Column/Diana ben-Aaron

Finding a living group and limits

One thing is certain at MIT: after a few years, you know your limitations better than you ever wanted to. For instance, I know how many hours I can go without sleeping before collapsing, and how many courses and activities I can juggle before I start failing them. How many hours I can go without calling home before my parents panic. Furthermore, I have just realized I am not going to be able to stay all I have to tell you about MIT into a single crystalline grain of an essay in time for this issue of The Tech, or matters. As a compromise — life consists of compromises, no matter where you are — I offer these unpolished nuggets of thought:

How to choose a living group:

One of the things MIT will have you hear over and over and over before the end of Rush Week is, "Choose a living group not for a computer, but no more deserving of a computer and a boat anchor is anything more complex than a computer and a boat anchor is.

Only major difference between a computer and a boat anchor is that computers can work on a stored set of instructions and a boat does not.

This appearance of life makes computers so interesting that students often fall into this trap of over-dependence. Computers can be seductively patient and effortless and this sense of power makes them attractive to people because it offers them more control than they have in real life. Too many hackers turn to computers for the approval and respect they do not receive from their peers.

Computers are not alone in their seduction of the innocent. MIT has had self-absorbed students since Boston Tech opened its doors, and surely there were Greek tutors forced to reprimand their peers. A good education must broaden your view of the world, not simply deepen it.

Freshmen come to MIT interested in morphology few things. This is not a new problem. For many high school students have exposed students to traditional studies such as physics, chemistry or mathematics. They would come here interested in these fields and undergo their first major shock: High school science is not the same as professional practice. These disinterested students then find their places in other disciplines.

Electronics has changed this natural progression. Electrical engineers do not appear to do any that differently from the experienced amateur. Widespread availability of computers has accelerated this trend, as programming is still programming, no matter how experienced the practitioner.

It was a known fact that MIT could not teach him anything. He is now a high-priced consultant for several microcomputer firms. He may have been right, but he will never get the background he needs to write anything more complex than computer games and accounting software. Freshmen do not realize that there is a great difference between computer programming and computer science. Often, they realize it too late. I don’t want to scare any freshmen (or their parents) who are reading this column, but if you know exactly what you need to learn, why come to MIT? Too many paths to knowledge run between computer programming and other disciplines.

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Column/Ken Mettsner

Computers are only tools

By now, practically everyone has seen that ubiquitous ad from Commodore where a kid gets kicked out of college because his parents did not buy him a computer. This commercial really offended me. Even if a Commodore computer could help you in college, no reasonable university would expect you to own one. No one has ever taken a census of MIT’s computers; there are simply too many to count.

There are computers for accounting, engineering, research, word processing, hacking and more things than can be listed in this column. They range from “smart” calculators to room-filling mainframes. Students are offered large discounts on Apple and Digital computers. Project Athena will give you all the computer time you can eat. You can pay to use a computer, or be paid. So where do Commodore computers fit in?

Computer use is not separate from other activities here. Too many consider think of MIT as consisting of cold, white rooms filled with mainframe computers and small, dingy rooms crammed with sneaky hacker-priests. While we do have a few such rooms, the majority of computers here lie buried in labs and offices. Proper, the priesthood, friend — MIT people use computers.

A computer should be a tool, not a god, but no more deserving of worship than a hammer. The