Commencement washed out

Commencement was a wash-out, both figuratively and literally. Pouring rains were likely to be the only memory graduates take away the ceremony, for the commencement address was far from memorable.

There is no excuse for holding the ceremony outdoors this year. Weather forecasts from the previous evening called for some precipitation that morning. MIT laid to weight the comfort of the graduates and their families against the logistical problem of moving inside. They were selfish in their decision.

This selfishness left graduates with stained clothing and stuffed noses. Families either were soaked or, if they were lucky, got to crowd around monitors to watch the "festivities."

Is this any way to treat people who have put a significant amount of time, effort, and money into their education? Is this any way to treat families who have traveled from around the world to see their children and share in their educational experience? The answer is clearly no. In the future I would hope that MIT would remember the charge to be "better safe than sorry." Moving commencement inside would have provided much more enjoyable experience for all attending.

Inside or out, the audience still had to be content with the address of William R. Hewlett SM '36. This was unfortunate. Hewlett's own title, "Random Thoughts on Creativity," was certainly appropriate. I had trouble following the speech, as it wandered aimlessly around, never reaching a firm conclusion. The address also seemed to be a plug for Hewlett-Packard. Hewlett spoke almost exclusively about the various accomplishments of his engineers, praising their creativity. I half-expect him to tell us how his engineers came up with ideas in the shower and the desert. Only the background music was missing, otherwise, the commercial was complete.

The biggest complaint I have against the speech, though, was its stereotyping of the MIT community. Hewlett treated the entire class as if they were engineers going into industry. The speech was not a broad message to the entire graduating class, rather a lesson on how to be a better engineer.

The speech probably means little to the many graduates who are going on in the pure sciences, social sciences, humanities, and other professions not directly related to engineering. - one body major who will be going to medical school next year asked me, "What does R&D stand for anyway?"

I hope that this year's commencement was an anomaly. The next time rain is forecasted for commencement day, I assume the ceremonies will be moved inside.

I also urge the commencement committee to be more creative in their speaker selection. Graduates should be able to hear a speech with vision, and not another lecture, at the end of their long career.

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