

opinion

Column/Thomas T. Huang

Gray: educator to bureaucrat

Prediction: Sometime within the next two years, David S. Sax-on '41 will retire, and Paul Edward Gray '54 will leave the presidency to become the next chairman of the MIT Corporation.

As chairman in 1990, Gray will devote his energies as the pitchman for the current five-year \$550-million endowment drive. When this happens, Gray will have completed a tragic metamorphosis from educator to bureaucrat.

In the mid-1960s and early 1970s, Gray worked to smooth out a rough freshman year, to improve the quality of teaching, to broaden and make more flexible the undergraduate education and curriculum, and to establish support for minority and women students' affairs.

Back in 1966, Gray — an up-and-coming associate dean of student affairs with a crew-cut, expansive jaw, a set of piercing eyes — was concerned with the effectiveness of the freshmen year. He had served as chairman of the Freshman Advisory Committee, a limited version of today's Undergraduate Academic and Support Office.

He proved to be a spark-plug

in starting the pass/fail movement at MIT. In the fall of 1967, addressing a joint meeting of the Committee on Educational Policy and the corresponding student committee, he proposed informally that freshman grades be wiped off the record. His proposal ultimately led to MIT's freshman year pass/fail, which continues to exist today.

The philosophy of his work at that time was best summarized in March 1971, when he was elected chancellor under newly-elected MIT president Jerome B. Wiesner: He would focus on structure.

There should be two thrusts to revamping the MIT education: 1) to provide a greater number of alternatives in curriculum, and a greater degree of flexibility, recognizing enormous differences among incoming students; and 2) to try to bring students as early as possible to the point where they ask "significant questions." A variety of tough problems "can't be approached without concern for social considerations and social consequences," he proclaimed.

But seventeen years later, something has gone awry. The man who gives the charge to the

graduates today is changed.

Although MIT's current educational reform certainly reflects Gray's philosophy on increasing breadth and flexibility in the curriculum, faculty members say that he is not providing the educational leadership that he should be. Except for an occasional speech, he has not taken the point-man position in the reform.

Moreover, recent actions of his administration do not reflect well on him. Last January, Gray, Provost John M. Deutch '61, and Dean of Science Gene Brown eliminated the Department of

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Column/Ben Z. Stanger

Define your own measure of success

I am wiping my forehead today, and it's not because of the weather. It has been a rough four years. It will be good to get my diploma; right now I'm feeling a little nostalgic and feeling more than a little relieved.

Behind that relief come nagging questions: Have I achieved my goals? Have I succeeded at MIT? Will I succeed elsewhere?

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Columns and editorial cartoons are written by individuals and represent the opinion of the author, not necessarily that of the newspaper.

Letters to the Editor are welcome. They must be typed double spaced and addressed to *The Tech*, PO Box 29, MIT Branch, Cambridge MA 02139, or by interdepartmental mail to Room W20-483.

Letters and cartoons must bear the authors' signatures, addresses, and phone numbers. Unsigned letters will not be accepted. No letter or cartoon will be printed anonymously without express prior approval of *The Tech*. *The Tech* reserves the right to edit or condense letters. Shorter letters will be given higher priority. We regret we cannot publish all of the letters we receive.

Column/Julian West

Smoking ban must be enforced

On March 7, 1987, Cambridge set a law curtailing smoking in public buildings. Cambridge joined the vanguard of a national trend to fight tobacco addiction, eliminate toxic "second-hand" smoke from the environment, and clamp down on seductive tobacco ads aimed at minors. Similar laws in the United States and elsewhere are establishing new standards of public health, clean air, and decency.

One week after the ordinance took effect, response was favorable from smokers and non-smokers alike. At that time, an optimistic William R. Dickson '56, senior vice president, told *The Tech* that "most people are certainly trying to cooperate."

But since this has been a controversial law — and especially since it can be viewed as a test-case for wider legislation — we must take a longer-range view. What is the climate one year after the ordinance took effect?

In short, it is not nearly so favorable. Non-smokers may now have recourse to help in securing clean air in their offices, but few offices were unable to reach equitable arrangements before. In the hallways, staff members smoke freely during their shifts. After-hours, it is not uncommon to see

Campus Police officers smoking indoors.

In the months after the ordinance was established, the occasional smokers in the Student Center were usually unaware of the new rules, and apologetically extinguished their cigarettes on request. Today, scofflaws use public areas on the fourth and fifth floors for smoking at all hours. They are openly disdainful of the city's ordinance, MIT's rules, and the oppressed non-smokers who politely point them out.

It is time for MIT to make a decision. Either it should take steps to comply with the city's law, or it should make a public announcement that it is unable to do so. In case of the latter, MIT should inform the City of Cambridge that it regrets to stand in contravention of the city's ordinance.

