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The Tech

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NOTES

* Beginning Tuesday, *Notes* will appear on page two.

* The MIT Musical Theatre Guild announces that its scheduled production of *A Funny Thing Happened On The Way to the Forum* has been cancelled because another Cambridge group was accidentally permitted to produce the same show on the same dates. The Guild would also like to announce that they have been permitted to produce the first post-tryout performances of the smash hit musical *Company*, winner of the Tony and Drama Critics' Circle Awards. Auditions for the George Furth-Stephen Sondheim musical will be held next week.

* Application may be made to the Activities Development Board to obtain funds for capital expenditures and for minor space renovation. Recognized MIT community activities are eligible. Application forms may be obtained in room 7-101. Applications must be submitted by Thursday, March 9.

* All freshmen and sophomores interested in studying abroad during their junior year should explore the idea promptly. Long-term planning is important. Contact Dean Hazen, foreign study advisor, room 10-103, x5243.

* Dr. Marion Mann of Howard University Medical School will meet with premedical students on Tuesday, March 7 at noon in 16-139.

* Foreign students in the MIT community are invited to apply for an experimental course in English for Foreign Students being offered at MIT. There will be two meetings weekly and the first meeting will be Tuesday, March 7, at 7 pm in the International Student Lounge 50-210. Application forms may be obtained and filed at the Foreign Student Office, 3-111, or completed the first meeting of the course.

Pass/Fail: plausible options

By Lee Giguere

Two and a half weeks ago, *The Tech* aired the issue of the effect of hidden grades on freshman pass/fail; the faculty, however, failed to reach the question before the end of their meeting — discussion of Pass/Fail was deferred to this month's meeting. In another two weeks, pass/fail will again come up before the faculty — what are some of the alternatives open to them?

While neither the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) nor the Committee on Evaluation of Freshman Performance (CEFP) are likely to recommend it, but the faculty could choose to avoid the issue by eliminating pass/fail altogether. This is unlikely.

Assuming that freshman pass/fail will be continued, and it is very likely that it will, what are the most plausible options for dealing with the medical schools?

The faculty could choose to continue pass/fail while at the same time setting up a mechanism for keeping "hidden grades" in certain core subjects in chemistry and biology, and perhaps also in physics and mathematics. (This was one of the options enumerated by Professor of Economics and Political Science Everett Hagen, chairman of the CEFP, in his discussion of the issue in *The Tech*, February 15.) "Instructors or departmental offices," he explained, "might keep either grades or the basis for assigning grades or evaluations that are close equivalents..." This information, however, would only be available for

students to send to medical schools; no other use, Hagen proposed, should be made of it.

Such a measure would be tantamount to a return to grades; any freshman who was even considering applying to a medical school would be robbed of the freedom pass/fail is meant to offer. The system, it seems, would be so diluted as to be meaningless. Sentiment outside of these core courses (and especially in the Humanities Department, where there is feeling that students will be very poorly motivated to do course work if they feel that their humanities subjects are the only ones in which they won't be graded) would seem to run against this option.

A slight variation on this option would be to leave it up to students to obtain a grade or evaluation from their instructors on an individual basis. The only advantage to this is that it eliminates the general collection of "hidden grades" by an instructor or department and limits their use only to those students who specifically request them. It does little, however, to preserve the integrity of pass/fail.

As part of its proposals, the CEFP stated: "It is the responsibility of each instructor to provide each freshman student with meaningful evaluation of his or her work..." Embedded in this, it seems, is another alternate solution to the problem of medical school admission requirements. It has been suggested that "meaningful evaluations" might be an acceptable substitute for grades in

medical school applications.

Clearly, one of the goals of pass/fail has been to improve rather than eliminate teacher-student evaluations; if the present evaluation forms, distributed to freshmen twice each term, were carefully utilized they might form the basis of an evaluation system that would be acceptable to medical school admission committees, and compatible with the spirit of pass/fail. (The question of the usefulness is double-edged: not only must students and faculty put more into the evaluations, but the medical schools must have to spend more time considering such applications.)

Finally, MIT could simply refuse to give any sort of grades at all in a freshman subject. Pass/fail would be kept intact, and the goals of MIT's educational program would not be broken to meet the demands of the medical schools. In conjunction with this, MIT could advise incoming freshmen that a student who might apply to a medical school should postpone chemistry and biology subjects until after their freshman year. (In most cases, this would not interfere with a student's program. According to Hagen, this was the solution that most members of the CEFP favored.)

At this point, several faculty committees are considering the issue and the Preprofessional Advising Committee is collecting data on medical school admission requirements. The final decision among the available options will certainly have to wait until more information about what the medical schools want is available. However, it is possible to discuss some of the values against which these alternatives will be measured.

There appears to be some sentiment both among CEFP members and the faculty and student body in general (see the letter from Marvin Sirbu G and Lar Storch '71 in *The Tech*, February 25) to take a "hard stand" and refuse to "give in" to the medical schools. As Sirbu and Storch put it: "By what right does Johns Hopkins ask us to subvert our education system by demanding grades?"

