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1982 Womens' League
Report on women's
organizations at MIT

MITWL Committee on the Future
Report

File

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BACKGROUND:

Following the inauguration of a new President at MIT and consequently a new honorary chairman of The MIT Women's League, the League's Board, in the fall of 1980, founded a committee to study its current status and future goals. The Board was motivated by the fact that a number of new and vigorous women's groups had formed at MIT in recent years and that there had been a challenge to the criteria for membership in the Women's League, as well as declining participation in its activities.

The Committee, appointed over the winter of 1980-81, accepted its charge to be that of investigating the membership and the future of the MIT Women's League, its relationship to other women's groups on campus and to MIT, and of submitting a report and recommendation to the Board of The MIT Women's League for implementation.

Because it was important to understand how the League relates to other women's groups at MIT and the "women's movement" at MIT, membership on the Committee was planned to include some knowledge about these groups as well as faculty and staff wives and MIT women staff members. In order to hear in some detail about the activities of these other known MIT women's groups, the Committee invited representatives of each group to a meeting to present a summary report of the group's purposes and goals and membership. In addition, the MIT Administration was asked to address the issue of how it sees The MIT Women's League. Every effort was made to continue in an information-gathering mode for as long as possible before drawing any conclusions from what we had been hearing. It was known that several members had come to the Committee leaning toward one conclusion or another on critical membership issues, but it was not until the fall of 1981, after meetings, that the chairman of the committee brought the issue of MITWL membership criteria up for discussion. This waiting process

allowing all members of the committee to hear the same information from every available relevant source, was salutary to the Committee's sense that it was coming to a reasoned decision, made unanimously and with a feeling of satisfaction and tranquility.

Other Women's Organizations at MIT

One of the first tasks our committee undertook was to develop and send a letter/questionnaire to other women's organizations at MIT. (A copy of this letter is appended.) This letter was mailed to the following groups:

Advisory Group on Women Student Interests - Association for Women Students - Association of MIT Alumnae - Association for Women in Science - Lincoln Laboratory Women - Minority Women's Discussion Group - MIT Association of Women Postdoctoral Fellows - Women's Administrative Staff Group - Society of Women Engineers - Tech Wives Organization - The Wives Group - Women's Advisory Board - Women's Forum

Included with the letter was a copy of the brochure "What is The MIT Women's League" as well as a tear-off sheet to be returned to Margaret Mann indicating if the group wished to cooperate with the League's project.

About _____ organizations responded and six representatives joined our committee to share information about their organizations and how they did, or might, interact with MITWL.

Technology Wives Organization (TWO): Gail Richardson, President, represented her group at our meeting of 10/15/81.

The purpose of this group, whose membership is primarily wives of MIT students, is "to provide an opportunity for women affiliated with MIT to find others who share their interests. Founded in 1922, the organization provides services to the community, sponsors social events for its members and their spouses, and provides opportunities for members to load their interests. TWO helps the wives of students to cope by giving them their own place in the community."

They publish a newsletter monthly October through May. All new students in September are sent a brochure describing the group along with a questionnaire. They also have a welcoming party for new students in September. Other activities include International Cooking, a Craft Sale, and a Bake Sale. This year they are co-sponsoring area hospitality parties with The Wives Group. The TWO has two members of the MITWL as advisors. Their funding includes a subsidy for their newsletter from Constantine Simonides' office, a grant from the Graduate School Council, proceeds from their bake sale, and annual dues (\$5). The craft sale profits go toward interest-free educational loans for their members. Their dues-paying membership varies between 50-100.

It was suggested that the TWO President be invited to the President's welcoming party for newcomers next year.

Association of MIT Alumnae (AMITA): Margaret Coleman, President, joined the MITWL Committee on 10/15/81 to tell us about AMITA. This is probably the "oldest" organized group for women in the MIT (org. 1899). Currently there is a potential membership of 4100 living alumnae and it is expected to grow 10% a year in the future. AMITA provides a "means of communication, a sharing of common interests, and encourages high standards of achievement among women students"

Its activities include high-school visitations (in cooperation with the MIT Admissions Office), talking with women students to share their common interests in MIT experiences, and annual awards (for academic achievement) to women who are Seniors. They have sponsored an IAP seminar on "How to Make It in the Pin Stripe World" and expect to have their second annual Career Seminar this spring.

