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Opinion—

Breadth shouldn't stifle depth

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pointed out later in the same statement that the department was forced to choose between HUM-D status for Spanish Culture and Latin American Culture. Another course that lost HUM-D status in "preparatory" cases was The Renaissance and Reformation. If the Renaissance and Reformation aren't broadly humanistic, what is?

Cartright also defended the distinction between core HASS-Ds and electives. "Is it not appropriate to break students into philosophy?" But some of us don't need to be broken into anything. Some enter with great specialization, and others by baby course. Again and again students echo the view that the new HASS-Ds will be even more slick and superficial than some present HUM-Ds.

Finally, it is impossible to suppress the disturbing sense that the charge toward HASS-D is led by the most technical sectors of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, by an econometrician and an analytic philosopher.

Image and reality

Moving toward a "core" is one way to make people feel there is some obligation to learn something in the humanities and social sciences, that they're not just there for relaxation. On the other hand, a requirement of introductory courses could send the message that students are not expected to go beyond the basics, since they're just engineers.

Are students against this just because it would get them in the way of filling the requirement with soft, entertaining classes? The students indicate no: the students who showed up were the ones who want to take demanding, serious humanities classes. How can the "reformers" be so alienated from the most interested students? It's not just disappointing, it's frightening.

Any humanities "reform" that makes the ones who care feel ignored and betrayed can't be more than that hollow. On the face of a $600 million fund drive, MIT is absurdly polishing its image with impressive-sounding statements, resolutions and votes — but will education fall by the wayside?

Well then, what do we want?

"Common experience." That's another phrase tossed around too casually. People take small, specialized HASS courses in search of common experience with others equally dedicated. Now comes the proposal that wants to reflect an "experience" that might turn out to be a large, boring survey course that no one cares about.

Meaningful experience comes when you join an intellectual community, as a participating member. MIT undergraduates discover contexts, become active members of the Artificial Intelligence Lab, help build humans-powered airplanes. They should have analogous opportunities in the humanities and social sciences.

"Engineers know that when they build a bridge, they don't do it alone," says Professor Gerald J. Sussman '85. Engineering and science are inherently communal and social. We depend on the public relations Dean for Undergraduate Education Margaret L. A. MacVicar '65 observes, MIT's close relationship with the government has fostered a service ethic, and we serve its needs — but we also set its agenda. MIT should make students feel they are not supposed to be somebody else's tools.

We come to MIT not to purchase a certain body of knowledge with a good brand name, but to focus and bring out our natural curiosity and find meaningful experience with the help of an intellectual community.

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