Larry Bacow and the Mantle of Leadership

Two years ago, no one really knew what to expect of President Bacow. In general, Tufts students were ignorant of his career at MIT, but as his second year winds down, we now have some idea.

Bacow is a man driven by political expediency, who acts primarily with an eye to how alumni, trustees and donors might perceive any action he takes. To some extent, this is reasonable and necessary for a job that features fund-raising and keeping trustees happy. But too often, Bacow is willing to allow injustices to go unprosecuted, or to crack down on innocent fun, as long as it keeps controversy to a minimum and keeps up all public appearances. I should stress that by “too often,” I don’t mean “always.” Indeed, President Bacow has done the right thing for Tufts on numerous occasions; one only wishes, however, that this could have been more consistent.

Live nude girls (and boys)

This past year, Bacow ran afoul of Tufts’ most popular campus tradition (or, perhaps, vice versa). For several decades, students have celebrated the end of Fall classes in early December by drinking adult beverages and running around the quad in the buff on the first night of study period. Several hundred students participate, and the quad draws the largest audience of any campus athletic event. President Bacow claimed to be ignorant of the tradition; he was away during the NOR of his first year. This December, he held a meeting with Trustees at the President’s mansion, Gifford House, the same night of the NOR. The quad is practically in the backyard of Gifford House – imagine President Vest hosting a picnic for MIT Corporation members during Steer Roast.

The next day, Bacow fed off an angry email, expressing his dismay with the NOR, and his desire to end the event because several students were injured and required medical attention. A few students, he claimed, were groped by the cheering crowds. “The combination of consumption of alcohol with a mad dash through an icy, hullu campus at night cannot, I conclude,” he continued.

The outcry was immediate, and it lasted at least a month or two into the beginning of the next calendar year. Letters to the editor, and endless Viewpoints appeared in the Tufts Daily, condemning Bacow’s threat to take away the only real source of school spirit and stress relief the school has left. While changes of some kind are likely next year, it is near certain the NOR will continue, despite Bacow’s best efforts to kill it.

On one level, one can hardly blame him. If anything went wrong at the communicating well with all of its constituencies. I think again, this year, the UA could have done a better job. The same problem happens with the IFC: the IFC Chair goes back and talks to the presidents, but the possibility of a trip to go back and talk to their houses. So there’s always communication gaps along the way.

How to improve that is an issue. We tried town meetings, but you can only get people to show up to talk about the particular meeting issue, so you don’t have a chance to discuss broad things. E-mail letters are treated as spam, you might as well toss that off.

PM: I’m particularly interested in housing and orientation this year. I think we need to have a decent level of success in communicating their needs for FSILG rush. DormCon and IITLP are doing better in recent months. What’s your impression of what works and what doesn’t work there? What are the fundamental obstacles to be overcome?

Larry Benedict

and the Challenge of Student Life

Interview by Scott Schneider and Vikash Mansinghka

Though Dean for Student Life Larry Benedict has spent less time here than the senior class, he has been a quick student of MIT culture. We grilled him exhaustively on Orientation 2002, the future of dorm rush, and student-administrator communication, and he related every issue back to the underlying facts and ideas. This interview showed us Benedict’s insight and talent for understanding students’ perspectives, as well as his appreciation for the MIT culture of autonomy and self-government.

Prometheus: I’d like to start by just asking you about your background and what brought you to MIT.

Larry Benedict: This is now my 32nd year in student affairs and higher education. In my last year of graduate school, my funding ran out. I was working at UMass Amherst on research methods, evaluation methods, stats, that kind of stuff. I needed money to get through the last year of graduate school. The dean of students at that time was advertising for a research assistant to develop a telephone polling system on campus. So my last year of graduate school was actually the first year of the job that kept me there eighteen years.

PM: One of the major topics we’d like to talk about is communication and interaction between students and administrators. There’s been some controversy in the recent year and it seems like there have also been some improvements, and we’d like to see that those gains don’t get lost. Can you tell me generally what are some fruitful ways for students to communicate with administrators? Is it generally better to discuss overall goals or have conversations about specific plans?