Their goals are to increase the number of women students, as well as the number of women on the MIT Corporation and MIT department visiting committees.

They have their own funding, charge annual dues (\$10) for active participation in their programs, and publish a newsletter mailed to all alumnae in October.

MIT Women Postdoctoral Fellows: No representative was able to meet with the Committee but Cynthia French sent us an informative description of this organization.

This group had its first organizational meeting in June 1979. In January 1980 the association defined its goals and functions as follows: a) To provide a forum for women postdocs to exchange ideas; b) To allow social and professional interactions between otherwise isolated women postdocs; c) to discuss issues inherent to the life of postdocs; d) to develop a network of professional women scientists; 3) to discuss and perhaps resolve problems which are specific to women; f) to prepare for inevitable life crises.

Their mailing list comprises people who have attended meetings or asked to be included (not all postdocs per se). A four-member steering committee takes care of the membership list and money, and are there as contact people with other groups. The dues are \$1 per year to cover costs of duplicating and mailing meeting announcements. Volunteers plan meetings which are held monthly. They also maintain a library of information about jobs, statistics of women in academia, and newsletters from other organizations of women in science.

Women Administrators Group: Marge Lucker and Holly Sweet joined our discussion of this three and one-half year old group which was formed to provide a network for "middle management" women staff at MIT. Their concerns deal with issues of career development of "where do we fit in the pyramid at MIT?" Their programs are open to the MIT community and notices of their meetings are distributed to a mailing list of women included in the following payroll categories - staff, OSP and administrators (about 600 individuals); The Personnel Office currently subsidizes their budget for mailing but otherwise they have no funding.

They coordinate their programs with those of the Women's Forum and one of

their group sits on the Forum Steering Committee. Like all organizations of this type, interest waxes and wanes. The same few people are active in planning the programs and they are concerned about attracting and involving more of their constituency in these efforts.

They would be interested in interacting more closely with the MITWL, especially in advertising programs and activities in areas of common interest, e.g. career development.

The Wives Group: was represented by Dr. Charlotte Schwartz, one of its "founders." She described this group as a "service" of the MIT Psychiatric Service to support activities for wives in the entire MIT community. The Medical Department provides a half-time secretary who keeps up a mailing list and sends out announcements of activities. The Coordinator for the Wives Group is a Sociologist on the staff of the Medical Department. In actuality, the majority of participants in its activities are wives of foreign students and staff.

Their programs include a Wednesday morning group which tours places of interest in Boston, Cambridge, etc. and a Wednesday afternoon group who usually has a speaker or program on subjects ranging from US politics to the Japanese Tea Ceremony. They also sponsor a craft group, a language conversation exchange, pot-luck dinners and neighborhood support groups.

They are particularly effective in sponsoring an International Open House for new students in September. They distribute packets and send invitations to the Open House to new students in their native languages.

The group has about 350 names on their mailing list and put together and sell a book on Getting Acquainted at MIT and the Boston Area. Their main goal is to fill in gaps which other organizations do not cover through lots of self-help, socializing, and other information-sharing and understanding of different cultures and countries.

Their contacts with the MITWL are mostly informal. In the area of English classes, the groups overlap.

Women's Forum: Betty Campbell noted that this group was organized informally about 10 years ago primarily to provide a network or "forum" where women's concerns could be discussed. This group was instrumental in setting up an ombudsperson (Mary Rowe) for these concerns. The Forum has an MIT mailing address (Betty's office) which is listed by most of the major women's network organizations outside MIT.

The forum publishes a bimonthly newsletter as well as an IAP issue. These publications are mailed to 2800 women employees in all payroll categories at MIT. They are funded through the President's Office (Mary Rowe). These funds are used to print and mail the Newsletter and to provide small honoraria for speakers.

The forum holds meetings on the first and third Mondays of the month. These meetings are open to the entire MIT community (men and women). In addition, they sponsor the Gay Warner Lecture during IAP and have run all-day workshops on Saturdays dealing with stress, personal development, etc.

Soujourner was originally sponsored by the MIT Women's Forum and is now a nationally distributed newspaper for women but is no longer connected with MIT. This is an example of what the Forum feels is part of its raison d'etre - to bring to light issues of concern to women in the community, after which the issues will be taken over and continued on their own merits (e.g. the Medical Department now regularly offers Stress Management Programs).

