This year, he explained, there will be 40,000 applicants for 14,000 openings in medical schools. Since most applicants contact a number of schools, often as many as ten or fifteen, this means that "close to half a billion" applications are usually filed with the nation's 140 medical schools.

Only statistics?

Asked about reports that many MIT students get into only one medical school, Gould admitted that there is a problem. But he pointed out that it was one of several problems. To underline the point, he explained, that statistics simply show that he was admitted to only one school, however. Gould also said there are "students who really get into only one school." There are "many factors" and "no uniformity" in the admission processes, he said.

And while some people get into only one school, there are certain people who are accepted to a number of schools. The only explanation is that there is "something about them" which has attracted them to medical schools.

Although "a lot of those over 40,000 do not have a chance" of being admitted to medical school, Gould said, a "terrific number" are academically qualified. In fact, he asserted that currently, medical school applicants are better qualified than "the quality is terrific."

From private conversations with medical school admissions officers, Gould said, he has learned that "a lot of times they tell students don't any make any differences," are guidelines in the screening process. While some schools "probably look at all applications," from certain schools, Gould explained that an initial screening is carried out by clinical workers. "I know how the grade-point cut-offs," Gould stated. In some instances, he added, scores from the MCATs (Medical College Admissions Test) may be all that are examined. "Whatever figures are available are looked at," Gould explained.

The more, the better?

"There isn't any question but that the more data you have, the more confident you are of the chance you have," Gould continued. For those applicants who have less data, "subjective factors play a greater role.." In reference to Pass-Fail, he noted, "The absence of those grades doesn't necessarily damage a guy, particularly if he's taken advanced subjects." At MIT, he noted, most people take a lot of biology; it's in mathematics, physics and chemistry, fields in which pre-med requirements can be, and often are, completed in the freshman year, in which difficulties arise.

Commenting on suggestions that students be encouraged to defer their pre-med requirements until their second year, Gould rejected such proposals, saying "We're trying to give an education," MIT's strength, he said, "is that it gives a real solid preparation for medicine." Gould underscored the importance of a scientific background, explaining that over the years since he was an undergraduate, the emphasis had shifted from humanities to science in pre-med requirements.

An advantage of Pass-Fail, Gould suggested, is that it allows students who had "almost all A's" but "had a shock in coming here" to "forget about their first year grades. He also noted that as far as he knew, pass-fail grades do not enter into the calculation of a student's sum for screening purposes. "Most medical schools don't convert N's to grades," he said.

"I think there's a personal feeling about this medical school business all over the country," Gould said. "It's too bad."

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