Editorial

Requirement must put writing first

All undergraduates in the Class of 1987 and subsequent classes must satisfy both parts of the writing requirement to graduate. Phase One concerns basic writing competence; Phase Two concerns professional writing in the student's field.

At Wednesday's faculty meeting, Professor Kenneth Hoffmann, chairman of the Committee on the Writing Requirement, expressed the committee's intention to have Phase Two essays evaluated by departments, not by the Writing Center. This proposal could reduce the requirement to a rubber-stamp process.

The committee's report stresses the flexibility of the requirement. Yet flexibility can be abused, and problems can grow unnoticed when there is no central oversight. Decentralization is chronically a source of problems at MIT when there is no central supervision -- for example, the proliferation of humanities distribution subjects. Standards could vary from department to department.

Provost John M. Deutch '61 has emphasized the need for Institute-wide planning and self-examination through the Long-Range Plan and the undergraduate education review. In recent years, provosts have not been accepted by the same number of people. If there were not enough TA's to grade 8.01 problem sets, there are not enough skilled readers. The Committee of readers could come together to discuss the papers, each group explaining their judgments to the other.

Unfortunately, we have nowhere near the capacity for such a scheme. MIT could not support such an effort.

The committee intends to have Phase Two essays evaluated by professional writers, not by the Writing Center. If the proposal could reduce the requirement, we feel strongly that the faculty should reexamine it carefully, and should not allow the writing requirement to be carelessly eroded before even one class has graduated under the requirement. At the very least, more discussion is needed.

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While the world's attention focused on a display of machines in Libya, two timely figures quietly stepped off the world stage. Both lived in Paris, both were sepantintarists. Simone de Beauvoir, who died on Monday, was 74; Jean Genet, who died the following day, 75. The two writers were among the most respected contributors to 20th-century thought.

The similarities run much deeper. Both rebelled against the established social order de Beauvoir by denouncing marriage, Genet by living as a piquetook, prostitute and beggar. Both sought to elevate oppressed women's rights, Genet championed the homosexual and criminal underclasses. Both, above all, were moralists and sought to create new concepts and new systems of morality.

French literature has suffered two insoluble losses as many days, Jack Lang, until recently the French minister of culture, announced "Jean Genet has left us," and with him, a black sun that enlightened the seamy side of France and new systems of morality.

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