Opinion

Jerri-Lynn Scofield

On a clear day, can you see your future?

Just as spring is the time when a young man's fancy turns to love, fall is the time when college seniors' attention turns to the future. Typewriters are replaced by resumes of sophisticated taste, as they begin the long, often frustrating procedure of trying to represent themselves: their interests, accomplishments, goals, and ideas, imposed by graduate school applications. Briefly summarize your academic accomplishments to date. "List your four most recent encounters with a sleeping dog." If more often one term is elapsed between your past and present periods of study, explain what you did in the interim. One can not forget the ever-popular name, permanent address, and social security number inquiries. And the application itself is always cleverly designed not to match the spacing capabilities of any known typewriter and is often printed half-blank, with the possible white paper, so the money student can not conceal his mistakes.

Other seniors rise early, put on new suits frequently, prepare for the interview, and prepare to become corporate masters of their financial futures. It is often evaporating, and even a trifle ludicrous, to try to reduce your essence to one, two, or three R.I.C.C.T sheets of paper or to summarize it in a fifteen or thirty minute interview. MIT pendule never seem to iron out this hurdle. They barely concerted housing terms that students at the Institute often get so caught up in academic pursuits that they forget everything else. Unfortunately, the very rigor of their education makes the senior year in some cases the most demanding time. Nevertheless, as I'm sure the article "Here they, the road a prospective captain of industry must follow," is less nebulous. I often think of discovering that other universities are rigorous in their own ways, and demand proficiency in skills that an MIT education fails to instill.

As the senior year progresses, students must decide the directions they will inevitably pursue. Many students other than myself, the project of the future will seem less nebulous. Everything will no longer look so busy. At least I hope so.

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Volume Ninety, Number Two

Friday, November 5, 1982

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The Tech (ISSN 0148-3807) is published twice a week during the academic year except during MIT vacations; weekly during January, and once during the last week in July for $10.00 per year. Printed by the Tech Printing Company, Cambridge, MA 02139. Third Class postage paid at Boston, MA. Non-Profit. Permit No. 97510. POSTMASTER: Please send all address changes to our mailing address: The Tech, PO Box 29, MIT Branch, Cambridge, MA 02139. Telephone: (617) 253-1414. Advertising, subscriptions, and editorial questions: 1805 Tech, 77 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02139. Copyright 1982 MIT. All rights reserved.

MIT has an optimal formula

According to a story floating around MIT’s Sloan School of Management, a recruiter from a prestigious business firm was asked why his firm hired predominantly from Harvard’s Graduate School of Business but not at all from MIT’s. His reply, simply, was, "At Harvard, they teach concepts; at MIT, they teach skills. We can teach the skills, business schools are supposed to teach concepts."

His response struck me as indicative of an interesting image, accurate or not, that MIT projects. Obviously, the Institute’s departments teach both concepts and skills, and, in fact, the distinction in importance between concepts and skills is not at all clear. Nevertheless, assuming the terms "concepts" and "skills" can be properly defined, the generalization does ring true: the educational emphasis placed on each reflects the school’s philosophy toward its teaching and its attitude toward its students. To me, however, MIT embraces, in this context, an optimal middle ground. MIT is an engineering school. MIT faces the challenging yet enviable position of straddling the educational philosophies of two academic disciplines: the liberal arts community, MIT is an engineering school, a school that emphasizes the narrow and the practical. To the engineering academic community, however, MIT seems to me so theoretical that the run-of-the-mill technical student in upstate New York, MIT aims to train backup engineers, but rather, leaders in industry and research.

The logic overarching obsession brings to mind two conversations which illustrate my point. The first was a remark by a top civil engineering student at a well-respected engineering school of a fellow student who asserted, quite seriously, that she thought calculus was a wasted class and useless in her chosen major. Tossing the reasons for optimism aside, I was nonetheless less struck by the bluntness of her remark. The second occasion involved the dean of engineering of a medium-sized school in South Dakota. Upon learning that I was an MIT student, he boasted that all freshmen in his school’s Electrical Engineering Department were required to build their own processor. This contrast between the two freshman curricula reflects the differing educational philosophies.

Essentially, the balance between teaching concepts versus teaching skills is influenced by two competing components: and skills are at all certain, the skills, business schools are supposed to teach concepts.

The latter observation brings us to the Institute’s commitment to a balance between teaching concepts versus teaching skills. At MIT, the emphasis lies on the development of the individual student’s potential, and the development of the individual student’s potential. The former serves to further the individual student’s potential, and the development of the individual student’s potential. The latter serves to further the individual student’s potential, and the development of the individual student’s potential. The former serves to further the individual student’s potential, and the development of the individual student’s potential. The latter serves to further the individual student’s potential, and the development of the individual student’s potential. The former serves to further the individual student’s potential, and the development of the individual student’s potential. The latter serves to further the individual student’s potential, and the development of the individual student’s potential.