Santa Claus is coming to town

It’s almost Christmas, judging from the toy commercials still echoing in my ears — even as the turkey settles in my stomach.

As I sat mesmerized before my television at home, watching Peter Panda rollerblade through the bicycle section of a toy castle no less than 30 times in a single hour, I began to wonder in my mind whether Santa Claus would be getting any Christmas lists from Cambridge. I was so sure he would that I rifled a few mailboxes when I returned and am pleased to report that I found. Maybe Claus Jr. will get to read this while waiting for an admissions interview you just about need a computer science degree to be a toy manufacturer these days:

Dear Santa:

Have you got anything in the way of a non-denominational Christmas — er, holiday — tree? I mean, really, I just about had it with their kids.

Great,
Robert Holden, Assoc. DSA

Dear Santa:

I’ve got an offer for you. Would you believe a hand-held game of human torture called “The Third Inquisition”? I built it for my 6.111 lab. There’s a miniature video screen with a naked human figure on it. The object is, by means of special screws, turning screws and adjusting voltages, to simulate mind-snapping torture. If you can break the computer’s will in less than 10 minutes it plays “Happy Days Are Here Again.”

Well I think, Dad! Write me back quick. I’ve got an offer from HP already.

Joe Gluckman, VI ’84

Dear Santa:


Peter Richelson
Director of Admissions

Dear Santa:

Ditto.
Robert Sherwood
Assoc. DSA, Residence

Dear Santa:

I’ve never asked for anything from you before. Well, there was that quarter of a billion dollars in 1975, but that really wasn’t that hard, was it? Well, I’m really strapped right now. So I’ve got this list. Could you see what you can do?

A little shock to keep the damn physicists happy.

A vow of silence from Harvard — just for six months.

No new lawsuits. No new companies. Nothing.

No more MIT jokes on television or in the movies. Let’s make fun of Caltech as the eggheads for a while.

Paul E. Gray
Traveling speaker supreme

Dear Santa:

Do you think somebody could make it unequivocally clear, once and for all, without a doubt, and to all concerned, just exactly, explicitly where we’re supposed to be doing?

Amita Waltom, Emily Weidman
F. Corbato

Santa:

The world’s waiting for them to conquer the energy crisis, decaying cities and nuclear proliferation. They’ve got difficulties facing them with genetic engineering, defense research, and a takeover by the oil companies. They’ve got to deal with increasing costs, government regulation and public distrust.

So haven’t those guys in Cambridge got anything better to worry about than the name of a damn castle?

Can you talk some sense into them, Santa? I mean, just where are their priorities?

Sincerely,

Metropolitan District Commission

The Tech's editor in chief wrote a column recently saying he would not want to send his kids to MIT. Since then I have noticed an interesting trend. A Tech alumna who was in the same class as Paul Gray recently told me that he won’t recommend MIT to his college-bound son. Another alumna long ago suggested that I should not go to the Tute as an undergraduate, but rather maybe as a graduate student. My father even recommended that I should choose a school other than the Institute. In fact, I can’t remember anyone ever recommending MIT to me for undergraduate studies.

MIT was never my first choice for college. I only applied out of curiosity to see if I would be accepted. I fully believed what everyone told me about the Institute; graduate student oriented, narrow focus in classes and in students, few women, many weirdos, no social life, and endless, hard work. It was a blow both to my father and myself when I chose MIT after my first choice school turned me down. We both pictured me becoming a social misfit, never having any fun outside of my coursework (if then), losing all interest in the “real world” and “real people.” I found out when I got here that many of my classmates had similar worries about themselves.

Happily, the horror stories didn’t become reality. Oh sure, MIT is not geared for a typical undergraduate education or a normal social life (whatever that is) and tends to become a sort of ivory tower. My guest after talking to people at other schools is that science and engineering departments at most colleges have similar problems. As with everything else at MIT, if a student wants a broader educational base, a more normal social life or a closer connection with current events, that student is going to have to want it and to work for it, often quite hard.

The environment at MIT does not create social misfits. MIT does, however, attract students with a narrow field of interests, who are able to work hard and who don’t want their horizons broadened. Required classes won’t necessarily get people to like literature, history, or politics. However, the Institute must be careful to provide and encourage means for students to voluntarily become more well-rounded. This is, I assume from the inaugural rhetoric, one of the more important topics of discussion within the administration currently.

MIT is not a college that is well suited for everyone, not is everyone well suited for MIT. It would be a tremendous shame if MIT as a college should try to accommodate its desires too much to accommodate the desires of all. The Institute is a leader (if not the leader) among science and engineering schools, a position which we would seriously threaten if controversies are spread too thinly. Already laboratories are overcrowded, professors are overworked, classes are understaffed, and facilities are overloaded.

I can’t say if I would recommend MIT to my son or daughter when that decision has to be made. It would depend on whether I felt their future could be beneficially affected by attending and also on whether we as a family could tolerate the financial burden. I have enjoyed and benefitted from MIT; there is no reason to suspect that my children could not in the future.

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