External motivation rarely gives results

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Newspaper's staff editor, however, believes that the human nature is such that it takes a certain amount of manipulation to get people to write. This is not a straightforward "Your writing is abysmal," to motivate students to action. Upperclassmen may advise these freshmen, "Don't worry, it's not a requirement yet. They won't withhold your diploma. You don't have to do anything," but remember that a casu- lity to the philosophy of Con- trolled Ambition is that there is no reason to do anything until and unless you have to.

MIT students are supposedly highly self-motivated. Why then, Controlled Ambition? Because the system encourages it. Without a writing requirement, professors can lecture all day on the merits of effective written communication to no avail. Professors may discourage students from putting all-nighters to finish their problem sets, but students act on their own interest, see it as an incredible time-saving device. 

There has been some talk re- cently of proposals examining MIT's freshman year curriculum. While the Institute aims to re- main a center of technological excellence, a re-evaluation of the first-year core curriculum is both timely and needed. MIT should deal with questions central to the purpose of freshman chemistry, physics, and mathematics requirements, and whether they adequately serve to introduce stu- dents to scientific thought. What is the proper role of freshman year courses, and where does the study of discrete mathematics, statistics, computer program- ming, or biology fit within these requirements, if at all?

There are complaints on both sides. The Electrical Engineering department begrudgingly re- turns at its annual meeting, what should have been taught in E.02, while majors in Economics claim 8.02 has no relevance to their course of study. External motivation, in the form of requirements, is an important facet of an MIT under-graduate education that lends meaning to an MIT diploma. 

Poorly designed and implement- ed requirements, however, result in less-than-enthusiastic students and give them all the more rea- son to practice Controlled Ambition.

It appears that the Institute fosters the attitude that an MIT education is a series of hurdles, and that the object of the game is to "get by" with the least amount of trauma. I don't blame students for feeling this way. MIT has a reputation for having high stan- dards and a frenetic pace for both students and faculty.

I do, however, offer a sugges- tion for students. Do what inter- ests you. If you have always thought Renaissance Literature would be interesting, it all means take the course. Don't worry about how much time it will take. Be reasonable in your assessment of how much time you have, but, above all, try not to "play the game."

Perhaps I make these observa- tions because I am a senior, "old and sedated," and find motivation for anything academic, among my classmates, at an all-time low. Perhaps it is I.A.P., a time for re- flection. Certainly, I do not advokate submision in academies, for there is a limit to which one should be motivated toward one's studies. There is so much outside of the classroom worth learning.

I do think, however, that external motivation rarely produces long- term results.

Maybe I should start my thesis next week.

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