Wadleigh Tells Of His Undergraduate Years At Tech

By Richard S. Russell

Twenty years ago, the president of the MIT Athletic Association was a tall, bespectacled senior named Kenneth R. Wadleigh.

Wadleigh entered MIT in 1939. As a graduate of an accredited high school, he circumvented SAT and CEBT tests. He graduated four years later with a BS and MS in Mechanical Engineering. He returned to MIT in 1946, became a part-time instructor, and filed the work so well he was retained. He received his doctorate in 1953 and became Dean of Student Affairs in 1961.

From the start, Wadleigh had an interest in athletics. In his freshman year he joined crew and the squash team and became manager of the track team. From the latter position, he worried his way up the ladder until his election as AA President; in addition, he was on the staff of Technique. Twenty Years' Difference.

During his tenure, the undergraduate body was about the same size as presently, although the graduate school had a much larger home enrollment. Most of the students were "vacuum-tube" engineers who lived in the Boston area. Wadleigh himself lived in the Student House, where room and board came about nine dollars a week.

The actual physical plant was somewhat smaller; most of West Campus was nonexistent; the gymnasium had been housed in a World War I airplane hangar; and, plans for a student union were still just plans.

The students were different; too. Most had been through the hardships of the Great Depression and were then witnessing World War II; there was more worry about the practical aspect of finding a living.

A much greater proportion of the faculty then had only bachelor's degrees. Nevertheless, Dean Wadleigh emphasized the faculty's need to prepare his students for the world of work.

Selection of subjects was extremely limited. All freshmen took the six required subjects including compulsory Aryan. No advanced standing or advanced placement was given. So inclusive was the schedule that Wadleigh's first MIT elective did not come until his senior year.

*On Instruction.*

Instruction was more impersonal in those days. The main concern was producing a person capable of applying himself and his ability to handle the country's war effort. "The prevailing attitude," Wadleigh said, "was that if you couldn't climb the Great Wall, you were out in the street."

The social life of the early forties was rather smaller, but big name bands were invited for campus functions. Formal dancing was more popular than ever. Co-eds were fewer in number and proportion; automobiles, too, were rare.

*Harvard vs. MIT.*

During Wadleigh's junior year, some Technicians interrupted a nationally-known entertainer on his way to an engagement with the Harvard Freshman Society. Telling him they were going to Harvard, the students conveyed him to "a certain frequency which must remain unnamed . . . Memorial Drive."

.*Wadleigh entered MIT.*

When the party there began to get dull, someone called Harvard to volunteer the whereabouts of their guest. Harvard marched on MIT to retrieve the confused entertainer. Harvard had direct concern for their guest. Harvard marched on MIT to retrieve the confused entertainer. Harvard had direct concern for their guest.

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However, the student body was generally serious and not prone to staging frequent pranks. In fact, although they were aghast when tuition was raised from $200 to $300, the undergraduates refrained from demonstrations.

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