significant factor in the yield of undergraduate admissions and alumni donations. The following statements are taken from the Unified Proposal for the MIT Residence System⁷, written in October 1999 by the Strategic Advisory Committee to the Chancellor, in collaboration with the Undergraduate Association, Graduate Student Council, Dormitory Council, and Interfraternity Council:

Housing must be guaranteed for four years to all undergraduates. The current guarantee of contiguous housing for students is a valued part of the recruitment process of MIT and an important part of the educational value of the residence system. The pace and pressure of the academic rigors of the Institute are widely acknowledged, and the housing guarantee removes a potential source of significant stress.

Weakening or eliminating this guarantee would cause substantial difficulties for the student body. Undergraduates have limited financial resources with which to afford off-campus accommodations and have limited amounts of time in which to search for housing. The natural stress of searching for housing would be compounded by the Cambridge rental market. With the elimination of rent control and the effects of general demographic trends in the Cambridge area, affordable housing is at a premium, with the market at approximately 98 percent+ saturation. Cambridge residents are concerned about the prospect of MIT students (and those of other area colleges and universities) flooding the system. Students, on the other hand, are disconcerted by the prospect of finding acceptable and affordable housing in such a constrained environment.

Housing provides a necessary foundation for university education. Shelter allows students to concentrate on their studies, knowing that their basic needs are fulfilled. The

⁷Report text can be found at <http://web.mit.edu/advise/unifiedproposal/proposal-FINAL.html>



experience of living in university-affiliated shelter also powerfully reinforces the role of the university as a self-contained community within its surrounding city. The physical design of housing, and the resolution of issues such as access to housing, contribute to and mold this community. Housing, then, is more than just a roof: it is a foundation for community and an educational tool with far-reaching effects.

We believe that the best immediate support a student can get is from those who live nearby, and therefore a friendly relationship with one's living community can be necessary to a student's surviving the academic rigor of the Institute. Support could come in the form of volunteer tutoring (which at MIT can be just as common and useful as organized tutoring), or even just in the form of a friend to talk to or a group of people in which one feels welcome. A friendly living environment, which is what we believe describes a 'home,' is one of the most treasured aspects of the MIT housing system as it now stands.

In addition to our moral and social objections, we are skeptical of this recommendation's alleged cost savings. Has the Planning Task Force considered the economic effects of suddenly flooding the already-saturated Cambridge housing market with excess demand? Will MIT provide additional financial aid to students who are forced to find expensive off-campus housing? Will it expand shuttle services to provide transportation and safety for those who live far from campus? Will it hire additional staff to help students find affordable housing and understand their lease agreements? These costs should not be overlooked.

The undergraduate community's stance on this issue has not changed in the decade since the Unified Proposal was written; housing must be guaranteed to all undergraduates for four years.



6.3 Recommendation 4: Metering of Dormitories

6.3.1 Summary of the Recommendation

Google PowerMeter, which details energy usage at a residence, has suggested that just informing people of how much energy they are using will help them reduce their consumption by about 15 percent. A recent evaluation of the heating system at a particular dorm revealed that significant savings could be obtained by replacing a steam trap. This idea involves tracking dorm usage metrics and charge residents individually for their portion of utilities, such as water, electricity, and heat. The desired result would be to reduce waste and save money. Issues might arise if dorm rates are adjusted based on energy consumption.

6.3.2 Position

MIT dormitories spend about \$8 million per year on energy bills, and the cost of metering would be approximately \$790,000. Google PowerMeter suggests that people reduce energy consumption 5-15 percent when made aware of current usage. Based on these estimates, MIT could save between \$400,000 to \$1.2 million per year, paying for the cost of metering in a time frame of 8-24 months.

Feedback from students on the Undergraduate Association's Task Force Summary website indicates that undergraduates support metering dormitories. The net outcome of voting as of October 9th, at +147, indicates that students support this method of investing now to save money and resources in the future. The comments that students sent in also indicate strong support for the possibility of metering in dorms, though several concerns about implementation and consequences for students were raised.

The primary concern is that students could be charged a utility bill separate from rent, which would create inherent inequities in housing at MIT. First, dorms with less energy efficiency (poor insulation or outdated lighting) would automatically charge residents more than some of the newer dorms. Second, students were concerned as to how the utilities in public spaces would be distributed: would residents evenly split the costs, even if some students used public spaces more than others? Several responses indicated that students would simply begin using outlets in public spaces to avoid excess utility charges. Finally, students also raised concerns over the heating systems in many of the dorms. In Bexley Hall, for example, students cannot control the level of the heat output during winter, often resulting in many residents opening windows to level out the temperature. This is clearly an unsustainable and inefficient practice, and would increase bills for students who cannot personally control their own heating or air conditioning.