LRB: I think the obstacles are what I was talking about. DormCon and ILTFP are a good example. DormCon has a certain set of roles and responsibilities for what goes on in residence halls, to be the communication link with the college, and to lobby on behalf of the residence halls to the administration. However, when something came up a couple of months ago, all of a sudden ILTFP shows up. We met with them, and we found a lot of good work being done by the particular group, unusual how this other group got together. This may not sound so bad, but consider how this impacts people who have degree programs that require summer internships, or those on the cusp, who need one last class to be made up over summer school. Worse, many international students will fall into either situation. Obtaining a return visa a year later and funding a trip all the way back to the US simply for a ceremony would be impractical.

Burning down the Bush

While these actions reveal Bacow to be out of touch with students, he nonetheless does the right thing in many cases. For example, former President George H.W. Bush came to speak at Tufts last February. Campus antwar activists had warned in advance of mobilizing several Boston-area activist groups, hundreds of protesters marched from Davis Square to campus, carrying slogans about the Bushes being warmongers who want to steal Iraq’s oil at the expense of the students, and observing significant worry (justified, it turns out) that the protesters would do something to disrupt the talk itself, so cops were out in full force, protecting the entrance with riot-gear.

On one level, one can hardly blame him. If anything went wrong at the communication well with all of its constituencies. I think again, this year, the UA could have done a better job. The same problem happens with the IFC: the IFC Chair goes back and talks to the presidents, but the possibility of a trip to go back and talk to their houses. So there’s always communication gaps along the way.

How to improve that is an issue. We tried town meetings, but you can only get people to show up to talk about the particular meeting issue, so you don’t have a chance to discuss broad things. E-mail letters are treated as spam, you might as well toss that off.

PM: I’m particularly interested in housing and orientation this year. I think we need to have a decent level of success in communicating their needs for FSILG rush. DormCon and IITLP are doing better in recent months. What’s your impression of what works and what doesn’t work there? What are the fundamental obstacles to be overcome?

Larry Benedict
continued from page 1

Bacow demanded in a campus email that these efforts not go through, that every effort to do so be met with litigious attempts to nullify the Amendment liberties that, as a matter of right and courtesy, students were bound to respect. This of course brought several protests sneaked into the talk, and on cue burnt whistles, held up a banner and an upside down flag, said remarkably with duct tape, chanted antiguarantor slogans until security removed them, flipping Bush off as they did it.

Bacow never apologized for his actions. But neither did he act as a toady to Bush. Of course, from a strictly the audience would have been impractical, as so with the Clinton talk, students submitted their questions to Bacow and read them to Bush. He picked hard questions, about Bush's handling of the Kurds, response for Saddam in the 80's, and similarly difficult questions designed to put the former president on the spot. Bacow has much to be proud of regarding this affair.

Carnage at the Cannon
In contrast to his vocal second year, President Bacow has so far kept to a hands-off approach, wisely remaining below the fray of undergraduate politics. This is due in part to defining controversies erupted almost immediately in fall of 2001. The first centered around the then-source editor Sam who, after being held to galva- nize students to the cause of janitor labor unionization, and similarly difficult questions designed to put the former president on the spot. Bacow has much to be proud of regarding this affair.

Erratum
In our zeroth issue, we allocated too much room for Barack Obama. We cut off some text. We will ensure that we are more careful in the

Prometheus staff
Editor in Chief
Scott Schneider '00

Letters to the Editor
Nice work guys - I've been trying to convince The Tech that they needed a sense of student advocacy for while now, but this should do it.

Sloan Kupers '03

Cover to Cover
I just read Prometheus cover to cover - a first for any MIT publication I have ever picked up.

Congratulations on a great first issue. There was a great breadth of topics and each article was a quality piece of writing. I especially enjoyed and appreci- iated the interview with Prof. Vandiver; I think more get to know the facutby/administration articles would be a very good thing for the MIT community.

