Column/Joseph J. Romm

Pick Course II for power and control

Second in a series.

Severe restrictions on entry into Course VI for future freshmen are even now threatening to rise phoenix-like from the ashes of the December faculty meeting and turn MIT into a two-class system.

Everyone has an obligation to discourage freshmen from majoring in Course VI. I have a two-step modus operandi for stimulating discussion: First, bring to light the many facets of MIT's other departments; second, offend as many people as possible along the way, in hopes of provoking a response.

What drives mechanical engineers? What is the essence of Course II? How can I capture the flavor of MechII without asking another rhetorical question? Easy: Course II is power, cars, and control.

If you do not believe me, just go to the 2.70 contest. Arrive about two hours early some year and get a really good seat. If you cannot make it early, just bring a large brown paper bag; people will think you are a contestant and let you get a seat up front.

Then sit back and see the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat, if I may coin a phrase. The last two years, the key to winning the contest has been power, cars, and control.

Let me illustrate with the story of "D." In high school, Mr. D assembled a jeep from the parts of more than a dozen cars. At MIT, he had a brief fling with the biomedical engineering facet of Course II; I wish I could describe in detail his attempt to build a hand-held master transporter that could distinguish between clothing and skin for use on women at parties, but it failed in an ugly fashion, and the case has not yet come to trial.

Then Mr. D found computers and control, which is the use of electronics for regulating machines. This was Mr. D's Nirvana. He used to say that applying computers and control to the design of cars was more fun than self-abuse. Now that is autoeroticism.

Course I, like Course II, makes extensive use of computers, and has its own famous contest. (Please turn to page 6.)

“Careers in Technical Communication”

Armen Varteressian, Course XXI-S, Class of 1968

Manager of Software Publications and Development Services
Tandem Computers, Inc.

Wednesday, February 15, 1984
7:30 p.m. 4-231