The faculty is scheduled to act this Wednesday on the Committee on Educational Policy's proposal to restructure the freshman year pass/fail system. At last month's meeting, the faculty suspended discussion of the CEP proposal, and the committee reviewed its plan. Although the CEP reaffirmed its original proposal, they have not managed to marshal any more convincing arguments that dictate adopting their proposals. The proposed revisions to pass/fail have remained out of the public eye for the past month while the CEP reviewed its revised plan, yet students and faculty members should not forget the importance of this issue. It will probably be the most significant educational question to be decided at MIT during the current academic year.

Pass/fail was originally implemented to decrease pressure during a student's first year at MIT and to provide more meaningful full feedback to entering students. The current CEP proposal indicates that two laudable goals are being sacrificed in the interests of efficiency. Abandoning these two goals at this time, as the CEP has proposed, does a disservice to all freshmen and to the entire MIT community as well.

A memorandum the CEP circulated on November 10, outlines "several educational benefits" they claim will result from adoption of their recommendation. The CEP asserts, "By providing students with an unofficial report of their grades, the CEP proposal will highlight cases requiring intervention and help students and advisors. It goes without saying that the CEP should design a means to ensure that faculty members and freshmen actually complete the forms. The CEP has tried to contend that its proposal represents only a slight modification of current practice applied during the freshman year. It has failed to substantiate this claim. The current proposal would dictate, for the first time since pass/fail was adopted, that each faculty member submit a grade to the spring for each freshman taking his course. This represents a significant departure from existing policy.

The CEP also contends that the newly compiled formal freshman grades will only be used for evaluation purposes by the student and his advisor, and will not be abused either inside or outside of MIT. Yet over the past year, the CEP has not demonstrated an ability to prevent misuse of freshman grades. Moreover, the CEP has introduced "hidden grades" into the Computing Science Department's grading system and required all upper level courses to offer the pass/fail system. The CEP's proposal contains no evidence that it will improve the quality of the educational experience for MIT undergraduates.

The CEP should attempt to improve freshman advising at MIT without abandoning a short-lived attempt to provide better feedback about students "outside of the grades." For 8,700 dollars a year, students deserve that the faculty pay serious attention to the consequences of its proposals. The CEP has not produced any solid documentation that indicates a return to a more formalized grading system is warranted. Thus, faculty members should reject this ill-conceived CEP proposal. Students should demonstrate that they care about the issue and make an earnest attempt to attend the faculty meeting, open to all members of the MIT community, this Wednesday at 2:15 in 10-250.

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