Bill DelMaggio

uesta
Prometheus
Page 2

May 2003

PROMETHEUS

Tufts Has a Bacow

ambitious campaign previously carried on in secret by a cabal of English graduate students exploded onto the scene: the Tufts Source, the university's own National Labor Review Board to form a new labor union of Tufts graduate student workers.

As the “management,” he faced legal constraints on what he could say in contexts where he could not necessarily formally hear the appeal. The board has agreed to at least examine (not necessarily formally hear) the appeal. The administration appealed that decision to the regional board of the NLRB on the grounds that it was too late; it was held. Bacow and the adminis- tration would exploit grad student labor union pressure -- Cornell's president, for example, declared to Harassment, and a punishment of Pro- Testing students with the level of abuse the union and the administration.

and similarly difficult questions designed to put the former president on the spot. Bacow has much to be proud of regarding this affair.

Carnage at the Cannon
In contrast to his vocal second year, President Bacow has so far kept to a hands-off approach, wisely remaining below the fray of undergraduate politics. This is due in part to defining controversies erupted almost immediately in fall of 2001. The first centered around the then-source editor Sam who, after being held to galva- nize students to the cause of janitor labor unionization, and similarly difficult questions designed to put the former president on the spot. Bacow has much to be proud of regarding this affair.

Carnage at the Cannon
In contrast to his vocal second year, President Bacow has so far kept to a hands-off approach, wisely remaining below the fray of undergraduate politics. This is due in part to defining controversies erupted almost immediately in fall of 2001. The first centered around the then-source editor Sam who, after being held to galva- nize students to the cause of janitor labor unionization, and similarly difficult questions designed to put the former president on the spot. Bacow has much to be proud of regarding this affair.

Carnage at the Cannon
In contrast to his vocal second year, President Bacow has so far kept to a hands-off approach, wisely remaining below the fray of undergraduate politics. This is due in part to defining controversies erupted almost immediately in fall of 2001. The first centered around the then-source editor Sam who, after being held to galva- nize students to the cause of janitor labor unionization, and similarly difficult questions designed to put the former president on the spot. Bacow has much to be proud of regarding this affair.

Carnage at the Cannon
In contrast to his vocal second year, President Bacow has so far kept to a hands-off approach, wisely remaining below the fray of undergraduate politics. This is due in part to defining controversies erupted almost immediately in fall of 2001. The first centered around the then-source editor Sam who, after being held to galva- nize students to the cause of janitor labor unionization, and similarly difficult questions designed to put the former president on the spot. Bacow has much to be proud of regarding this affair.

Carnage at the Cannon
In contrast to his vocal second year, President Bacow has so far kept to a hands-off approach, wisely remaining below the fray of undergraduate politics. This is due in part to defining controversies erupted almost immediately in fall of 2001. The first centered around the then-source editor Sam who, after being held to galva- nize students to the cause of janitor labor unionization, and similarly difficult questions designed to put the former president on the spot. Bacow has much to be proud of regarding this affair.

Carnage at the Cannon
In contrast to his vocal second year, President Bacow has so far kept to a hands-off approach, wisely remaining below the fray of undergraduate politics. This is due in part to defining controversies erupted almost immediately in fall of 2001. The first centered around the then-source editor Sam who, after being held to galva- nize students to the cause of janitor labor unionization, and similarly difficult questions designed to put the former president on the spot. Bacow has much to be proud of regarding this affair.

Carnage at the Cannon
In contrast to his vocal second year, President Bacow has so far kept to a hands-off approach, wisely remaining below the fray of undergraduate politics. This is due in part to defining controversies erupted almost immediately in fall of 2001. The first centered around the then-source editor Sam who, after being held to galva- nize students to the cause of janitor labor unionization, and similarly difficult questions designed to put the former president on the spot. Bacow has much to be proud of regarding this affair.

Carnage at the Cannon
In contrast to his vocal second year, President Bacow has so far kept to a hands-off approach, wisely remaining below the fray of undergraduate politics. This is due in part to defining controversies erupted almost immediately in fall of 2001. The first centered around the then-source editor Sam who, after being held to galva- nize students to the cause of janitor labor unionization, and similarly difficult questions designed to put the former president on the spot. Bacow has much to be proud of regarding this affair.

