Column/Joseph J. Romm

Bad effects of CEP plan will outlast the positive

To paraphrase Shakespeare, the evil that committees do lives after them, the good is oft interred with their bones. So let it be with the the Committee on Educational Proposal (CEP), of which I am a member. The CEP has an honorable plan to restrict admissions to Course VI, and the faculty will vote on it Wednesday.

The CEP plan calls for the Committee on Undergraduate Admissions and Financial Aid (CUAFA) to decide if restrictions should be imposed on incoming freshmen, based on whether sophomore enrollments in Course VI is declining according to the following program: 350 sophomores as of Fall 1984, 310 sophomores as of Fall 1985, and 270 sophomores (the steady-state level) as of Fall 1986.

The restriction itself would permit roughly the incoming class to be admitted to MIT with the provision that they could not major in Course VI. The CEP proposal leaves the decision of which freshmen would be selected for restricted admission to CUAFA and the Admissions Office, although the proposal offers numerous general principles for the selection process. Perhaps the most important of these principles is "Another major objective is to assure that students from throughout the admissions matrix receive restricted admissions." This is an attempt to avoid having restricted students selected from the bottom of the admitted class, reinforcing their image as second class citizens of the MIT community.

I say "reinforcing" because the CEP proposal inevitably divides the admitted freshmen into two classes of differing status, with essentially no opportunity for the restricted class to enter the unrestricted class. The evils of such a two-class system will irrevocably change the character of MIT.

The one bright spot on the horizon is that it appears that sophomores (the steady-state level) as of Fall 1986 will outlast the problem that the proposal is intended to solve. This is not unexpected.

The problem has not gone away, it has just been mitigated for a year because of a massive effort by the Admissions Office and by faculty and students in and out of Course VI.

Does this mean that the faculty need not approve the plan? Maybe — the plan is evil; it represents a threat to punish MIT's future student body if the present one cannot control its insatiable lust for electrical engineering and computer science. On the other hand, fear of punishment is a great motivating force, and who can say that such fear is not exactly the kind of pressure the MIT community needs to keep pushing it in the direction of fewer and fewer Course VI majors? Then again, to quote the Bard one last time, sometimes it is better to bear those ills we have than fly to others that we know not of.

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