While this somewhat philosophical consideration is worth considering, what seems to be a much more important question, and one with a more personal impact, is "Which alternative will produce the greatest good?" In other words, should MIT decide to return to grades in the freshman year or to allow hidden grades, some freshmen might feel harmed. The question is whether this would be more or less than the injury that would be done to possible medical school applicants if the absolute integrity of freshman pass/fail is maintained. Should MIT decide to maintain pass/fail and refuse grades in freshman subjects, some students might be barred from attending medical schools. There is certainly serious doubt whether MIT has the right to deny this possibility to its students. (Of course this objection might be meaningless until more information is available from the medical schools, it will be impossible to decide.) Opposed to this, however, the question of whether the entire freshman population, which is believed to benefit from pass/fail, should be sacrificed for these few.

One thing is certain, however, whatever is decided, the rules of the game should be made explicit. Over the last four years, many freshmen have been unaware of the possibility that grades could be obtained for any of the subjects. To the extent that it has failed to make them aware of the rules of the game in the past, MIT has lied to students. In the future, care should be taken to explain to all incoming freshmen the rules of pass/fail, whatever they may finally be.

by Brent Parker and Johnny Hart

Letters to The Tech

To the editor:

In the face of another good, but simplistic, review of an excellent, but unhistorical film (namely *Cabaret* and its review in the Feb. 29th *Tech*), I must respond. Two points of criticism:

1. It seems to be the tendency of Americans, especially intellectuals, to put down people of another time or another place. Our one-sided, myopic view of Southerners as stupid or violent or racist is just one example. More to the point, the view of Germany of the '30's as a place of mere decadence and refusal to cope with the deteriorating political condition is that taken by the film, by the reviewer (P.E. Schindler, Jr.) and by most other *Cabaret* reviews.

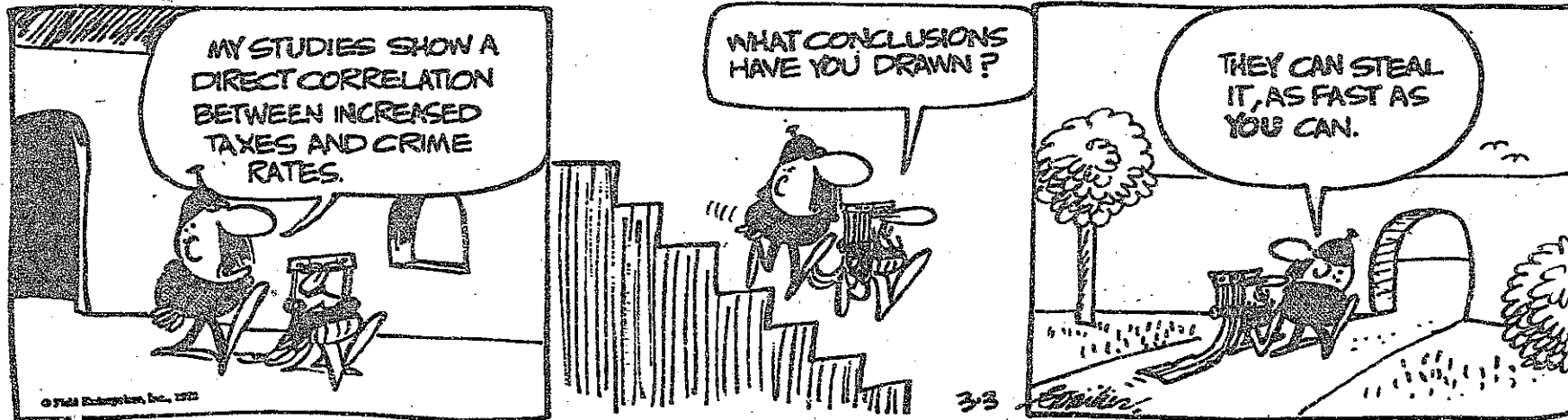
It is simply untrue to characterize most Germans then as stupid or escapist or psychopathic or their cabarets as filled only by the old, fat, unsophisticated and rich. We'd like to think that. But the people going to cabarets then were much the same types that are going to movies today: and many of these people are really confused by the political events surrounding them and by the moral consequences of these events.

This ambiguity is not appreciated by the film *Cabaret*. However, its sources — the Isherwood *Berlin Stories* and, yes, even the Broadway musical — do delve into the feelings of the people of that time, their confusion, and their natural desire to escape Nazi carnage (even though they realized that this was ultimately impossible).

I hope that future historians and films will be more appreciative of the moral dilemma that Americans must face today, as we bloodily butcher just as many as the Nazis, than we are towards the Berliners of the '30's.

2. The reviewer claims that Sally Bowles loved the theatre more than her lover Brian and therefore would not marry him. I think a more realistic (less romanticized) interpretation of this very dramatic moment in the film is that Sally finally admits to herself that she had very

THE WIZARD OF ID



The Wizard of Id appears daily and Sunday in *The Boston Herald Traveler*.