Other students suggested that monitoring of individual dorm rooms would be somewhat inconsequential, considering the fact that the dorms, as compared to other buildings on campus, actually use very little energy.⁸ Some alternative suggestions include putting motion sensors on lights in

⁸See the MIT Energy Map: <http://energymap.mit.edu/map>.



public spaces throughout campus, including Athena clusters, hallways, and bathrooms.

Based on this feedback and the limited information available in the Institute-wide Planning Task Force Initial Report, we suggest that MIT install metering in the dorms, but guarantee to maintain the current rooming fee structure, without charging a separate utility bill based on energy usage by room. We would also suggest investment in other energy-saving projects, that would have short term costs but long-term payoffs. These investments include the previous suggestion of installing motion-sensored lighting, giving students control over heating and air conditioning levels, and installing better insulated windows in dorms. These projects require some capital upfront, but have the potential to save MIT even more than the \$400,000 to \$1.2 million suggested by metering alone.



6.4 Recommendation 5: Adjusting Financial Aid to True Food Costs

6.4.1 Summary of the Recommendation

Financial aid provides \$4,510 per year for food. However, MIT students report that they spend only \$1,700 to \$2,240 on food per year. The Task Force suggests reducing the food component of financial aid to \$3,000 per year for students without a meal plan; students with a meal plan would continue to receive \$4,510. The Task Force estimates that such a change could save \$2.4 million per year. It is not clear whether “meal plan” refers to the existing House Dining program or to a revised plan (see Implementation of Meal Plan Changes in House Dining).

6.4.2 Position

Currently, the board (food) component of the cost of education does not accurately reflect the actual student expenditure on food. This results in a discrepancy in the financial aid MIT allocates for board and students’ actual food expense. The MIT board cost is set at \$4,510 per academic year⁹. A recent survey found student self-reported expenditures on food ranged from \$1,700 to \$2,240 per academic year. The idea is to reduce the board component of financial aid to \$3,000 per academic year for students who decline the meal plan. Board would remain at \$4,510 for students on the meal plan. This change would provide an incentive for students to opt for the meal plan, which would benefit the MIT dining program financially. It would also lead to significant savings in financial aid allocated to students who decline the meal plan. If board is set at \$3,000 and 80 percent of students decline the MIT meal plan, \$2.4 million in undergraduate financial aid savings would be realized.

Financial aid should cover the costs of education, including food. Students agree that the current financial aid allocation for food is greater than the cost for food during the semester; students support reducing financial aid to align with actual costs. Students rated this idea as +78 on the Undergraduate Association’s Task Force feedback website. Written feedback also supports correcting the financial aid package, though students raised several issues with the recommendation that should be taken into consideration during implementation.

Primarily, students question why financial aid would explicitly subsidize the dining system; students believe that a flat rate of \$3,000 per year would be more equitable than offering some students an additional \$1,460 per year, especially since students who enroll in House Dining spend an average of only \$2,250 on food per year.¹⁰ Thus, additional funding for House Dining members is unwarranted.

It is important to remember that financial aid is an important factor in many students’ lives. Thus, while undergraduates support this particular recommendation, other changes to financial aid should

⁹See http://web.mit.edu/sfs/afford/undergraduate_expenses.html

¹⁰As stated in the 2009 Final Report of the Undergraduate Association Dining Proposal Committee at <http://web.mit.edu/ua/docs/dpc-reports/Final%20DPC%20Report.pdf>



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be studied rigorously. In addition, as prices fluctuate (for food and in general), financial aid should be updated as well. A major issue that should be studied and understood is how students are currently utilizing the additional funds provided to them by MIT. Hopefully, any remaining money should be rolled over to the Institute, but if students are using this extra allocation for essential purposes, perhaps MIT should evaluate if it needs to add, for example, a technology stipend.

Reducing food allocations in financial aid to more closely align with current spending is a good idea that students support. Removing the proposed \$1,460 per year subsidy for dining plans would allow this recommendation to save even more than the projected \$2.4 million.



6.5 Recommendation 6: Implementation of Meal Plan Changes in House Dining

6.5.1 Summary of the Recommendation

The Task Force suggests replacing the existing \$300/semester House Dining membership with a \$600/semester dining plan. The Blue Ribbon Committee estimated that this would help reduce a \$500,000 annual subsidy of the dining system. It is not clear whether additional Blue Ribbon Committee recommendations would be implemented.

6.5.2 Position

An examination of the Blue Ribbon Committee's (BRC) proposed meal plan changes found the changes would lead to a reduction in MIT's approximately \$500,000 annual subsidy of the dining system. The idea is to provide a \$600 dinner plan in place of the current \$300 dinner plan as a requirement for new students as of Fall 2010. Among the foreseeable benefits of the new plan are that it would create revenue stability and attendance predictability.

