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Opinion: LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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MIT is just another place

Prior to arriving at MIT, you might harbor the notion that it is a magical place where unicorns, dragons, and fairies exist. After the first three weeks, the honeymoon is over and you find out that it is a lot of work. The work is manageable, but only if you are not in 10 other activities outside of classes. Supposedly, students that are accepted to MIT are "well-rounded." In reality, we found science/engineering fun and easy; thus allowing time for us to be the presidents of clubs, play sports, and sleep. Everyone hits the realization that you can't do everything some time during the first four terms at MIT. I was told prior to arriving at MIT that it was going to be hard work, so I came prepared to reduce my nonacademic commitments.

For the first three terms, I treated MIT like most upperclassmen have in the past, and like some freshmen and sophomores still do: a place to leave after earning a degree. Then I came to the realization that I was unhappy, not because of MIT, but because I had forgotten who I was. MIT became about surviving classes, not pursuing knowledge. I decided to make an effort to enjoy MIT, and that is when it all got better.

I started to paint again, to work out, and to have a social life. When it came to classes, every class had a purpose. Each class had a syllabus of their goals and objectives; then I would find something that I wanted to learn that could run in parallel to the course material. For example, I took 2.001 (Mechanics and Materials I) because I wanted to be able to design a small-scale bridge and calculate how strong I could make it for very little weight. I never ended up making the bridge, but every time I went to class I thought of how I could use the course material to design it. Stress, beam bending, and trusses became tools for what I wanted to do and ceased being academic objectives. Grades started to no longer matter. I stopped going after the A or B in the course; instead, I went for understanding the material and concepts. I can always go back to a book to find an equation, but understanding the "why" was more important.

My approach was not foolproof. I did poorly in classes and realized that it was better to finish the term with three good classes than with four/five poor classes. You don't get anything out of taking five classes if you don't do well. Focus on deeply understanding the material. It is important to note that we are not defined by our failures. We are defined how we overcome our failures and move forward. Research is all about failing, and knowing what does not work, so we can discover and innovate on the one thing that works. Faculty have drawers of rejected papers and proposals. Those who have never failed do not understand the process of getting up.

On a recent plane flight, I was sitting next to an MIT alum and we had a nice long conversation. We share a bond that transcends time; we both survived Boot Camp MIT. Staying up until 3 a.m. working on a problem set question because you want to find the answer; you don't want it given to you. We have the ability to create our own heaven or hell. It really depends on the individual. Try discussing probability with people outside of MIT or quantum mechanics, and chances are that you are going to

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feel different or misunderstood. Or brilliant!

MIT is just another place. You can be successful without coming to MIT. It is the drive for knowledge, to be surrounded by individuals that feel the same nerdy way we do about science and engineering that brings us together to such a place. You have to love the place, in order to be happy. If not, why did you come to MIT in the first place? MIT is not a place where parental desires matter. At the end of the day, there is only your desire for knowledge that will keep you up at night.

For me, MIT is a playground. I can play around going on the monkey bars and have fun, or consider it exercise and be miserable. After 16 continuous terms (SB, MS, and now PhD candidate) at the Institute, I have found that MIT has so much more to offer than classes. Your education is only half of the learning. Sometimes the other half is the most important half with three important points: One, learning to keep good friends; two, enjoying life independent of the work load; and three, getting to know yourself.

I joke around with “renewing my contract” with the Institute, and that I must be insane to keep wanting to stay here. There are no bars or time required to stay; the only thing that keeps us here is our desire. We can all leave at any time we please, move on with our lives, and be successful in the world. MIT is just another place where we come together for the pursuit of knowledge and personal growth: nothing more, nothing less. There are no unicorns, unless they are part of a hack. The only dragon is probably one painted on the halls of Bexley. We don't have fairies — only snow flurries.

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