Editorial

Plus ça change ...

Times are changing at MIT. Activism has been on the rise during the past year and shows signs of growing stronger. The community is discussing the Institute’s role in Strategic Defense Initiative research and investment with corporations doing business in South Africa.

Committees are discussing the nature of undergraduate education and the proper balance of technological and humanistic instruction. Overtrollment in the Department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science has been alluring in the wake of new programs in other departments and an admissions process seeking greater diversity.

The Tech today embarks on its 106th volume of publication. The editors and staff members will attempt to continue the tradition of Volume 105 and before to present as fast, accurate and complete coverage of news and as wide an array of opinion as we can.

The Tech and WMBR-FM will experiment this year as members of the Associated Press, sharing the cost of subscription so both listeners and readers in the community can obtain better information about events outside MIT. The Tech’s expanded Associated Press News Roundup section will attempt to summarize the most important and interesting stories of the past half-week.

The foundation of The Tech is the students of MIT. We need your help to cover the news. We need your help to be a good forum for community opinion. We need your help to inform people about change, or the lack of it, at MIT. Please join us.

Morgan’s departure a loss to students

Frank Morgan ’74, associate professor of mathematics, is an outstanding teacher. He has been honored with the 1982 Everett Moore Baker Award for excellence in undergraduate teaching and the Cool and Ida Green Career Development Chair, which recognizes and encourages excellence in teaching.

Morgan has shown exceptional ability to administer classes, even large freshman lectures. He is well-known for his speaking and blackboard style and for awareness of how students are reacting to his lectures through such measures as the “calculus cabinet.” Morgan developed the present form of the 18.01-18.02 sequence in freshman calculus, a valuable means of adjustment for the many freshmen who have some calculus background but are not ready to place out of a while term at MIT.

Morgan has made an important and lasting contribution to the community by spearheading the formation of the Institute Colloquium Committee and serving as its first chairman.

Perhaps more than anything else, students know Morgan as someone who is available outside the lecture hall. He literally knows hundreds of students in each class by name, and is regarded as friendly and concerned.

Morgan was denied tenure at the end of last term, and must leave MIT by the end of the next academic year.

In response to Morgan’s situation, the Undergraduate Association Council has urged the administration to review the role of teaching ability in tenure decisions.

All tenure decisions are extraordinarily difficult and complex. As students, we are not qualified to judge Morgan’s research, nor do we have any reason to suspect the Mathematics Department of treating his case carelessly.

Yet one thing is certain: Morgan’s departure will be a blow to undergraduate education at MIT, and this blow comes not by accident, but through a well-established process.

Students cannot be blamed for interpreting the decision as a signal that MIT cares about research and not education, even though mathematics department head Arthur Mattuck has participated in the Provost’s Office curriculum reform effort from the beginning.

The Institute must demonstrate its commitment to the “equal balance” of education and research frequently cited by President Gray. It must ask why the Baker award for excellence in teaching has gained the reputation of the “kiss of death” for untenured junior faculty.

Many undergraduates believe they are not a priority at MIT. The Institute can and should do much to remedy this perception, starting with a reexamination of the tenure process and of the relative amount of time faculty are expected to spend on teaching and research.

All those who know Morgan will undoubtedly join us in wishing him good luck. His commitment to education should inspire student commitment to improve education at MIT.

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THIS ISSUE

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Cover story by Richard E. Wagh ’86.

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