It’s time to set a sensitive precedent

Tomorrow the full faculty will address an issue that has recently become the subject of heated debate: deciding the date of the Graduation Exercises for the Class of 1982. After what the officers of the faculty have termed “an unusual sequence of events,” Commencement has been scheduled for May 28, the Friday before Memorial Day. Unfortunately, the date was chosen without realizing that it is also a Jewish holiday.

Religious observance by a group of students should allow the University to participate in Commencement exercises. Graduation is the culmination of years of effort and to miss it is an individual Act that cannot be replaced for those who miss it or for their families.

Opponents of a change of date argue that it would be “contrary to action taken by MIT for reasons inconsistent with the Institute’s position as a secular institution.” Yet last year, the faculty decided to change the Residence/Orientation Week calendar so that first term finals would not conflict with the Christmas season. Equal sensitivity to the needs of all religious groups is not inconsistent with the Institute’s position as a diverse institution, and sets no dangerous precedent.

Opponents also argue that it is too late to change the date; the May 28 date has already been officially announced and students may have already made plans. Many students, however, were not aware of the May 28 date until recently. In any case, the latestness of the recognition of the Registrar’s blunder is not an excuse for failing to rectify an error that should never have been made.

In recognition of the just needs of an important group of MIT students, it is essential that they be afforded the opportunity to voice their concerns and to be considered for the purpose of setting Tuesday, June 1 as the date for the 1982 Commencement. The officers of the faculty have already recognized the opportunity to delay Commencement to an alternate date.

Although the change in date would raise the costs of setting up for the ceremony, the increased costs are outweighed by the importance of the event and the opportunity it provides for the students to voice their concerns.

If such an action sets a precedent of sensitivity on the part of the MIT faculty, it is doing so long after such a precedent should have already been established.

Visit your President

Next to the excessive workload, lack of student influence in Institute decision-making processes seems to be the most popular of student complaints at MIT. President Paul E. Gray’s new open office hours, which begin this afternoon, provide students and other members of the Institute community with an opportunity to constructively channel their dissatisfaction.

The most effective way for student opinion to influence Institute policy is for students to communicate with both early and often. By informing the administration of student concerns before crises arise, the likelihood of administrators incorporating students’ ideas into policies should be increased.

In the weeks to come, make the time to meet with the President’s office during open hours. Establishing a congenial, open relationship now can increase student influence when it becomes truly important. Student leaders in the future will be able to introduce themselves to Gray, and chat for a few minutes.

Open office hours will be an effective means of communication between students and the President, but students must let the President know how they feel about the issues which confront MIT.

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And finally hit them with a thirty percent price hike.

Guest Column/Anonymous

On coming out to a fraternity

By: Anonymous

While unsure of how the president and other brothers would react to my coming out, the general atmosphere I had experienced over the last two days gave me hope that it would be, if not a positive response, at least, “Why not see how it goes, I don’t care whether he’s gay or straight anyway.”

I talked over the matter with the president; he said that he would have to talk with the brothers about it and should be able to give me an answer that evening. I told the president that I would be more than glad to talk with any of the brothers, if they wanted to discuss possible problems or personal fears.

Three hours later, I received the verdict: “We’d like very much to have you, but we’re afraid that it would be too uncomfortable...” As it too often has, Homophobia (with a capital H) had won the battle.

I was disappointed, but determined to abide by their decision. I felt that the whole issue was dealt with in a very unfair way: the president talked with other brothers about it before he talked to me, and was again invited to stay at the house that night. Sunday morning dawned, and while going downstairs for breakfast I was asked to follow one of the brothers. As you can guess, I was extended a bid by the president.

Nothing unusual so far, nor eerily: Such things happen to several hundred freshmen and freshwomen each year. Unlike most of the incoming classpeople however, I talked with the presi- dent of DBS immediately following the invitation, told him that I am gay, and asked if they would want to take another vote on the extension of the bid. I decided to come out to the fraternity immediately for several reasons: firstly and most importantly, I felt it was only fair that they knew of my homosexuality while making the decision whether to extend the bid or not. Secondly, I was sick and tired of living a double life with most of the people around me. Lastly, I had been planning on being out and using GAMIT; if my homosexuality were known about on campus, I preferred to be the one to tell my fraternity.

Guest Column/Anonymous

Feedback

Opinion

To the Editor:
Kenneth Pollack's piece "Graduate School Growth Ex- plained" in the Tech for September 4, is a very good "once-over-quickly" review. I would add only one additional bit of information to clarify the data in the box at the bottom of his article. In his discussion of the history of undergraduate and graduate enrollments, the totals shown therein are for both regular students (degree candi- dates) and special students (non-degree candidates). Typically, the number of undergraduate special students is very small in relation to the number of S.B. candidates. However, the number of graduate special students is relatively much larger. For example, the total of 4788 for the fall term 1980-81 is comprised of 3434 regular students and 404 special students.

In comparing undergraduate graduate special students, one can typically compare the numbers of degree candidates. This graduate population was about 96 percent of the undergraduate population in 1980; we anticipate that it will be almost identical to the graduate population this term.

Kenneth R. Wadleigh '83
Dean of the Graduate School