Writing requirement Phase II: Satisfaction not guaranteed

An editorial that appeared on March 1 in The Tech stated that MIT should "stand by its Institute Writing Requirement." However, I agree with the basic idea that MIT should do all that it can to incorporate writing into the educational experience of its students but I don't agree that the current form of the requirement is the best way to achieve this goal.

The theory behind the implementation of the writing requirement has serious faults. Requiring MIT students to write more will only help them recognize and eliminate defects in their writing. But the requirement alone isn't going to significantly improve the quality of any individual's writing. Most people have come to believe that the most significant benefit of the writing requirement is the incorporation of writing into departmental curriculums. However, this belief is mistaken.

The prevalent attitude at MIT seems to be that the requirement forces students to think about their writing ability, that it presents writing as a discipline that might be overlooked in the general education. What seems to be missed is that Phase II places as much of an emphasis on the faculty as it does on the students.

The ability to write can be very difficult. Grading papers can take a significant amount of time, as very few professors are qualified to grade students' papers. Some faculty resist cooperative efforts with the Committee on the Writing Requirement because they may not want to give up class time to teaching writing or receive the intrusion of a writing professor into "their" classes. Some may feel that the teaching environment of their respective fields in any case seriously involves a writing experience. Therefore, the writing requirement is an institutional requirement, departmental faculty feel that they can "pass the buck" to the administration. But because the requirement often involves technical writing in the student's field, only the departmental faculty are qualified to judge the merit of a particular piece. The fact that some departments have allowed the writing requirement to be handled by a private writing professor makes life difficult for students. The delay that departments have had in addressing the requirement has hit the seniors especially hard. It is exceedingly important that the Committee on the Writing Requirement look closely at the problems that have arisen this year and eliminate these problems in the future.

The administration and department heads should have started a campaign to get the support of their students. Even though some faculty members (or their 100 junior (now senior) had not yet finished the requirement). To avoid this situation next year, departmental faculty should begin to publicize the options for satisfying the requirement for undergraduate students.

While all the rhetoric like "you know about the requirement" and "the time you come here" is valid, some of the responsibility lies with the individual departments and with MIT administration. After all, the departments have also known about the requirement for several years.

Most co-op courses came far too late into the game for students to satisfy the requirement in Phase II. Every department has had co-op courses that incorporate writing program. Undergraduates can receive credit for the initiation of co-op courses in the reality of the responsibility of the departments. Department heads: if your department doesn't have a co-op class, you are making much more difficult for your student. The requirement is an important requirement. Not all departments have co-op courses. Many departments have no non-cooperative writing program. Undergraduates can receive credit for the requirement. If you know about the requirement, you are failing to provide your students with a way to learn a valuable skill.

Procrastination (or "selective forgetting") is a way of life for many students, staff, and faculty at MIT. In the case of Phase II, the faculty at Tech stated that the requirement was to educate and teach excellence. And is seen in some of the popular magazines in their house.

I have no opinion as to what might happen. I don't know if I would feel terrible if I saw a young black guy perhaps 13:30, I would feel terrible if it were someone else, but I don't have a say in what they wish on their property. I do have a say in what you wish on your property. I don't have a say in what you wish on your property. But I have a say in what you wish on your property.