Carnage at the Cannon
In contrast to his vocal second year, President Bacow has so far kept to a hands-off approach, wisely remaining below the fray of undergraduate politics. This is due in part to defining controversies erupted almost immediately in fall of 2001. The first centered around the then-source editor Sam who, after being held to galva- nize students to the cause of janitor labor unionization, and similarly difficult questions designed to put the former president on the spot. Bacow has much to be proud of regarding this affair.

Carnage at the Cannon
In contrast to his vocal second year, President Bacow has so far kept to a hands-off approach, wisely remaining below the fray of undergraduate politics. This is due in part to defining controversies erupted almost immediately in fall of 2001. The first centered around the then-source editor Sam who, after being held to galva- nize students to the cause of janitor labor unionization, and similarly difficult questions designed to put the former president on the spot. Bacow has much to be proud of regarding this affair.

Carnage at the Cannon
In contrast to his vocal second year, President Bacow has so far kept to a hands-off approach, wisely remaining below the fray of undergraduate politics. This is due in part to defining controversies erupted almost immediately in fall of 2001. The first centered around the then-source editor Sam who, after being held to galva- nize students to the cause of janitor labor unionization, and similarly difficult questions designed to put the former president on the spot. Bacow has much to be proud of regarding this affair.

Carnage at the Cannon
In contrast to his vocal second year, President Bacow has so far kept to a hands-off approach, wisely remaining below the fray of undergraduate politics. This is due in part to defining controversies erupted almost immediately in fall of 2001. The first centered around the then-source editor Sam who, after being held to galva- nize students to the cause of janitor labor unionization, and similarly difficult questions designed to put the former president on the spot. Bacow has much to be proud of regarding this affair.

Carnage at the Cannon
In contrast to his vocal second year, President Bacow has so far kept to a hands-off approach, wisely remaining below the fray of undergraduate politics. This is due in part to defining controversies erupted almost immediately in fall of 2001. The first centered around the then-source editor Sam who, after being held to galva- nize students to the cause of janitor labor unionization, and similarly difficult questions designed to put the former president on the spot. Bacow has much to be proud of regarding this affair.

Carnage at the Cannon
In contrast to his vocal second year, President Bacow has so far kept to a hands-off approach, wisely remaining below the fray of undergraduate politics. This is due in part to defining controversies erupted almost immediately in fall of 2001. The first centered around the then-source editor Sam who, after being held to galva- nize students to the cause of janitor labor unionization, and similarly difficult questions designed to put the former president on the spot. Bacow has much to be proud of regarding this affair.
The Use and Abuse of Rhetoric
By Sheeva Azma

With over 400,000 words, the sizeable vocabulary of the English language should be accustomed to exploitation in the name of artistic license by now. Books keep being written and rewritten about things like love and politics, but they recycle the same sentiments in a wide variety of words and phrases. So why don’t people stop saying the same things in different ways? Societies have dynamic vocabularies that adapt to either include new concepts or repackage words that societies don’t like any more. So people get creative and start re-working their old words.

The English language automatically adapts to verbal restlessness in many ways. Slang eventually seeps into our everyday lives, regardless of who we are. Even while thoroughly hosed and tooling on a pset, we may find ourselves dropping MIT lingo into zephyrs amidst bouts of punning. This is one example of linguistic experimentation induced by MIT culture.

But the main engine of language proliferation is rhetoric, where the desire for effective speech fuels preoccupation with alternate expressions of a single idea. Rhetoric’s power stems mainly from its malleable nature. People can use rhetoric to isolate and convey an idea while demphasizing or avoiding unfavorable overtones. For example, in preparation to formally begin the war on Iraq, the Bush administration took great care to call the effort a “plan to disarm” the country. In his ultimatum, he rarely used the word “war” itself. The decision to use rhetoric to put a convincing spin on the truth, and although rhetoric can be a powerful tool for honest communication, it can also be abused by those who deliberately lie or deceive. To know what someone is really saying, you have to pay attention to not only what she is saying, but also how she says it. At that point, you have the ability to distinguish between the use and abuse of rhetoric— and so long as verbal shenanigans abound, you’re going to need it.

