The Student Information Processing Board (SIPB)

- **Who are we?**

  The Student Information Processing Board (SIPB, pronounced sip-bee) is MIT's volunteer student group dedicated to computing. We have an office just outside the Athena cluster in the MIT Student Center, and you are welcome to come to the office to ask us for help or to hang around and use our computers.

- **Why should you join?**

  The best reason to join SIPB is that you are interested in learning about and helping people with computers. All that's really necessary to join is an interest in computers. Amongst our members are some of the most competent and influential programmers in the world, and while we try to help any MIT student, we help each other with technical issues even more. You'd be amazed at how much you can learn just sitting in the office and listening to the conversations around you.

  The SIPB office is also a great place to hack. It's a lot more fun than hacking alone in your dorm room. And no one here will ever tell you that your conversation is too geeky. Plus, we have a print server to play your mp3's on.

- **What do we do?**

  We make it easier for you to use computers at MIT. That may sound kind of boring, but it's actually a lot of fun, as well as being tremendously important. SIPB picks up where the official MIT computing infrastructure leaves off.

  Most of the time, we just hang out in the office, doing our own thing and helping people who stop by or call us with questions. We also:

  - Teach classes over IAP about programming and other computer topics.
  - Make it easier for students to access Athena by helping them install Linux-Athena on personal machines.
  - Provide software IS&T doesn't support – several AIM clients (such as gaim), the Ogg-Vorbis music system, several programming languages, the vim editor, the Mutt e-mail program, etc.
  - Maintain the MIT usenet server, news.mit.edu.
  - Maintain an AFS cell (AFS is the network filesystem that MIT uses) to provide space for software and other projects.
  - Write documentation to help people learn Unix, Athena, LaTeX, Matlab, etc.
  - Develop and improve software (some of our members have been integral to the Linux, NetBSD and GNOME development communities).

  We're always looking for more people who want to help improve computing at MIT or elsewhere!

- **How do you join?**

  We have a two-tier membership system due to the fact that we have privileged access to a huge array of hardware and some socially important MIT network services. Anyone can become a "prospective member" meaning you have access to SIPB's resources. After you have been around a while, and there's a perception that what you're doing is useful to SIPB, then you can become a "member", which means you get your own key to the office and full administrative access to most of our machines.

  Official meetings are Monday at 7:30 p.m. in the office. You must attend four meetings before you can become a member. Before and after a meeting there are usually more members and prospectives around than at other times, but you can hang around the office any time it's open, and it's often more fun at other times.

- **How can you reach us?**

  The SIPB office is W20-557, on the fifth floor of the Student Center. Feel free to drop by and ask about joining. The office doesn't have set hours, but it is usually open. You can also reach us by calling 617-253-7788 or sending mail to sipb@mit.edu.

Thinking of Buying a Computer to Bring to MIT?

Lots of people buy a computer to bring to MIT with them. You may want to wait until you get here to buy a computer. This can be more convenient since many manufacturers deliver, and you probably won't be in your fall dorm room for at least a week anyway. Furthermore, it gives you a chance to figure out exactly what you want. For example, most dorms have public printers, and you can print to the many Athena clusters scattered around campus from your personal computer, so you probably do not need to buy a printer. (You also won't have to put up with buying your own paper and ink/toner and fixing a printer when it breaks.) In any case, MIT Information Services and Technology (IS&T) will send you a mailing this summer with their recommended systems.

Many students decide to run Linux-Athena on their computer, giving all the advantages of an Athena workstation (like access to your home directory from any Athena machine anywhere on campus, printer access, and lots of software like Matlab, Mathematica, ProEngineer, Acrobat reader, and a PDF writer) right in your room. You should check the list of recommended systems from IS&T to see if Linux-Athena runs on it if you are interested in this. Many students also choose to use non-Athena Linux distributions, in addition (of course) to Microsoft Windows and MacOS. You can email us at sipb@mit.edu if you have questions about this or anything else. If you're buying a laptop, remember that the models that IS&T recommends (see their mailing) all support Linux.