

Special Projects Office

The Special Projects Office assists with the development of new Dean for Undergraduate Education (DUE) initiatives and supports a number of special educational activities and faculty committees.

Administration of the MIT Communication Requirement

The office coordinates the administration and implementation of the Communication Requirement—now in its third year as an undergraduate requirement—and supports the work of the faculty Subcommittee on the Communication Requirement (SOCR). We are working closely with other offices within DUE—especially the Registrar’s Office and Academic Services—to improve implementation procedures as problems are identified. In addition, since effective collaboration among SOCR, the Committee on Academic Performance, and our office is an important aspect of tracking and enforcing students’ progress towards completion of the requirement, we are working actively to maintain strong communication among these constituencies.

The office continues to process proposals for new Communication Intensive subject in the Major (CI-M) subjects and coordinates their review by SOCR before forwarding them to the Committee on Curricula for final approval. We worked closely with the DUE to assess budget requests associated with CI-M subjects and other components of the requirement and to allocate the support necessary for their delivery.

Currently, we are working with the dean and with staff in the Teaching and Learning Laboratory to convene an advisory group of outside experts to provide initial feedback on the requirement and help frame an ongoing assessment of its effectiveness.

The Cambridge-MIT Undergraduate Student Exchange Program

This was the third full year of the Cambridge–MIT Undergraduate Student Exchange program (CME), which began as an initiative of the Cambridge-MIT Institute and continues to receive substantial financial assistance from this UK government–supported initiative. Management has been a responsibility of the Office of the Dean for Undergraduate Education working with partners at Cambridge University. About 220 students from both institutions have participated in the full-year program; 12 MIT departments currently offer this option to their students, including most major engineering and science departments. In May staff in this office accompanied the dean and Chancellor Clay as they met with their Cambridge University counterparts to discuss the future of the CME. There was strong consensus that the undergraduate exchange was an exciting and worthwhile program that was of benefit to both institutions and their students. However, it was agreed that resources need to be identified to ensure the long-term stability of the program. To that end, planning is underway for a joint fundraising initiative to underwrite some costs of the exchange.

MIT students are now given “mock” tripos exams in January to help them prepare for the year-end exams. This year, MIT engineering students participated in seminars held at MIT to prepare them for their Cambridge coursework, and we work with staff in the MIT Writing Program to help students satisfy the Communications Requirement while at Cambridge University through a one-week workshop held at MIT in September.

Planning for an Office of Study Abroad and Foreign Scholarships

We have begun to investigate the possibility of establishing an office that would (a) serve as the focal point of information for undergraduates and their advisors about study abroad and foreign scholarship opportunities, (b) provide support to students as they investigate and plan for a term or year away from MIT, while they are away, and when they return to MIT, (c) stimulate the development of new study-abroad programs beyond the opportunities that currently exist for MIT undergraduates, (d) provide proactive support and guidance to students applying for certain distinguished foreign scholarships and to the faculty Committee on Foreign Scholarships, and (e) serve as the home for the CME program as well as the new Killam Fellowship program (an exchange program with a number of US and Canadian universities).

As a step toward establishing such an office, we have assumed responsibility for a number of distinguished international study grants that require application to and endorsement by an MIT faculty committee, including the Fulbright Grants, the Rhodes Scholarships, the British Marshall Scholarships, the German DAAD, the George Mitchell Fellowships for study in Ireland, and the Churchill and Gates Fellowships for study at Cambridge University. During this past academic year, we worked closely with Professor Linn Hobbs to improve the provision of advice and guidance to students throughout the application and interview process. More than 100 students expressed interest in applying for one or more of these programs; and we interviewed more than 50 students during the course of the application process. We have introduced an improved plan and timetable for the coming academic year that should benefit students and the faculty—and that should help give MIT students a more competitive advantage.

The MacVicar Faculty Fellows Program

This office, working closely with Dean Redwine and the provost, has assumed the bulk of the organizational responsibility for the MacVicar programs—including planning the agenda for the monthly lunch meetings, working closely with departments and the senior administration as fellows are being nominated and selected, and, finally, working with the Office of the Secretary of the Corporation to plan and organize the March 5 MacVicar Day program, which this year featured Harvard professor Richard Light.

The monthly lunch program for the MacVicar Faculty Fellows continues to be a stimulating and useful forum on a number of topics related to teaching and learning. This year’s program culminated in an afternoon reception with President Vest, who used the opportunity to reflect on educational accomplishments during his tenure at MIT.

The d'Arbeloff Grants Program

The dean for undergraduate education chairs the Council on Educational Technology Grants subcommittee that oversees the resources provided through the Alex and Brit d'Arbeloff Fund for Excellence in Education. Although no formal call for proposals was issued during this academic year, we have received and funded a number of requests for the coming fiscal year and continued to monitor the progress of initiatives that have been funded in prior years.

Support to the Task Force on the Undergraduate Educational Commons

The Committee on the Undergraduate Program is staffed and supported by this office, providing valuable links between the work of the DUE and that of the Faculty committee that is responsible for undergraduate program policy and direction. At the present time, in addition to providing senior staff support to the committee, we monitored the new Exploratory subject experiment for second-year students.

We have assumed responsibility for providing high-level staff support to the new Task Force on the Educational Commons. This group, under the chairmanship of professor of chemistry and dean of science Robert Silbey, will review the goals, content, and structure of MIT's current core educational requirements as well as other aspects of the undergraduate experience that are common to all MIT students.

Staff in the office have begun to work closely with the DUE and with Professor Margery Resnick, the new chair of the Committee on Discipline, to gather data about academic integrity policies and practices at peer institutions.

Staffing Changes

In the late spring, we welcomed Anne McLeod ('00) to the office; Anne will provide full-time support to the new MIT Task Force.

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