The Forum is interested in interacting with the MITWL particularly through use of its newsletter and mailing list since its programs are already open to MITWL members.

Women's Advisory Board (WAG): This is a presidentially-appointed committee which

meets once a month with Mary Rowe. The committee is made up of representatives of all women's groups on campus. All of the organizations described in this section, including the MITWL, are represented on WAG. Members discuss issues and recommend action on a variety of concerns to women at MIT. The group is often consulted on policy issues, particularly those which deal with women's concerns.

General Comments and Recommendations for Interaction Between MITWL and Other Women's Organizations

In discussing these groups we differentiated them by purpose and goal into those that were professionally or internally oriented, such as Postdocs, Women's Administrators Group, Women's Forum, AMITA, and those that were service or externally oriented, such as TWO, Wives Group (Medical Department) Women's League, AMITA.

We concluded that there is a lot of overlap in women's groups, but most tend to draw on specific memberships to deal with common interests or issues. It might be helpful to have some way of communicating with each other once or twice a year. Perhaps more groups should be encouraged to send representatives to WAG (Women's Advisory Group) where information sharing could take place. It was suggested that women's groups should attempt to exchange calendars for actual and proposed activities during the year. This could include listings of first and third Monday Forum meetings to actual dates for the MITWL Newcomer's Tea. In this connection, we noted that Mary Morrissey does maintain a "planning calendar" in the Information Office to which all organizations in the MIT community, including students, have access. This includes MIT-sponsored events as well as some "outside" groups sponsored by MIT people.

It was suggested that Tech Talk publish a "center fold" once a year which would include not only a comprehensive calendar of all women's groups but also

brief description of who they are and what they do.

It would be desirable to develop a comprehensive mailing list for all women in the MIT community, since just about every group maintains some sort of list of "members" and there is a lot of overlap in these.

The Women's Forum is perhaps the largest "umbrella" for on-campus women but the MITWL may have the second largest 'potential' membership.

Relationship of the MITWL to MIT

Of primary concern to the Committee was what kind of support the League had from the MIT Administration. Historically, the Institute had continued to build support for the League onto that base initiated by Mrs. Moore's donation to the League, known as the Moore Fund (so that the League would never have to charge any dues). MIT has granted space (the Emma Rogers Room) and an administrative assistant, office expenses and major funding for a Bulletin. Consequently, no dues are required of members, although contributions are solicited from members toward expenses for some activities. At the Committee's request, Mr. Constantine Simonides, Vice-President of the Institute for all matters pertaining to Personnel/Personal issues, addressed the Committee on behalf of the Administration. He reassured the Committee that the Administration viewed the MIT Women's League activities as one of the reasons why MIT has "heart": that the women of the League have humanizing influence, spending their time on concern for others in the MIT community. Furthermore, that concern for helping other has become a hallmark also of the women professionals and all women of MIT who share those altruistic attitudes with the members of the MIT Women's League.

Mr. Simonides noted that from his long experience at MIT he had seen how the MIT Women's League had been a forum and example for those women in mid-years who have to wrestle with the debate of home vs career, of whether one can spend one's time meaningfully without being in an ~~acknowledged~~, paid, career position.

Committee members would agree that many in their volunteer capacities have had leadership and contact opportunities and perquisites at levels to which they might never have had access except as volunteers! Some volunteers have had noteworthy "professional" experiences that would make many career women envious. Furthermore, some volunteer activities are learning experiences, and "advancement" can be rapid for those who are competent, quick to learn, and willing to work. One goal of the MIT Women's League, he felt, can be to explain this and to reassure and educate those younger women facing the same home/career debate - that the decision for volunteerism is a worthwhile one and not a dead-end. The women of the League enjoy working together toward a useful goal, and they have found and invented many over the year. So useful have been some of the projects initiated by the League that they have been absorbed into the Institute's own obligations, e.g., the Housing Office and the Child Care Office. The Furniture Exchange, space for which is provided by the Institute, besides providing a service in buying and selling furniture for off-campus students (primarily), also yields a handsome profit of about \$5,000.00 a year for the Women's League to contribute to student scholarship aid. With the volunteer aid of the MIT Women's League (about 1600 woman-hours a year), the student-run Blood Drive is the largest in the northeast.

