Message from the Chancellor

As you may have heard from your son or daughter, MIT recently endured the tragedy of a student death. Brian G. Anderson, a junior in management, was found dead in his room in Next House on February 20. While we must wait for a final determination by the medical examiner as to the cause of death, we noted at the time that there was no strong evidence that Brian’s death was a suicide, nor was the community at large in any imminent danger.

This has been a difficult year for our campus and our community, and I wanted to briefly give you a sense of how we have reacted to it. Since last November, a working group of students, faculty, and professional staff have been examining all aspects of our student support system, as well as the interactions between our academic enterprise and student well-being. We have identified a number of logistical items that can be enhanced and have already begun to incorporate changes.

We have launched a new outreach program aimed at ensuring that all students are aware of and can quickly access support services. We are also engaged in a thorough examination of several other possible initiatives, including additional peer-to-peer support systems, looking at the impact of academic pressure on student well-being, and additional ways to empower members of our community to support others. We will be reaching out broadly to students and faculty to gather other suggestions.

We hope that the results of these efforts may lead to additional improvements to our community. While this is a sad time for all of us, in talking with many students over the past few weeks, I am encouraged by the level of outreach they are expressing to one another, and I am confident that we will continue to improve the shared sense of community through MIT.

BRIAN ANDERSON'S OBITUARY

Corporation names members of Presidential Search Committee

Twelve MIT Corporation members and 10 faculty have been named to the Presidential Search Committee tasked with identifying the successor to President Susan Hockfield. Three undergraduate and three graduate students have been named to a Student Advisory Committee that will assist in the search. Following more than seven years of service, Hockfield announced in February her intention to step down. She will remain as president until a successor takes office.

VIEW PRESIDENTIAL SEARCH WEBSITE

MITx Launches First Class

MITx, a new online-learning initiative announced by the Institute in December, began March 5 with its first course, 6.002x (Circuits and Electronics). Registration opened in February, and more than 90,000 people signed up for the prototype course.

READ MORE ABOUT MITX

MIT Men's Basketball Advances to First-Ever NCAA Final Four

The MIT Men’s Basketball team, already the most successful squad in the program’s 112-year history, defeated Franklin & Marshall College 69-54 on March 9 to advance to their first NCAA Division III Final Four. On Friday, March 16, the 29-1 Engineers take on the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater for a spot in the championship game.

VIEW GAME TIMES AND ADDITIONAL DETAILS

Crater Lake & Rouge Rafting Trip

July 29 - August 5, 2012
Dynamic Student Information Systems

If faculty, students, and staff were asked a year ago to describe their experiences with MIT’s Student Information Systems (SIS), most responses probably would be “paper-based,” “outdated,” “time-consuming,” and “inflexible.” Fortunately, SIS has made significant progress in modernizing and enhancing the user experience. If asked the same question now, faculty, student, and staff responses may sound very different: “digitized,” “online,” “paperless,” “robust,” “efficient,” “flexible,” and “streamlined.”

LEARN MORE ABOUT WHAT MADE THE DIFFERENCE

MIT Parent of Two Speaks Out

As an alumnus and parent of two sons currently attending the Institute, I have acquired a certain perspective on the intense academic pressure that permeates our students’ learning environment. There is no doubt that this pressure is part of an MIT education and constitutes an excellent preparation for the rigors of the professional world. Yet sometimes, a great part of this pressure is self-imposed by students who strive to take on an unreasonable academic schedule. By overloading themselves with coursework, they not only create an unsustainable stress level but they also prevent themselves from experiencing myriad other opportunities that are an integral part of an undergraduate education. Activities such as research, sports, clubs, volunteering, and student government provide relief from academic pressures and allow our students to develop other valuable skills.

While a minority of undergraduates may thrive while taking five or six classes, students seeking a balanced schedule can often manage four classes while taking part in another activity they enjoy.

As the drop date of April 26 approaches, ask your son or daughter how they are managing their current course load. If you detect a high level of anxiety, try and discuss with them the possibility of dropping a class. Earlier is better since the stress reduction will be immediate.

For many parents, though, it is difficult to obtain the undivided attention of their student when they finally get them on the phone to try and have a serious discussion. Our kids have become “experts” in multi-tasking, and we all know that while talking to us they are doing homework, checking Facebook, and thinking about an upcoming test. If you can’t have that all-important discussion face-to-face, do the next best thing…video chat via Skype or FaceTime! This will truly allow you to evaluate how your student is doing, catch any warning signs, and convince them that it’s really OK to drop that class for which they can always register again next semester.

My last piece of advice is for parents who feel that their son or daughter is systematically avoiding them or not responding to either texts, calls, or e-mails. In that case, and especially if you are worried your student is experiencing significant distress, contact the Residential Advisor in their dorm or living group and ask him or her to discretely check on your student and then call you back.

MIT is an extraordinary place where our students are being challenged intellectually every day. As parents, we should attempt to ensure that they take full advantage of this experience while learning how to manage academic pressures and to enjoy the multitude of stress-relieving and enriching activities offered on campus.

John Begg ’78, P’09, P’14
MIT Parent Fund Chair

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Experience the beauty of the Pacific Northwest and the beautiful Rogue River this summer with the MIT Alumni Travel Program. Explore the river from its headwaters near Crater Lake to the Oregon coastline. Choose to hike or raft from one campsite to the next. Hikes are five to 10 miles long and expert guides lead each day’s expedition and share information on the local human and natural history. Reconnect with Mother Nature and sink into the simple rhythm and joy of life on the river!

Questions?
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