Jeni-Lynn Scofield

Close Encounters of the Wrong Kind

I don't know how I manage to do it. I wore up and down that this semester was going to be different. Rather than spending the first two weeks of classes shopping for interesting courses and trying to convince my scope and interest, I wanted to choose courses primarily on the basis of my course catalogue and my advisor's advice. This idly lasted a short time — four hours after classes began, to be exact. That was when I met a professor I'll call ET, because his first lecture was truly extraordinary.

ET stroffled into the first day of class, sans syllabi, and proceeded to tell the assembled multitude how we would spend the semester. Well, sort of. I don't think he had any idea how we would spend the semester if we took his class. At least he didn't inspire any enthusiasm in me. We wouldn't have a textbook. ET hadn't drafted a reading list. (Can extraterrestrial reefs really look like this? 

He hadn't decided yet what we would study. He couldn't tell us when assignments were due, or how many would be expected. He wouldn't even tell us what they were or what they would cover. He wasn't ignoring grades, which would have been a refreshing approach. Work would be graded. That is, some of the assignments would we receive some grade. Some would grade according to some criteria as yet to be determined. Then he announced that maybe he would just give us all B's. I don't mean to question his public relations judgment; however, that was not a message any of us wanted to hear the first day of class. Especially the close nerds. (Welcome to my class. Some of you may work hard, some of you won't, but it wasn't matter. It's easier to write B's than A's. I don't have to bother about getting down to the earthly task of assigning real grades.)

This is not the first time I have been confused as to what I would be expected to do to complete a course. At least ET admitted he didn't have any idea where we were going. Last semester I was confused under someone who knew the first day of class what our assignments would be for the entire semester. He announced we would be required to write four papers, and would not be expected to take a final examination. At the end of eleven weeks of classes, long after distributing paper topics and presumably after we had all started our re-search, he changed his mind. He gleefully announced we wouldn't have to complete that last assignment. Instead, we would have a comprehensive final examination.

Don't get me wrong. I didn't question any instructor's right to have any examination at any time. I just expect to be told about it. So, can plan my schedule accordingly. Obviously, writing papers and taking exams require different allotments of study time, of which I only have so much. I de-

serve to be told, early in the semester, what is expected of me, especially when I am paying $700 dollars for the privilege.

Are we going on Educational Policy? Now that you have finished garroting freshman pass/fail, you might focus attention on a proposal that would truly make student life and teaching worthwhile, reducing the faculty's workload. MIT students deserve truth-in-studying regulations.

I suggested last semester that departments might require professors to inform the headquarters early in the term to make sure these schedules conform to the rules of the faculty and don't contain any illegal final examinations. Is this a feasible proposal? At least all instructors submitted syllabi early in the semester, professors like ET would be forced to enter our universe. Students would know what was expected of them and would be able to plan schedules to devote enough time to subjects; professors might even receive higher quality work. Eliminating such close encounters of the wrong kind might make MIT a little more pleasant-for all of us.

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Feedback

More support needed

To the Editor:

We want to express our concern about the recent reduction of staff in the International Students Office. International students comprise 30 to 25 percent of MIT's student population, but two people, Dean Chamberlain included, are presently employed by the International Students Office.

Any student entering MIT faces great challenges, some of which are not even clearly enough to plan schedules to devote enough time to subjects; professors might even receive higher quality work. Eliminating such close encounters of the worst kind might make MIT a little more pleasant for all of us.

Column/Mark Templar

Democrats need new ideas

It seems like only yesterday, but almost two years have passed since Ronald Reagan and the Republican Party gained control of the White House and the Senate. Campaigning on a theme of less government, these conservatives capitalized on voter discontent with the then Democratic President to score impressive victories in the polls in 1980. Since that time, Republicans in Washington have used their newly found political strength to reduce government spending dramatically and cut taxes in an effort to solve America's economic problems.

Now, the 1982 elections are just seven weeks away, and the Republican Party's economic policies are a central issue in many Congressional races. Democratic candidates have been quick to point out — correctly — that Reaganomics is biased in favor of the wealthy and that it has not produced the economic boom promised by Republicans. In fact, near-record unemployment and business failure rates have led many Democrats to believe that they can ride into office simply by pointing to bad economic news and blaming the Republicans.

To a large extent, the Republicans have focused their campaign strategy on negativeism and have not adequately addressed the issue of political recovery on the tax of an economic recovery. But this campaign strategy of negativity is not likely to be as effective as the Democratic leadership might hope. Voters do not like to see politicians great news of economic distress with barely concealed glee. People realize that it is one thing to criticize — and another to come up with a better idea.

The truth of the matter is that the Democratic Party has not offered the American public a viable alternative to Reaganomics. When the Republicans proposed the Kemp-Roth tax cuts in 1981, not only did they not make the bill, but they also led a bidding war in which tens of billions of dollars in tax benefits were doled out to special interests. When President Reagan asked for deep cuts in programs for the poor, many Democrats supported him. And when the Administration tried to rein in Social Security, the Democrats screamed bloody murder, but they proposed no reasonable way to save this crucial, but nearly bankrupt, program. In the last two years, the Democratic Party

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YEAH YOU, JOHNSON ... I DIDN'T SEE YOU SAYING THE LORDS PRAYER...