

**INTERVIEW
WITH
JEFF MELDMAN
SLOAN ORAL HISTORY**

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No other recording or transcript of this interview has
been authorized as part of the Sloan Oral History materials)*

J: Jeff
B: Bob
G: George

G: It is November 21 and we are interviewing Jeff Meldman. Jeff, maybe you'd want to share your first knowledge of MIT and what brought you here originally and what your experience was through today.

J: I'm going to separate, where it's appropriate, MIT and the Sloan School because my first many years of experience with MIT had little relationship to the Sloan School. I first came to MIT as a freshman and went into the School of Engineering, in electrical engineering.

B: What year was that?

J: I came as a freshman in 1961. I was very interested in what I would call electrical science. I didn't know what engineering was at that time, but was interested in science.

G: What did you know about MIT?

J: Very little. I think I was attracted by its legendary reputation. To me it was about technology, which was my main interest, and has been throughout my life.

That's why I wanted to go to MIT. I should mention, however, that at the undergraduate level, MIT is very centralized, unlike the graduate level. It was even moreso then. At the undergraduate level, a large percentage of the curriculum were general education requirements that were the same for all MIT undergrads, and that were determined by the MIT faculty as a whole. That is still the case today. In contrast, for example, Wharton undergrads have their own general education requirements, determined by the Wharton faculty, not by the University of Pennsylvania.

I thought of myself, as most undergraduates did then, and do now, mainly as an MIT student, and not so much as an electrical engineering student, or a student in whatever major. I assume that was true for the Sloan undergraduates, too, but I do not think I knew any. During my undergraduate years here, I knew almost nothing about Sloan, which I would have called Course XV. The school name that I seem to remember is Industrial Management.

B: When the school was first established, what was it called?

G: It was the School of Industrial Management, but that was only about a year.

J: In any case, I did take one subject at Sloan, but it wasn't a management subject. I had been thinking of going to law school, and it there was an introductory law subject in Course XV that Stan Jacks taught. Stan was also MIT's pre-law advisor. The term I took the course, it was taught by Dan Nyhart. I later discovered that it was a very good introduction to law school. Very well organized and taught. I would be very much honored many years later, to be asked to take over the subject from Stan when he retired. In any case, I think that was my only contact with Sloan as an undergraduate.

Then I went to law school, where I became very interested in computers, initially because of their possible application to legal research. I became interested

enough to come back to MIT after law school and do my graduate work in computer science.

B: What year?

J: 1968. I graduated from MIT in 1965, and I graduated from law school in 1968.

G: Did you leave the area?

J: No. I was nearby, up the river, at Harvard. I came back to MIT to study computer science, and I was finishing up my doctoral dissertation when my Sloan story begins. With about a year of graduate study to go, I was putting up posters in one of the Sloan School buildings for an IAP activity I was teaching called “A Brief Introduction to Law.” I was in a corridor near Stu Madnick’s office. I had known Stu as a fellow grad student in Computer Science. Stu saw me putting up posters, and came out of his office to tell me that the Sloan School was hiring in MIS (today we call it “IT”), and to ask when I would be finished with my thesis. That led to my joining the faculty at Sloan.

B: Did you teach law or MIS?

J: I taught both. As a grad student in electrical engineering, I had started a seminar in computer law. I taught it jointly with Arthur Miller at Harvard Law. When I joined Sloan in the Management Science group, I continued teaching the computer law seminar while teaching other MIS subjects that need to be covered.

B: Your office was in near Stu Madnick’s?

J: Yes. Near the others in the MIS group, including Stu, Jack Rockart, and Michael Scott Morton.

B: You were teaching law, you mentioned Stan Jacks.

J: At first, I was teaching only MIS subjects, which included my computer law seminar. In 1979, Stan Jacks, who taught what was then MIT's main law course, retired. I was asked to take over that course, after which my teaching became about half law and half IT.

This was also how I became involved with the Sloan undergraduate program. It turned out that Stan had also been managing Sloan's SB program, and when he retired, I was asked if I would take that on, too, along with his law course. I was told I would have, as Stan had had, considerable help from Esther Merrill, the program's administrative assistant since 1957 (and until she retired in 1986). And so I ended up running the undergrad program, first as manager and committee chair, and then as director, for the next 32 years. Immediately prior to Stan, I believe the undergrad program was run by Jay Forrester and Ed Roberts. They can probably tell you about their predecessors. How does that fit with what you know?

B: Edwin Schell chaired Course XV for a long time. I do not know where his faculty appointment was.

J: It might have been economics. The economics faculty were the most involved in the early Course XV.

B: At that time, we had Doug McGregor, he had an appointment in Economics. Economics had a lot of social science. What was the nature of the undergraduates when you began as chair? You had 50 students at that time?

