Faculty must take CEP plan seriously

The Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) has proposed to the MIT faculty a contingency plan to alleviate the overcrowding problem in the Department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science (EECS). Some students in future classes would be forbidden to major in Course VI under the proposal.

Although the department already has tried some solutions, such as asking faculty members from other departments to teach, the solutions have not worked. All involved realize more drastic measures are necessary.

If the restrictions are to apply to next year's freshman class, the faculty must vote on any recommendations by end of October. The Committee on Undergraduates Admissions and Financial Aid (CUAFA) must decide by next week what to recommend to the faculty.

There are presently 350 EECS sophomores, and the department heads have agreed that Course VI cannot reasonably handle more than 400 students a year. The CEP proposal calls for the Admissions Office to select a varied group of students - not more than twenty-five percent of the class - to receive, along with their official acceptances in April, notification that they may not major in EECS.

The science department and faculty must not lose sight of long-term solutions. The Department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science has been bursting at the seams for many years, and requires some degree of expansion and more efficient use of facilities to better accommodate its current students. The Admissions Office must also continue to expand its efforts to break the popular perception that "MIT equals engineering" and to attract non-traditional MIT students, such as prospective humanities and social science majors.

The Office of Career Planning and Placement must strive on the one hand to convince students that they can obtain high-paying jobs with a degree from any department, and on the other hand to prepare students with degrees in departments other than EECS. One factor causing an excessive number of students to major in Course VI is job prospects. Many companies actively recruit EECS graduates. Every year, however, graduates of the School of Science receive offers of employment from other departments than those of Course VI counterparts.

The administration must not create an elite of students "good enough" to be permitted into EECS. The Admissions Office must determine randomly those students to be restricted, rather than basing the decision on a judgment of how likely the student will be to opt for Course VI.

Random selection will ensure that no group receives special consideration. No student will be able to say to another, "You only got into Course VI because you're a woman." Similarly, no student will be able to say to IAP: "I was admitted to EECS because I am better." The faculty must take decisive action. The CEP proposal provides broad guidelines on which to build a well-planned, effective, and equitable policy for dealing with the serious problem facing Course VI and the rest of MIT. No action, or ill-conceived action, will have far-reaching, detrimental effects on the entire MIT community.

They should also remember that a policy change of this magnitude must be re-evaluated annually, rather than after the three years that the proposal suggests. Whatever path MIT policy may take, the Institute must realize its ultimate responsibility is to return to a system of open enrollment.

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First of a three-part series

The age-old debate on the relationship between religion and politics has flared up again. I've seen enough hypocrisy and fuzzy thinking about these two institutions to spoil me to present my own views. Here I address some of the questions people have been arguing about recently.

What role should religious leaders play in political campaigns?

Religious leaders, like anyone else, are free to support any candidates and positions they want, but they should make it very clear when they are speaking as church authorities and when as private citizens. For instance, Jerry Falwell went way too far when he called Ronald Reagan and George Bush "God's instruments for rebuilding America." When Archbishop O'Connor of New York said "I don't see how a Catholic could in good conscience vote for a candidate who supports abortion," he implied it might be sinful to do so. This was an abuse of his position. If O'Connor thought voting for a candidate who favors abortion was sinful, he should have openly said so, but he knew Catholic church leaders would not back him up if he explicitly took that position.

In fact, the Catholic bishops have issued a statement saying that the two most important issues in this year's elections are "right to life" and "right to privacy." If they forgot to mention abortion, it was an oversight.

As bad as it is for clerics to step into politics, it is just as bad for a political candidate to clash himself in the mantle of religion and imply that God is on his side, as Reagan has been doing. Not only has Reagan shamelessly sought opportunities to assure himself with church leaders (e.g., arranging photo opportunities with Pope John Paul II and saying he has often sought the Pope's advice, attending a prayer breakfast with 17,000 fundamentalist ministers, and appearing with bishops on campaign stops), he has represented himself as a protector of public schools who are "intolerant of religious belief." This is hypocrisy.

While Reagan would argue that government has no business promoting any particular religion, he would justify his support of school prayer by calling it "voluntary," and saying that any particular religion need be favored. This is ridiculous.

In general, second graders will not be volunteering to lead prayers — teachers and school administrators will be.

It seems inevitable, given the overwhelming majority of Christians in most towns in the United States, that the "voluntary prayers" will favor certain religions over others.

A prayer favoring no particular religion is no prayer at all, and compromising by holding different types of prayers on different days leads to even more obvious inequity.

Any prayer will be intolerant of agnostics and atheists. Schoolchildren are very impressionable, and a school represents tremendous authority. It is unfair to children who have been raised as atheists or agnostics to expect their beliefs to remain unaffected.

By favoring school prayer, Reagan is identifying himself with groups who do not accept the axiom that Congress ought to make no law respecting an establishment of religion, etc.

Compare to Reagan's statements, the behavior of Reverend Jesse Jackson has been exemplary. He used religious themes to good effect in his primary campaign, but he never claimed to be a champion of religion or an example of piety. The hundreds of black churches which supported Jackson made clear they were doing so as a political action, not because they thought it was religiously required.

I will not conclude "the churches should stay out of politics," or that political leaders should ignore the pronouncements of churches, or that voters need to consider the moral connotations of their vote. Reagan's connection of morality with politics is a valid one. In my next column, I will argue that political discourse should focus more on moral issues, and discuss the issues of nuclear arms and abortion and the role of religion in these debates.

M. L. Shipman

Mixing politics and religion

The role of religion in these debates.