Undergraduates oppose replacing a \$300 per semester dining plan with a \$600 per semester dining plan, as indicated through casual conversations, written feedback, and electronic voting. Students would like the clarity of a declining balance system, but would not generally benefit economically from the change. This recommendation has a net -157 rating. Opposition is particularly fierce because the existing \$300 system does not provide most students with an overall benefit: for most students, the \$300 fee is more than the money "saved" with the 50 percent discount.¹¹ The proposed \$600 fee is a declining balance system without a discount, so the overall cost to students who eat in dining halls regularly would be about the same. Some students enrolled in House Dining today, however, do not eat in a dining hall regularly and the additional sunk cost would never be returned. Additionally, students question the lack of clarity in the recommendation, which does not indicate what other changes will be made to the dining system. To be forthright, students do not support expanding mandatory dining plans. Student feedback has indicated that a third problem with this recommendation is that dining halls provide very limited options for individuals with dietary restrictions; students do not want to pay more for a system that they cannot use in the first place.

While students oppose a straight increase in the House Dining membership fee, students do support efforts to reduce the overall subsidy of the dining system. We feel that the most prudent approach is a re-examination of the entire system, starting with the reports released in Spring 2009 by the Blue Ribbon Committee¹² and Dining Proposal Committee.¹³ While this recommendation is based in part on the recommendations of the Blue Ribbon Committee, a more thorough analysis could

¹¹See Section 4 of the Undergraduate Association Dining Proposal Committee's Final Report at web.mit.edu/ua/docs/dpc-reports/Final%20DPC%20Report.pdf

¹²See the Blue Ribbon Committee's report at dining.mit.edu/sites/default/files/BlueRibbonComm%20Final%20Report.pdf

¹³See the Dining Proposal Committee's report at web.mit.edu/ua/docs/dpc-reports/Final%20DPC%20Report.pdf



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improve efficiencies and reduce costs to the Institute while maintaining an affordable and functional system for students.

Students would like to reduce the subsidy to dining halls, but the proposal will not lower costs for students, and — assuming students actually use the dining halls — it is unclear what additional revenue is gained. Student would appreciate the increased clarity of the system, but a refined declining balance system should be examined within the context of larger changes.



7 Summaries Not Selected for Position Pieces

After analysis of the feedback on the summaries, the following five recommendations were determined to be of lesser interest to the undergraduates based on total votes, page views, and the content of the comments received regarding these issues. Although this was a tough decision, it was essential given the focus required for this report.

7.1 Administrative Processes Working Group Recommendations

7.1.1 Recommendation 8: Next Generation Student Systems

A series of projects called NGS3 will work to further automate business processes related to students. This could include things such as registration forms becoming fully electronic and replacements for part or all of MITSIS/WebSIS.

7.2 Administrative HR/Benefits Working Group Recommendations

7.2.1 Recommendation 2: Add Copay for Services Received at MIT Medical Facility

MIT Medical will begin charging co-pays for specialty care visits. This change is necessary for compliance with the Mental Health Parity Act, which took effect on 1/1/2009. The co-pays do not apply to primary care, and may not apply to students at all.

7.3 Administrative Procurement Recommendations

7.3.1 Recommendation 8: Standardize Personal Computing Purchases on Dell PCs

This idea is to restrict purchases of computers on campus to a single vendor and model of computer. In the last fiscal year, Apple and Dell were split 50/50 on laptop purchases and 30/70 on desktop purchases. This could affect the student discount program.



7.4 Revenue Enhancement Working Group Recommendations

7.4.1 Recommendation 3: E-learning Masters Degrees

This idea is to increase the market of an MIT masters degree. This plan calls for the development of an online program, targeted to working professionals, that would ultimately result in an MIT masters degree. Any change would be carefully researched to ensure that it would be profitable to the Institute. There are mixed reports from other peer institutions with some college programs revenue positive while others have been shut down.

Students and faculty have always strongly believed that an MIT degree must be earned, demonstrated by our unwillingness to award honorary degrees, and some people have suggested that an E-masters would weaken that conviction.

7.4.2 Recommendation 22: Replace Library Roaming Stacks with New Business Model

This plan calls for the reduction of the number of books stored on campus, freeing the real estate for offices and other uses. Additional books would be moved to cheaper real estate in the region and could be recalled by students within a couple days. In addition, the library could generate revenue by loaning books to other institutions and companies.

8 Acknowledgements

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- UA Committee on Dining



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- UA Committee on Enrollment
- UA Committee on Student Life
- UA Committee on Sustainability
- UA Student Committee on Educational Policy