Steps toward compliance need not be extreme. In most cases, more prominent no-smoking signs would be sufficient. Many of the signs which were originally posted have disappeared. Presumably, they were meant to be a temporary measure while individuals adjusted to the new consciousness about smoking. This is only a matter of time, but it may

be a decade rather than a year. Granted, the signs are ugly, but at least they are not a serious health hazard.

Signs would have a dual effect: they would inform smokers who were unaware of the regulations, and they would deter others who would be openly flouting the law. In addition, they would provide those bothered by environmental smoke with a first line of recourse. I have on more than one occasion been challenged by smokers to "prove" that they were breaking a city ordinance. On at least one occasion, I managed to find a sign posted nearby, but the smokers refused to accept

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"THAT GUY'S GETTING THREE DEGREES TODAY. HE WAS MADE TO SUCCEED ..."

Some of us seem to be more successful than others. There are plenty of objective measures we can use to evaluate our success here — job offers, graduate school acceptances, multiple degrees and grade point averages — criteria which parents and mentors never get tired of exchanging.

Look to your left. Look to your right. Look at yourself.

* * * *

"THAT GIRL IN THE PINK DRESS, OVER THERE. SHE WAS CAPTAIN OF TWO TEAMS, AND SHE ALSO GOT AN NSF SCHOLARSHIP"

With so much of the future invested in MIT's graduates, it is not surprising that MIT places such a premium on excellence and success. For us to progress as a nation, we must have talented leaders.

Yet in pursuing such talent, we tend to lose our vision. We succumb to the urge to rush forward without looking ahead and weighing every step. By using pre-packaged definitions of excellence and success, we run the risk

of becoming inflexible and narrow-minded.

We were told as freshmen to always look both ways before crossing Massachusetts Avenue. I never did, but luckily I made it to the other side without getting hit. Others, I fear, haven't done so well.

Unfortunately, and contrary to what is often said, there is a strong desire here to follow others. I was talking to a former roommate a few nights ago, a brilliant friend who has never put much emphasis on other people's standards of success. He was confused by the way so many MIT freshmen manage to choose a major without much knowledge of the field they are entering and without much real desire to do work in that field.

Many students come here knowing what they want to do, but for those who do not, the only choice is to follow paths which have already been made. The result is that a high percentage of students pick a major which they subsequently find completely unrewarding.

This same desire to follow applies to the agenda we set for ourselves while in school. The initial response to this atmosphere

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feedback

Students should sign pledge of responsibility

(Editor's note: The Tech received a copy of the following letter addressed to President Paul E. Gray '54).

To the Editor:

MIT's commencement exercises will offer the graduating class an opportunity to celebrate their achievements and think constructively about the future contribution they can make to the world.

Through education reform, the Institute is beginning to devote more attention to the social impacts of technology in the curriculum. New context courses provide students with the background they need to consider questions of social responsibility. What better place is there to reinforce the message of responsibility than the graduation ceremony?

This year, several universities across the country will include as part of their ceremonies an optional graduation pledge of responsibility. Last year, as reported in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and the *Wall Street Journal*, commencement ceremonies at Humboldt State University in Northern California included the first such "graduation pledge."

According to co-author Matt Nicodemus, the pledge could "help create an atmosphere

where social and environmental responsibility is openly discussed and plays a more central role in our life decisions." Such a change would be welcomed by many people at MIT. The statement, which students voluntarily sign after receiving their diplomas, reads "I pledge to investigate thoroughly and take into account the social and environmental consequences of any job opportunity I consider."

It might be argued that many students already perform a ritual at commencement to signify their entry into the job world. Many students follow the practice of turning their MIT class ring

Commencement pledge forces students to consider job choices

To the Editor:

I support the pledge proposed by "The Coalition to Blow the Whistle on MIT." All too often MIT graduates take a job for monetary gain without considering the effects of what they will be doing or the needs that will be left unfulfilled.

How many MIT graduates will end up working for law firms, doing their best to acquit clients, some of whom will definitely be guilty?

How many vital positions in

("Brass Rat") around during the ceremony so that the beaver on the ring faces the opposite direction. Yet the message conveyed unto students by this practice is hardly one of responsibility. According to the folklore, the beaver defecates on you while you attend MIT. But after you graduate, you turn it around so that it dumps on the rest of the world.

Of course, maybe this tradition was never intended as an initiation rite to legitimize technocratic insensitivity. But it cannot be denied that it has such an effect. Many managers in industry from MIT whom we and our

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the armed forces, our intelligence agencies, and the government in general will be filled by less qualified people?

Perhaps if MIT students consider the social consequences of the jobs they take — or refuse to take — they would refrain from taking some high-paying jobs and would instead spend a few years working at a low-paying one where there is a real need for their abilities.

Michael Friedman '89

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