To the Editor:

I don't write letters to the editor very often, but it seemed to me that the April 6 Tech article by Richard Parker and David Olive on the Political Science Department required a personal rejoinder. The article as it stands is right in its identification of a past tendency on our part to emphasize graduate training at the expense of undergraduate teaching. But read overall, it misleads the undergraduate reader about what is now going on within the Department. We are very far from having solved all the problems involving our relationships with MIT undergraduates, but a little more work on the authors' part might have turned up two propositions undergraduates might find interesting. First, most of us are keenly aware of the problems discussed. Second, we are taking very concrete steps to deal with them.

There is no more suitable place to focus this than in the American-politics field itself. Thanks very much, fellas, for pointing this out.

Lee M. Brown
Professor

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In pointing out all this relevant information, I would again want to reiterate that it is by no means eliminates all the problems discussed by the article. Until very recently, our American offerings were not in fact well developed or coordinated. What is sketched out above should thus be seen as a beginning, not as an end. It will also continue to be necessary for us to monitor what we do when presenting material to undergraduates. Our standards are and should continue to be high; but undergraduates are not necessarily journeyman professionals in political science. It is also obvious — and nowhere more obvious than in the American field — that the problems we deal with are of urgent substantive importance. A narrow "technological" or over-specialist approach to these problems simply will not do. Nor would I deny that some students and may serve to direct attention away from more basic issues.

Consequently, it would be perfectly reasonable for the CEP not to endorse the P/F Committee proposal regarding a limit and instead to rejoin those faculty who are concerned about the engagement of their students to examine their own teaching practices. At the same time it would be appropriate for the CEP to undertake a thorough review of teaching and credit-granting practices, with emphasis on understanding why some faculty manage to engage their students so well. I urge you to adopt this view.

On Pass/Fail

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Walter Dean Burnham
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