

AC 232

Should M.I.T. Have an Ombudsman?

1971

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## II. Should M. I. T. Have an Ombudsman?

It was interesting to observe that as we talked about the structure of the administrative wing, many critical questions were raised, and in almost every case some person would say, "But you don't realize that we already have such and such an arrangement to take care of that." The conclusion from this - and it occurred frequently - was that there is a gross lack of communication throughout M. I. T. It is our conjecture that this lack of communication is endemic to a university. A university, by its nature (and to its credit!) must be an amorphous entity to a large degree. The further it is from rigid lines of authority, the further it is from the military in its structure, the better it can fill its role as a forum, as a citadel of freedom. But it also follows that at times - many times - confusion results. Perhaps the diffuse lines of communication should not be as lightly accepted as is stated above. Perhaps there are ways to clear the lines.

CJAC raised the question of an ombudsman to help solve the problems with the idea that such an officer must not bring undesirable rigidity to the overall climate of M. I. T.

To summarize ahead of the discussion, it should be stated that a clear majority (all of the students) is in favor of having an ombudsman. Some members, probably four or five, have reservations, and no one on CJAC is absolutely opposed to the idea.

One important development in the American Universities has been the greatly increased involvement of the President with the members of the community. This is salutary but has greatly increased the load of the President. An ombudsman, being an emissary of the President, being an appointee of the President and having credibility with the entire community could greatly ease the load on the President.

In the past two years, many reports have been written about the American campus. We have by no means seen them all, but it is interesting that the Scranton Commission, the Carnegie Report on Unrest, the Linowitz Committee all recommended either that an ombudsman be appointed or that the idea be seriously considered.

CJAC became interested in the idea for more than one reason:

1. People at M. I. T. particularly students, don't know until their third year where to go with a question.
2. The overwhelming number of complaints are not large but become "hang-ups" if not treated quickly and thoughtfully.
3. In any grievance system, it is comforting for the aggrieved to know there is a neutral person to whom he can go.
4. Small grievances should not be handled as big deals. And if they are big, the ombudsman can see these problems to a more formal grievance structure e. g. the Judicial procedure.

In the following points we have attempted to portray the sense of CJAC. Only on a very few issues have votes been taken in CJAC meetings. We have generally acted on a consensus basis. The consensus of CJAC can be described on the question of an ombudsman in the following statements.

1. The idea of M. I. T. having an ombudsman has enough merit to warrant further and careful study because there is a deficiency in the communications and lesser grievance matters.
2. The ombudsman should be an appointee, an emissary of and a reporter to the President. Furthermore the role should not be created unless it is desired by and has the full support of the President.

3. Some basic changes in the area of improving communications are needed at M. I. T. These changes should be made and the creation of an ombudsman office should not be considered a cure-all.
4. An ombudsman through his activities might well bring into sharper focus where changes should be made.
5. The ombudsman must have a high level of credibility to the entire community.
6. The estimated cost of the office is twenty-five to forty thousand dollars. This is not a trivial amount and our conclusions were drawn with that realization.
7. The general consensus of CJAC is to look receptively on the possibility of having an ombudsman but we are not fully committed to the idea at this time.

Note: CJAC spent quite a lot of time on the ombudsman issue. We suggest the appendix containing the summary of our meetings, source material from Dartmouth and Stanford, be read. A lot of discussion was about Dartmouth. We recognize that M. I. T. is not Dartmouth but three members of CJAC spent time with the newly appointed ombudsman at Dartmouth so it gave us some first hand information. We consider Dean Snyder's and Professor Searles' opinions important also. (See meeting of 4/28/71, App. B).