

MIT Response to the 1999 Evaluation Report

Prepared for the [Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges](#)

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

March 2000

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology appreciates the opportunity to respond to the report prepared by the [NEASC site evaluation team](#) following its visit in November of 1999. The team's thoughtful report reflects an exceptional effort to understand a large and complex institution.

Inevitably, there are points on which the Institute's own perceptions and those of the evaluation team differ. The comments below respond to the major concerns raised by the team. Some issues identified in the report are already being addressed by MIT; a very small number call for factual clarification.

These responses are organized according to the [standards for accreditation](#) established by the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education:

- [Planning and Evaluation](#)
- [Organization and Governance](#)
- [Programs and Instruction](#)
- [Faculty](#)
- [Student Services](#)
- [Library and Information Resources](#)
- [Physical Resources](#)
- [Financial Resources](#)
- [Public Disclosure](#)

Planning and Evaluation

The evaluation team's emphasis on the importance of data assessment in planning is in line with the Institute's own commitment to placing systematic analysis of relevant data at the heart of its planning efforts. The Planning Office and the Budget Office collect data on departmental research volume, teaching loads, head counts, and space utilization. These data are utilized in allocating resources for a variety of purposes. The faculty database, which is maintained centrally and utilized in a variety of planning functions, is being upgraded to increase its functionality.

Organization and Governance

A number of the issues raised in the report concerned institutional governance. The team commented on the division of responsibility among senior officers, the relationship between the central administration and the academic units, and the role of the Faculty Policy Committee. The report also offered specific suggestions about the oversight of the undergraduate curriculum.

The relationship between the Provost and Chancellor has continued to evolve since their appointments in the summer of 1998. The President is working closely with both of them and with the Deans and officers of the Faculty to ensure clear lines of authority and responsibility.

The Institute is fortunate to have a strong departmental structure as well as a relatively centralized administration. While it may be unrealistic to expect that MIT will ever resolve entirely the tensions about the locus of authority and responsibility that can arise with respect to specific issues, the Administration seeks to manage this tension and ensure that issues are dealt with expeditiously.

The President, Provost, and Chancellor are already working to make greater use of the Faculty Policy Committee as a sounding board during the planning process and in setting priorities. The Chair of the Faculty and the Provost are establishing a standing subcommittee of the FPC to consider major institutional initiatives at their earliest stages of formulation. The objective is to engage the FPC at a point in discussions where faculty input would be most useful.

The Office of the Dean of Students and Undergraduate Education is being restructured to provide the Dean of Undergraduate Education with the opportunity to focus more closely on issues of curriculum and pedagogy. The Dean of Undergraduate Education now chairs the Grants Subcommittee of the Council on Educational Technology, which provides substantial resources to support educational innovation. The specific recommendations of the evaluation team with respect to the core curriculum are being discussed with the Chair of the Faculty.

The Institute continues to work to improve communication between students and the administration, which the evaluation team identified as an area of concern. The recent report of the Chancellor on the residence system incorporated substantial student input and was received positively by the student body. Public forums are providing additional opportunities for the student body and student leadership to raise issues of academic policy, as well as residential and community life, with faculty and administrators.

Programs and Instruction

The evaluation team expressed concern about issues of pace and pressure for undergraduates, the format of the first year, opportunities for management education for non-majors, responses to shifts in enrollment patterns, and the training of graduate teaching assistants.

The Task Force on Student Life and Learning embraced intensity as a core value for the Institute. While the Administration and faculty have attempted to develop ways to manage the pace and pressure of the undergraduate experience, it must be recognized that efforts to manage this intensity are likely to fail in part because MIT students are themselves so intense. It is extremely difficult to enforce load limitations on students who are eager to add to their academic schedules. Faculty violations of the regulations governing examinations and the end of term, however, are a recurring problem. A subcommittee of the Faculty Policy Committee has recently completed a comprehensive review of these regulations. Proposed changes that seek to clarify the responsibilities of the faculty will come to a meeting of the Faculty for approval later this spring.

The first-year curriculum has been the subject of intensive discussion within the faculty. The resources made available through the new d'Arbeloff Fund for Excellence in MIT Education are being focused on the creation of additional experimental programs to encourage more first-year teaching in non-traditional ways. In addition, the faculty is considering changes in the Pass/No Record grading system that would provide students with additional flexibility in their first year.

The Institute appreciates the increasing importance of management education to students in a wide range of other disciplines. The Sloan School is working collaboratively with the Provost and Chancellor to develop a plan to provide additional subject offerings to undergraduate and graduate students not currently enrolled in the Sloan School.

Since experience has shown that enrollment patterns can change quite dramatically over time, the Institute is careful not to overreact to disparities in faculty teaching loads across departments. Changes in departmental enrollment patterns are

addressed primarily by allocating additional resources for teaching assistants, which are controlled centrally. Reallocation of faculty slots across departments is reserved for situations of fundamental curricular or disciplinary change.

The Graduate Student Office runs a workshop at the beginning of each year for training of graduate teaching assistants. In addition, changes are being instituted in the Office of the Dean of Students and Undergraduate Education to provide better training and support of graduate resident tutors.

The evaluation team correctly sensed an intense interest in the creative arts among MIT undergraduates. The Institute continues to strengthen its support for student involvement in the arts. Facilities for Music and Theater Arts will benefit from major investments. A new teaching laboratory, rehearsal room, and black box theater are being planned, while additional rehearsal facilities for dance and music will be developed as part of the new undergraduate residence.

