Meeting apathy: a letter's lesson

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Something unusual accompanied the agenda mailed for last week's faculty meeting. A two-page letter, signed by Prof. Arthur C. Smith, chairman of the faculty, asked his colleagues "to attend some faculty meetings this year." That might not seem like an unreasonable request, but, as Smith acknowledged, many faculty members "get too busy" to meet. "I do intend to try to shift the balance in that direction."

Besides, "occasional boredom or irritation may be a small price to pay for the benefits of broad faculty participation." Smith's rhetoric alone is unlikely to motivate his errant flock to attend its monthly convocation. The faculty has repeatedly demonstrated, however, that it will turn out for meaningful, substantive discussions of significant issues.

The ongoing implementation of Project Athena and the continuing review of the undergraduate program should, as Smith's letter noted, provoke such deliberation. This is certainly the case for pertinent issues for faculty consideration. Smith's challenge, as chairman, is to identify and introduce these issues.

The lesson here is that interest, motivation and immediate product, attendance, cannot be generated from mere air. Perhaps the leaders of another local study are organizational necessity, the Undergraduate Association, will observe Arthur Smith and in faculty and learn from their example. But I doubt it.

Up here at school, we all have our second families, our homes away from home. We work so hard here that we sometimes forget how important our friends are. So many times we are there when we need them: after a girl friend dumps us, after that first 22 percent on a test, during the frantic all-nighters spent finishing term projects. Many of us will never again have friendships as close as the ones we made during those college years. Long after the 3.111 and Unified projects are over, we will still cherish the friends we made at MIT.

We at MIT are also lucky to have another thing: a student community that cares. Many students put a lot of effort into the extras that make life at MIT more bearable. The people in LSC, APO, house government, and even at The Tech make this a great place to go to school. Our sports teams and intramurals give us a welcome diversion from our incessant tool-a-doms. And our campus' religious groups give us a chance to find God; I probably would have never found God had I not come to MIT.

There is a whole other group of people that make things work at MIT: the students. Our housemasters and tutors and the administrative personnel here give their all to make things comfortable for us. Those people are the ones who make a dormitory like Baker House a great place to live. The patience and kindness of the staff and technicians of the undergraduate Physics office never ceases to amaze me. There are a lot of us at MIT who quiet- ly perform their jobs day in and day out and get a lot of flak but very little praise from us students. Whether we admit it or not, these people make more of a difference for us than MIT's fancy labs and Nobel laureates.

And we should not forget our professors, either. Although we sometimes joke that we would like more of our classes taught in English, we really are blessed with an excellent faculty here at MIT. Many professors take a lot of time and effort to work with their students and get to know them. It must take a great deal of patience to explain the Poisson distribution for the 189th time to a new class of confused students, but that patience and kindness pays off in real learning. We students should be grateful that some of our professors care enough to share with us so much of their knowledge and time.

Finally, we really ought to remember that all we enjoy here is possible because we live in America. The government helps many of us pay our way through school, and it pays for much of the research done at MIT. It also gives us the freedom to work, speak, and live as we want— freedoms that a growing number of people on earth will never enjoy.

So before we go back to our theses and UROPs and 5.41 problem sets, let's be thankful for all that we have. We are truly lucky to be where we are.