J: The degree was then an SB in management. It was kind of a junior MBA with four tracks, each with a faculty head. Jay had his own track in System Dynamics. Tom Allen led the track in Behavior Science. There was also a Management Science

track, which would eventually become the whole program. I'm not sure who headed that track at that time; it might have been John Little. And then there was a do-it-yourself track, which Jay Forrester and Ed Roberts headed. Students could put together their own curriculum if they could get three faculty members to sign off on it.

After I became the committee chair, I came to believe that we needed to change the structure. The management science track, with MIS as part of it, seemed well suited to MIT. I was afraid, however, that the other tracks were not demanding enough for MIT undergraduates. All MIT freshmen, then as now, are admitted according to the same criteria. As a result, all MIT freshmen are free to choose any major they wish from among all MIT schools and departments. Course XV had a reputation, more so than now, as the place to go if you couldn't handle engineering. That was not entirely unfounded. We had good students, too, but the distribution was strongly bimodal. I thought that one way to elevate the posture of the Sloan School would be to raise everyone to the level of the management science curriculum, make it more like other MIT undergraduate degree programs, and attract better students from the freshman class. I proposed doing so to the program committee, they agreed, and we designed a new undergraduate curriculum based on the management science track. The Sloan faculty as a whole thought it was a good idea as well.

B: You did this after how many years? You didn't do this in your first year?

J: No. I started in the second year...

B: I came in 1980, and I think it was started.

J: By about 1980 it had been approved by the Sloan deans and was en route to the MIT faculty. It had to go to the MIT faculty because we were proposing changing the name of the degree from "S.B. in Management" to "S.B. in Management Science." Abe Siegel and I presented the proposal at an MIT faculty meeting. I think Abe was

Acting Dean at the time. The MIT faculty approved the new program with little discussion. It was phased in over the next few years.

The new curriculum was academically more difficult program because of its rigorous management science requirements. That really did start to attract students. Enrollment doubled in a few years. Within the management science framework, we still had tracks. One new track was IT, which we added to help out the electrical engineering department because its own computer science track had become seriously overcrowded. Eventually our program enrollment peaked at 350 students over the three years, sophomore to senior. That occurred in 2002-03.

B: How did you divide your time between program management, advising and teaching?

J: I taught less. Especially because, at just about the same time, MIT's undergraduate dean's office offered me a part-time appointment as associate dean. They were trying to include a few MIT faculty from different departments within the central dean's office on a part-time basis. This concept had come from Constantine Simonides, the MIT Vice President to whom that dean's office reported. Howard Johnson had brought Constantine with him from the Sloan School to the MIT administration when Howard became MIT President. My duties as associate dean would involve work with student privacy and academic performance of minorities. I also proposed and implemented MIT's first Institute-wide orientation programs for new teaching assistants and for new faculty. Working part-time in MIT's undergraduate dean's office (now the Office of the Dean for Undergraduate Education) gave me a wonderful opportunity to learn about, and to try to improve, the impression that the rest of MIT had about the Sloan School. I became a kind of ambassador, at least at the undergraduate level. Sloan has made lots of graduate connections to the rest of MIT, but we haven't made many undergraduate connections. I thought I might be able to help with that.

B: Now, you are retired?

J: This is my third year at less than 50%. I'm down to teaching one course a year, in intellectual property law. I gave up my central dean's appointment in 2009, and I retired from the Sloan undergrad program in 2011.

B: Who is heading up the undergraduate program?

J: The current committee chair is Michelle Hanlon. Sloan now has an "Office of Undergraduate Education," and its director is Scott Alessandro. Stephanie Karkut and Mary Camerlengo are the assistant directors. In 1997 or 1998 the roles of committee chair and program manager were separated, John Little became committee chair at that time, and I became program director. Steve Graves has also served as committee chair, between John and Michelle.

I should also mention the two undergraduate minors that we launched in recent years. These are programs of six subjects that Sloan offers to undergrads in other MIT majors. John Little and I had pushed for such programs for a long time. There seemed to be a lot of student demand, although there turned out to be less than our surveys suggested. We began with a minor in management in 2005 and added a minor in management science in 2008.

B: The other subject is the work in finance to engineers, and financial engineering. Has there been any discussion about that as another minor?

J: There has been some discussion, but I don't know where this has gone recently because I am not as in touch any more. Originally, we expected a lot of MIT seniors from other departments to apply to Sloan's new SM program in finance, but the program gets very few applicants from MIT. One possible explanation is the additional

cost. MIT seniors graduate with considerable debt. On the other hand, finance is the most popular concentration within the management science curriculum

B: With the new building, do the undergraduates have a room or a place?

J: There is an Undergraduate Lounge on the first floor. Of course, for the next year or two, all of the program offices are in temporary offices, along with educational services in the Kendall Square building.

B: Great, this has been good. Thanks very much.