Mr. Simonides suggested that we consider focusing each year on a particular activity or department of the Institute. Hearing from each of them, new opportunities might become apparent to the League for their projects. This idea will be added to those already under consideration by the League.

The League explored with Mr. Simonides its felt need for representation on some MIT committees pertinent to some of its projects. While he does not have appointing power to all such committees, he recognized the value to all of adding League representation to the Information Committee of the Institute: this committee meets monthly, with wide representation about MIT matters. He reiterated

our independence of MIT mandates, and we recognized our interdependence in space and some fiscal matters.

Survey of Women's Organizations at other Colleges and Universities

A request for information about groups similar to the MIT Women's League was sent to a large number of schools. We had six detailed replies from the Harvard "Neighbors", Case Western University Women's Club, Yale University Women's Organization, Women's Association of McGill University, California Institute of Technology Women's Club, and Syracuse University Women's Club.

Money, Membership and Program

MITWL appears to be unique in not charging fees or dues. This was possible because of the "Moore Fund" which was established "for the purpose of helping with social activities or otherwise." Currently the Moore Fund produces an income of approximately \$1000 per year. Other women's groups have dues of \$5 to \$6 per year.

Because "membership list updating" occupies at least two-fifths of the MITWL Administrative Assistant's time, it is worthy considering other criteria for the membership list. "The membership of the MITWL is defined by who receives the Bulletin", as one of our committee stated. Perhaps it would be useful to charge a token amount or request a returned reply card in the September Bulletin if persons would like to receive additional Bulletins during the rest of the academic year. The September issue would be mailed to all members of the Faculty, Staff and Exempt personnel staff from a list to be supplied by Personnel, our Honoraries list, and the Corporation and Alumni Office. In this issue would be the calendar for the year and a list of Board Members, and the list of activities for the Interest Groups and Service Projects.

This suggestion is somewhat radical in that it affects our silent but interested membership who would not be receiving the Bulletin. Limiting the distribution of the Bulletin has the disadvantage of limiting our visibility.

The advantages may outweigh the public relations, however: (1) Cut back on time spent updating lists by Administrative Assistant who could spend more time on direct public relations (2) Cut back on costs of mailing the Bulletin from 3400 to possibly 500 subscribers.

Other school's newsletters were usually typewritten, which is another way of cutting the cost of the Bulletin. Cal Tech has a printed one but it appears they sell advertising space which may help cover their costs. Our production costs run about \$600-850 plus mailing costs. The Women's Forum newsletter costs about \$500 with interoffice mailing. We had 439 responses to our Annual Appeal and could expect at least that number in the future. The Appeal and the request for mailing costs for the Bulletin would need careful coordination. We recommend that a task force study the costs, distribution and format of the Bulletin.

Seminars are part of the program at most of the schools. Here is where the direction or goals for the year can be focused as suggested by Mr. Simonides when he addressed the Committee. More emphasis on the goals could be given within the MITWL's program. The seminars are usually educational in their subject matter.

Fundraising has benefits for the women's groups in creating cohesiveness in working together for a common cause. Most of the smaller schools have them. Bake and Craft Sales, Book Fairs, Flea Markets bring in money for scholarships. MITWL's Furniture Exchange is unusual in that it continues throughout the year and is a consistent fund-raiser of anywhere from \$5000 to \$7000 a year. This money is earmarked for scholarships. McGill does very well with their Book Fair (\$30,000 gross sales).

Social Activities that focus on newcomers are vital to all the groups. MITWL's wine and cheese reception at the President's House appears to be duplicated elsewhere by open houses, coffees, tours and teas, and even a picnic (only moderately successful) at Syracuse. All depend for success on the energy and organization of the newcomer committee.

All the groups scheduled monthly meetings from September through May (except for January) and all had some morning, some afternoon and some evening meetings. Ideas were widely varied: Faculty speakers on exotic subjects, educational and women oriented speakers, talent nights, political statement speakers, ethnic dinners. Few programs were on weekends. MITWL experience supports this, people are involved elsewhere on Saturdays and Sundays.

Although the need for socializing is greatest at the beginning of a person's first affiliation with MIT and diminishes as family activities in local communities increases, we were not alone in noting that retirees, widows and others past 50 or 60 return to the Institute for socialization. The Honoraries fill a needed place in the MITWL.

