Educational Reform I

MIT seems headed for a rather quiet fall. Last year's issues - disciplinary processes, war research, ROTC, coed housing - are unlikely to provoke a new storm of argument.

Perhaps the community could benefit from this tranquility by developing in a new area - educational reform. For too long student and faculty leaders have ignored this crucial issue: no major action has been taken since Mike Albert's Ad Hoc Committee For Change introduced their no-grades, no-requirements proposals during the 1968-69 school year. In fact, February, 1969, marked the last faculty vote on a reform issue: the faculty rejected a (radical?) CEP proposal to eliminate chemistry from the list of Institute requirements.

Is MIT's educational plan so sound that so minor a detail as the chemistry requirement cannot be changed? Are the current mechanisms of required courses, grades, and degrees relevant to the needs of today's students? We think not. The justification for requiring certain subjects, for example, is threefold: 1) the "well-rounded education" goal is boosted, 2) the student is prevented from going astray, and 3) the degree's "worth" is securely established. Of course, requiring at least a passing grade in several specific courses does not insure that the student will emerge well-rounded; it does insure that many students will take courses they find irrelevant to their own goals. As for point two, it may be that the student knows what he is being taught - what he needs from the faculty is suggestions, not a rigid routine. Finally, a degree, under any current definition, has little inherent value. The sheepskin is only a passing grade in a pass-fail system; it communicates next to nothing.

Moving on to grades themselves, for too long they have been misused. Grades should provide a means for the student and teacher to evaluate development. The student can measure his competency with the material, while the professor can determine whether the well-defined point goals set forth to his class. But to submit these grades to an outsider's judgment begs for a misinterpretation. Only the student and his teacher should be able to determine how well certain points are getting through to his class. But to submit these grades to an outsider's judgment begs for a misinterpretation. Only the student and his teacher should be able to determine how well certain points are getting through to his class.

As for the degree, the point made earlier is the most important. Since it conveys no specific information, the degree is useless - it's existence only justifies many of the faults noted above.

It would be foolish, though, to sweep away the old structure without providing a new one. The Tech suggests a totally different concept: a student written summary of what was accomplished. The student may submit on special projects, would constitute the degree. The beauty of this system is its utility and flexibility. The report would offer, not some vague premise of four years spent at a prestigious school, but a detailed account and analysis of what the student has learned. And flexibility? Students that desire a grade, for example, need only request that their professor include one part of his analysis. And there would be no worry about whether to give "credit" for activity done outside MIT - the student could prepare a summary of his efforts for insertion, perhaps analyzed as well by an interested faculty member.

And how may students work toward these goals? The most important tactic is personal contact with faculty members. Speak with your professors - large or small - about grading options available. It is the faculty, not the administration, that will ultimately vote on any reform program. As for concerned faculty, they are the ones with the power to encourage formal consideration of these and other new ideas. We ask them to lead their colleagues into a discussion of MIT's evaluation structure as a possible replacement for it.

Finally, The Tech does not seek to upstage the MIT Commission. We introduce these ideas for fear that the Commission report will be cast in the familiar framework of further refinement on the present evaluation structure while neglecting to consider the broader issues of its essential worth. By presenting our thoughts now, we hope to spark a debate on this essential facet of educational reform.

Educational Reform II

When the MIT Commission report is released in November, it will undoubtedly cover a wide range of issues. But there is one minor point that will probably be ignored, as all other committees and students have ignored it in the past: the sheepskin.

We speak of that epitome of classical educational rigidity, the object of hatred for hundreds of years. The sheepskin is both a mark of a well-earned grade and a guarantee of flexibility. The report would offer, not some vague premise of four years spent at a prestigious school, but a detailed account and analysis of what the student has learned. And flexibility? Students that desire a grade, for example, need only request that their professor include one part of his analysis. And there would be no worry about whether to give "credit" for activity done outside MIT - the student could prepare a summary of his efforts for insertion, perhaps analyzed as well by an interested faculty member.

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Correction

The reference to Sigma Nu Vis-Vis Brookline in the Tuesday issue of The Tech was incorrect. No such fraternity exists. The衲de? If I?ed, discount the city are the only and final results will have not been for zero. Written.

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