Editorials

**Retain flexibility of status quo**

Editor's note: This is one of three editorials discussing the report of the Committee on Educational Policy published by The Pace and Programs Subcommittee of the Committee on Educational Policy.

The report's recommendations on allocation of subject units do not, however, address the problems cited by the subcommittee.

The subcommittee cited two primary problems in the current system of assigning academic weights to classes. The primary problem cited is that humanities courses and social sciences, often considered non-essential, are given lower grades due to the common perception that humanities classes are less important than technical subjects, according to the report. While most students would prefer to have a more balanced curriculum, assigning weights to certain subjects, an accounting change in allocation of course credit will not adequately address this problem. A boost in the status of humanities classes will require changes in the classes themselves.

The subcommittee concluded that preparation hours are difficult to assign accurately, creating a situation in which different combinations of classes have the same total unit value but require vastly different amounts of classwork. The difficulty of estimating preparation hours and the current, somewhat arbitrary, system does not allow the subcommittee to abandon any attempt to weigh this factor in designating subject values.

The nature of MIT's courses requires that variations in preparation time be considered in the assignment of academic credit: some attempt, no matter how inept, is better than nothing. The proposed system of subjects and half-subjects would transfer the flexibility built into the current system without solving any of the problems cited by the Pace and Programs Subcommittee.

Accompanying it to a new, inflexible system of assigning academic credit, MIT should thoroughly review the current allocation of preparation hours and attempt to alter it to more accurately reflect reality. While a difficult modification of the status quo may not be as new or exciting a solution as that proposed, it is better suited to solving the problems at hand.

**Homecoming Queen contest too divisive**

The purpose of MIT's Homecoming Weekend, according to the subcommittee, is to create a focal point around which the MIT community can talk to express school spirit. The addition of a contest for Homecoming Queen to this year's festivities, however, conflicts with this goal rather than furthering it.

While MIT is a relatively small university, a seemingly small change, its implications are far-reaching in the minds of many members of the MIT community. Realizing this, the Social Committee has wisely decided to hold an open forum on the subject tonight. Such forums are often unsuccessful, however, tending to attract only those strongly in opposition to the proposed change.

A significant segment of the Institute community—men and women alike—clearly views a Homecoming Queen contest as a reflection of a set of values which is inappropriate at MIT and at this time.

While the proposal was well-intentioned, it should be withdrawn in the face of any significant opposition on the part of the community the weekend is intended to unify. Anything else would sacrifice the weekend's value to MIT just to maintain consistency with other schools' practices.

**Balancing personal priorities**

A persistent problem at schools with high academic standards such as MIT is the conflict felt by students trying to strive for scholastic excellence while balancing personal priorities. Many employers openly admit that MIT graduates suffer from what is generally called "burn out," the result of too many all-nighters pulling too often. After a while, it seems that some students require more sleep or rest on occasion. When they matriculated, even to the point of unconsciousness, directed towards the outside world.

No one at MIT needs to be told that life at MIT is intense, and, by the same token, no one is going to tell MIT to lower their admissions standards. When very capable students are placed in the same classroom, however, much of the existing pressure is self-generated, so extreme sensitivity to time constraints is required of both students and faculty. The report of the Committee on Educational Policy's Subcommittee on pace and programs is, in this respect, a good sign that the Institute is at least thinking about the changing nature of an MIT education.

MIT is now in a unique position to offer students a strong technical education in combination with a traditionally broad liberal arts experience, or what is now sometimes called "the new liberal arts." The problem, one again, is that MIT's hardened pace precludes many students from taking full advantage of MIT's advantages, academic as well as social, cultural, and athletic.

Many MIT students reconcile their habitual life in the fast lane by pointing to courses less-generated pressure to excel academically and self-generated pressure for the "right job" or "best" graduate school. There must be a better way.

One thing I've noticed is that, after a few years here, students tend to lose their perspective of things which used to be taken for granted in high school, including such necessities as sleep and well-balanced meals. Students seem to torture themselves needlessly for the simple reason that MIT's atmosphere is conducive to an attitude of getting the most results with an apparent minimum of effort. As a result, many students feel rushed even in their everyday activities; over a period of four years, this eventually leads to burn out. A sampling of comments made by MIT students yields virtually nothing positive or even constructive about the institution—there is always too much to do and not enough time.

Admittedly, most students must favorably adjust, short-term pressure; although this problem is rather unique to MIT, or at least applicable to all students, it poses an unnecessary hindrance to an optimal academic environment.

Graduates who are burnt out cannot serve society efficiently and, in the end, can only further lower a university's reputation. Undergraduate life is a time of growth and change; an atmosphere of continued tension is definitely unhealthy.

What is needed, then, is a balance of commitments and recognition of priorities. Adjustments in personal relations and social interaction should be encouraged, to the point of, once again, everything in moderation.

The Institute should remember that, given the nature of MIT students and their lifestyle, the Institute must bend over backwards to provide necessary support services and counseling. Although technology in per se can often be cold and impersonal, MIT shouldn't have to be.

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