With respect to the report's comments about the "faculty of arts," it should be noted that the renaming this July of the School of Humanities and Social Science as the School of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences will recognize the importance of arts in the curriculum and in co-curricular life but will not involve administrative reorganization.

Faculty

With respect to the report's reference to "research faculty," it should be noted that there is no such category *per se* – essentially all faculty are expected to teach as well as conduct research. The Institute has moved to pay academic-year faculty salaries from MIT resources rather than sponsored research funds; fewer than 4 percent of faculty positions are now paid from research funds. Members of the sponsored research staff are not considered members of the Faculty.

Student Services

As the evaluation team recognized, the Institute continues its efforts to strengthen student services and residential and community life. This year, the budget for staffing of student services, especially in the area of residential life programming, was increased substantially. Pending changes in senior personnel will provide an opportunity for further assessment of organizational mission and structure.

The evaluation team offered a number of suggestions for next steps. Work is already proceeding in many of the areas the report identified as priorities:

- A new Sports and Fitness Center is under development. Last week, ground was broken for the new Stata Center, which will include additional athletic facilities; as part of its construction, the existing alumni pool will be renovated to improve exercise facilities, locker rooms, and squash courts. In addition, last year the Institute replaced its AstroTurf field and, this year, will replace the outdoor track. The possibility of acquiring additional property adjacent to campus in order to expand the playing fields available to support a variety of athletic activities is under review.
- A new business plan for dining has been completed recently, and implementation will begin shortly.
- The Institute is aware of the need for a reassessment of career services for graduate students in light of the changing expectations of students and the less traditional career paths of both masters and doctoral students. The Dean for Graduate Students and the Office of Career Services are working together to better advise graduate students on less traditional career paths.

The evaluation team has seconded the recommendation of the Institute's own Task Force on Student Life and Learning in urging better integration of faculty into the co-curricular life of undergraduate students. MIT has taken a number of steps in this direction since the release of the Task Force report in the fall of 1998. These initiatives include the integration of faculty residences into the new undergraduate residence and experimentation with a new program in residence-based advising. Opportunities to bring faculty and students together have also been enhanced by support for large community events including the Millennium Ball in January of 2000 and the upcoming Johnson Games.

Library and Information Resources

MIT agrees with the assessment of the evaluation team that its library facilities are in need of physical renewal. The Libraries have undertaken a strategic planning process facilitated by an outside consultant. The plan being developed proposes capital improvements and relocation of some library activities, as well as the creation of additional study and exhibition spaces.

The team stressed the importance of the Libraries' provision of state-of-the-art digital library resources. The Administration is deploying resources that will increase support for the Libraries' acquisition and maintenance of digital resources for graduate student and faculty research. The evaluation team's recommendation that high priority be given to the choice and installation of a new, advanced, high-quality, library management system and online public catalog has been forwarded to the Director of the Libraries for consideration.

Physical Resources

The Administration is committed to campus development that supports new modes of teaching and research and the strengthening of the residential community.

The evaluation team remarked on the cost estimates for some of the new construction ahead. Each of the Institute's new capital projects represents a substantial commitment to innovative architectural design. While the initial capital costs are high, MIT believes the long-term return in functionality and aesthetics will justify the expense. The Institute has recently enhanced significantly its internal project management capability to ensure effective oversight of current construction activity.

The Institute has already begun to implement a long-term plan that will allow it to address the maintenance issues identified by the evaluation team. The deferred maintenance problems faced by the older buildings on campus are receiving high priority. The Executive Committee of the Corporation has recently allocated an additional \$20 million annually as an increment to the budget devoted to space renovations. In addition, approximately \$45 million over a three-year period is being spent to address critical infrastructure needs. Some deferred maintenance problems will be addressed through the replacement of old buildings with new facilities.

The current campus planning process (Campus Plan 2000) will provide direction on the issues of grounds maintenance and is also addressing signage. The Olin Partnership has been retained to assist in this effort. A key focus of Campus Plan 2000 is campus community. The steering committee for Campus Plan 2000 is devoting several sessions to determining how to meet the expectations for campus life outlined in the report of the Task Force on Student Life and Learning.

Financial Resources

The Institute's financial structure has been evolving rapidly to meet the new realities of changing research support, increased competition from MIT's peers, and the need to maintain and enhance physical facilities. The evaluation team, appropriately, urged caution in financing current initiatives. The Administration has been working closely with the Executive Committee of the MIT Corporation for more than a year to develop long-term financial plans that will maintain the financial strength of the Institute while permitting needed investments in programs and facilities. Contemplated increases in the endowment payout rate in the financial plans allow endowment to increase beyond inflation.

MIT continues its efforts to reduce operating costs, enhance productivity, and streamline financial operations. The funding of auxiliary services, which the evaluation team found anomalous, is currently under review. The next steps include a new business plan for dining and housing, the Medical Department, and other auxiliaries. In particular, MIT's auxiliaries in Fiscal Year 2001 will make for the first time contributions to covering indirect costs, in excess of \$2 million.

Public Disclosure

The evaluation team suggested that the MIT website was not always consistent or easy for outsiders to navigate. Recognizing that these are often difficult issues for organizations with decentralized web resources, the Institute is evaluating its website, and will be redesigning some aspects as necessary to ensure that it is an effective source of information about MIT and its programs. Leadership in Campus Wide Information Systems, the office that oversees the Institute's web presence, is working closely with the central administration in this effort.