Hansen, teaching, and tenure

Every year at least one extremely effective teacher leaves the Institute when his contract is not renewed. This year it is Professor Eric Hansen, as well as others who are not quite so well known among the student body. Whenever this happens, it is appropriate to consider the priorities of the Institute's academic departments.

We do not suggest that the political science department made its decision without considering Hansen's professional qualifications. However, it is clear that he will probably be in a better position at Haverford than he has been here. There is no point in trying to "save" Eric Hansen, simply because he doesn't want to be saved.

Rather, we should look to the Institute's departmental attitudes toward teaching and selection of faculty. We were not present when the decision was made not to retain Hansen and other young professors with similar outlooks, so we have only the word of the senior faculty concerning the priorities of the political science department. However, the record suggests what some of those priorities might be.

One prerequisite for tenure seems to be intimate connections in Washington. Another seems to be an interest in a quantitative approach to policy problems rather than the historical/philosophical approach that is the hallmark of a political science department which has led at least one young professor who has clearly demonstrated his competence in research to conclude that the department is not as concerned about undergraduate teaching as it should be. None of these facts suggest that interest and ability in undergraduate teaching are prime criteria for selection or retention of faculty members.

On the other hand, a departmental committee has been established to evaluate the undergraduate program, and a spot check of several political science undergraduates indicate that they enjoy the emphasis on current problems. In addition, at least one recently hired professor received praise for his teaching.

This confusion concerning the priorities of the political science department (or any other department) is amplified by the fact that there is virtually no large-scale, organized feedback on teaching ability in any department which has a significant effect on faculty hiring policies. A series of interviews we did some time back with chairmen of major departments revealed that while teaching theoretically is a major component on tenure decisions, the mechanisms by which it is judged are informal and haphazard. A few conversations between senior faculty and random students they happen to know or a poor excuse for an organized effort to determine how well junior faculty reach the majority of their students. In contrast, it is easy to judge a man's research; it is published and subject to thorough examination in the journals of his field.

In the past, there have been great debates concerning the need to reform procedures around the Institute and increase opportunities for creative work. It is unfortunate when students do not take advantage of programs designed to correct these problems.

Many people were distressed last year at the seemingly haphazard way in which the Compton Awards, MIT's highest award for contribution to extracurricular activities, were given. Many felt that the decisions of other reward committees, a factor in determining who should receive these high honors, which were not the case last year. This year, to correct this problem, the Faculty Committee on Student Environment has actually received nominations from students. How many have they received?

One. Students who know of someone who has made major contributions in important things around MIT that are worthy of recognition should direct their comments to Professor Alan Toomey, 3-272, X636.

There have also been complaints about the lack of opportunity to do unusual and creative projects at the Institute. This year, the Peter J. Elsberry Summer Research Fellowships were established. These fellowships are intended to finance large-scale, unorthodox, creative summits for MIT undergraduates. One of you has expressed similar interest doing a special project (if only you had the time and money) may have that chance this summer. Leonard Gallagher, Associate Director of Student Aid, 5-119, is responsible for making specific suggestions for people wishing to do something special with their summers and could benefit from an Elsberry Fellowship.

In your opinion, when it comes to promotion, what are the relative weights put upon teaching and research? by the administration of your department at MIT?

Teaching strongly outweighs research

Research strongly outweighs teaching

Both about equal

Research slightly outweighs teaching

Both strongly outweigh

In your opinion, what should be the relative weights put upon these promotion criteria?

Teaching strongly outweighs research

Research strongly outweighs teaching

Both about equal

Research slightly outweighs teaching

Both strongly outweigh

Admittedly these data were collected a few years ago, but to be honest we do not consider this data on this problem on this data. In addition, it should be noted that the turnover in the ranks of the faculty is far slower than among students; the faculty today consists mostly of individuals who replied to these questions.

The problem of undergraduate teaching is very similar to that of the advisory system in fact faculty merely indicate his time in a manner which he feels will promote his professional advancement. If he believes that teaching (or research) is not consistent with his advancement, the decision by department when decisions on promotion are made, will he allocates his time accordingly.

Research will always be important at an institution like MIT. However, we concur with the faculty that an adjustment of priorities is in order. The student body can demand no less.

Complaints, etc.

Whatever happened to Vietnam? The point has been made, though research by the administration of your department of the NLF's failure to back down. This would, of course, be a repetition of the mistake Lyndon Johnson made, and it would no doubt be costly in political terms. However, if a group of state department officials toured campuses last fall, they certainly could not have reported on large demonstrations against Vietnam. The reception which McGeorge Bundy received was much more friendly to back down. This would, of course, be a repetition of the mistake Lyndon Johnson made, and it would no doubt be costly in political terms. However, if a group of state department officials toured campuses last fall, they certainly could not have reported on large demonstrations against Vietnam. The reception which McGeorge Bundy received was much more friendly.

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