Interest Groups were a part of all the school's programs. Harvard has had cooking demonstration classes addressed to several different groups, for example, American, Japanese, French. Historic House tours and Antiques Lecture Series were there, too. Three other schools had "Gallery Goers", which we have had in the past and which seem especially beneficial for newcomers. All the other groups except MITWL have some form of book discussion groups. Yale has a group meeting to discuss or learn about problems of aging and another on personal financial management. These last two are under discussion for a workshop or seminar series under the auspices of the "Committee in Formation."

We have had individual requests for interest groups in antiques, gallery tours and folk dance. Such ideas should be promoted regularly in the Bulletin. We used to have a book club; perhaps it can be revived? A public relations person could help promote these interest groups.

Membership Consideration for the MITWL

One of the main reasons for creating "the Committee on the Future of The MIT Women's League" was to review the qualifications for membership. Should they

remain as stated in the By-laws of should they be changed to include all women within the MIT community by virtue of employment or marriage? Is the MITWL too restrictive in its membership definition? It was felt by those raising these concerns that our By-laws excluded a large group of MIT women who might wish to join with us in our social activities and service projects.

In our meetings with representatives of other women's organizations and with MIT personnel noone expressed a perceived need for the League to change its membership definition. Several persons expressed the importance of the warmth and humanizing influence the League has had in the community and the need to continue that role. Also mentioned was the unique position of the League to transmit the idea of volunteerism, service, and concern to a new generation of MIT women who will be more of a mixture of "wife", "professional woman", and "woman in transition" than ever before.

A consensus seemed to emerge that the best way to fulfill this unique role may not be to enlarge membership eligibility, but to open MITWL activities and functions, when feasible, to all women in the MIT community. The League does in fact offer a distinctive organization for those whom we have historically included in our membership. The organization by virtue of its present membership qualifications provides a framework within which it can function well as an MIT resource. Our service projects are changed periodically to respond to the needs on campus, needs that in most cases are not met by any other women's groups. There is concern that members at the time of a separation or divorce may need and want to continue as members. It is possible under present By-laws to include as members MIT women who have demonstrated in furthering the goals of MITWL.

The committee recommends that membership qualifications remain the same with the following amendments and changes that reflect some social changes that are occurring in today's world.

Article Membership

Section 1: Active members shall be the wives and women members of

(1) the academic, research, administrative and exempt staff of
The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, other than
students, and including Lincoln Laboratory.

(2) the Corporation of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Section 2: concerning Honorary Matrons remains the same.

Section 3: Representatives to the Women's Advisory Board should be
designated ex-officio members.

Section 4: A former member may continue her membership by request to
The MIT Women's League.

Section 5: Special members may be designated by The Executive Board
of The MIT Women's League.

Participation in the MITWL

Because the problem of diminishing participation in many League activities is one of the underlying reasons for undertaking this study, the Committee discussed many of the possible factors affecting this trend. Some of these are: The increase in the number of women pursuing careers for their own development and satisfaction; the lessening of interest in volunteer activities due to economic pressures; and the growth of new women's groups on campus.

Because of these and perhaps other reasons, attendance at the three major League functions over the past ten years has suffered a decline, while the number of women on the Bulletin mailing list (where the invitations appear) has not varied substantially. Honorary Matrons are included in these figures..

	<u>1971</u>	<u>1976</u>	<u>1981</u>
Tea	483	335	150
Annual Dinner	181	88 (1977)	95
Annual Meeting	130	66	70
Interest Groups			
Donations			

Many of the factors underlying the decline in participation are an important part of the changing American social scene, and must be seriously considered when planning for the future. They are, however, factors over which the League has no control. Another aspect of the problem, over which the League can exert some influence, is that of "image." In our discussions with representatives of other women's organizations and MIT administrative offices, it became apparent that most of these groups did not have a clear idea of what MITWL does, who belongs, who can participate, etc. The general impression of MITWL is that of a group of faculty wives involved in various activities and perhaps mostly social in nature.

In developing plans for the future we believe that our "image problem" is extremely important to address, not only in the effort to attract new participants in our activities, but also to attract new projects and opportunities which are appropriate to our membership and interests.

The Committee believes that the recommendation expressed earlier in this report to open many of the League activities to all women in the MIT community should be accompanied by a clear MITWL strategy for publicizing League goals, major programs, and activities. This strategy should include 1) clarification that the League's major commitment is that of "service to the Institute" 2) development of plans to reach out to the many women at the Institute who would benefit from participating in MITWL activities and who would contribute to the strength of the organization, and 3) the promotion of communication and interaction with other women's organizations on campus.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Create a new Board committee chairperson who would serve a broad public relations function and oversee all publicity and communications (including the Bulletin, Tech Talk, and other campus newsletters or publications).
2. Expand this amount of publicity for all ongoing programs and annual events

specifically noting who is invited, need for any volunteer effort, service aspects of event, etc.

3. Maintain exchange of program information with other women's groups via Bulletin, Women's Forum newsletter, etc. Explore ideas such as joint calendar calendar page in Tech Talk.
4. Develop framework for reaching out to discover and implement new ways to serve the Institute. (In the past the League was the innovator of many well established programs which are now operated by MIT, such as the Housing Office the Wives Group, the Language Exchange, and many others. Perhaps there should be a Recommendation Committee composed of past Chairmen of MITWL.
5. Coordinate efforts to ~~interest newcomers~~ with President's House activities.
6. Work with MIT Personnel Office to develop MITWL material for their Newcomer Packet, clarifying that most of MITWL programs are open to all MIT community.

POTENTIAL FUTURE AREAS OF EXPANSION FOR THE MIT WOMEN'S LEAGUE

A concern centers on expanding the service areas of the MITWL. The Seminars and Salons are ideally designed to broaden the knowledge and to increase the awareness of resources available to the entire community. There is an increasing need for us to interact with the Medical Department and the Health Services.

Workshops could be held on specific topics arising from similar interests, perhaps care of elderly parents; support groups for families dealing with severe illness; pre-retirement planning; post-retirement planning (second careers); leisure time and how to find it.

It will be necessary to experiment with a variety of time slots to accommodate community needs.

Visibility: It is important for the MITWL to make itself visible on all the committees and councils that deal with non-academic Institute-wide matters

Currently we have representation on:

- 1. Information Group ✓
- 2. Faculty Committee for Student Affairs (Observer) ✓
- 3. Medical Advisory Board ✓
- 4. Council on the Arts ✓
- 5. Community Services Fund ✓
- 6. Ad hoc Committee in Formation, chaired by Dr. Kahn of Medical Department ✓
- 7. TCC Board ✓
- 8. Compton Gallery (not yet represented)
- 9. Upward Bound
- 10. Wives Group

*Ad Hoc Committee on
 Women's Interests
 & Student
 Interests
 Women's Advisory
 Group
 Student
 Environment*

The League is now represented on all of the above except the Compton Gallery. It is very important for the MITWL Board to be kept informed and current about what goes on at the Institute.

The Bulletin should consider a change of format to provide more flexibility and reduce lead time. Perhaps it could even include a calendar of all women's activities at the beginning of each semester.

Tied to the issue of visibility is making our activities known to the MIT community. The activities include the Hosts to International Students, the Furniture Exchange, our assistance to the Bloodmobile, our plant sale and such activities as English Classes and sitter service.

Social Activities: It is important to maintain the socializing aspects of the MITWL through the use of various means: The Interest Groups (new ones can be developed as the need arises), teas, wine and cheese parties, holiday party. Some rethinking is in order in all of these activities with cost and attendance as high priority items. Some thought should be given to somehow joining the Honoraries and Emeriti in a single function once a year at least. (The spring dinner is always a success)

ful affair).

Coordinator of Volunteers: Many departments have expressed such a need, the Child Care Office, the Clinical Center (Nutrition), Benefits Office, Social Services. This is an area that has considerable importance for increasing and involving our membership. It should be explored carefully with the MIT administration.

It must be noted that we have been the innovators of programs that are now part of the established MIT policy. The Housing Office, The Wives Group, The Language Exchange, The Child Care Program and others are examples. It is likely that some of what we do in the next few years will be similarly absorbed.

It is necessary to respond to our constituency and that does seem to be shifting away some from the student body. According to Emily Weidman, we are doing a creditable job. Our position on the Committee for Student Affairs should give us a clearer picture of student attitudes and needs.