Though rhetoric can be useful, it can still spin out of our control. When this happens, accumulated connotations can obscure the real meanings of words. Negative connotations associated with loaded words come from external forces, not something inherent to the words themselves. Consequently, these connotations are often difficult to destroy. For example, words infused with racial content, such as “black” and “white,” evolve into new words that multiply when they become socially charged as the old ones. Replacing a word charged with negative connotations is difficult because the connotations will eventually catch up with the meaning. On the other hand, neutral words are periodically replaced with polarized words that may sound awkward or silly: “freedom fries” come to mind.

This sneaky business of linguistic switcheroos can aid rhetoric greatly. Ambiguities and vague connotations give speakers and writers the benefit of the doubt when trying to appease many audiences. In this way, rhetoric can develop positive connotations, as people extract the meanings most pleasing to themselves. The word “community,” a favorite of the MIT administration, is one such abstraction. Though this concept may have started out as a concrete plan to bring togetherness to the school, it now represents an ethereal bond that justifies almost any policy regarding student life.

One of the danger of vague communication is developing buzzwords. Buzzwords are hazards to communication because they are so broadly defined that they are meaningless. Words like “democracy” and “liberty” evoke positive mental images, but their concrete definitions are debatable and, since they’re so broadly interpreted, may even contradict each other. Those are examples of real words gone stale, but even worse are the artificial ones, the barely meaningful sounds used as placeholders for vivid language: “pro-activeness,” “para-digm shift,” “tax change,” and hundreds of others. Buzzwords are spawned when rhetoric goes too far and ends up contributing to the problem it is supposed to solve.

If language is so muddled and contains so many insinuations and clichés, how does anyone know what’s true or false any more? Indeed, people do use rhetoric to put a convincing spin on the truth, and although rhetoric can be a powerful tool for honest communication, it can also be abused by those who deliberately lie or deceive. To know what someone is really saying, you have to pay attention to not only what she is saying, but also how she says it. At that point, you have the ability to distinguish between the use and abuse of rhetoric—and so long as verbal shenanigans abound, you’re going to need it.

Sheeva Azma W5 (sheeva@mit.edu) writes good.


cat

Your comments go here
Dear Prometheus,
I enjoyed reading the first issue of your publication. I am glad to see that someone is finally covering these issues with an eye to the underlying ideas. Keep up the good work.
Sincerely,
Transparent Stogue

prometheus - please include a notice about our coffee table meeting on your back page
“What the hell is going on?” section... it’s not for everyone but some students might like it.

Book a table for your party today and get a 15% discount

Congratulations to the Class of 2003

Book a table for your party today and get a 15% discount

Visit our website at www.Jasminekendall.com

Fine Thai Cuisine

Live Latin every Friday night 9:30 - 1 a.m.
Live Jazz every Saturday night 7:30 - 11 p.m.

Visit your website at www.Jasminenkendall.com

Delivery, Private Party, Catering, Take Out and Dine In

1 Kendall Square, Building 300
Cambridge, MA 02139
(Broadway and Hampshire Street)

I was wondering if you guys had thought of writing about this whole “community” thing and how it doesn’t really mean anything.

Hey! I want to write about Go and how it’s like physics:
“Make everything as simple as possible, and no simpler.” You said you’d take anything well-written, so...

I don’t see how that could be an issue of responsibility but not failed to take into consideration, so your point doesn’t hold.

I was interested in what you guys are doing. I don’t have any ideas right now, but can I join your discussion list?

“Poppycoc.”
heyy, you guys messed up a reference to the RS7 in}

E-mail fire@mit.edu

©OPEN PRENTICE IDIOMS WHO COULDN’T REASON THEIR WAY OUT OF A BUBBLE
Whose democracy?

By Aram Harrow

"I love of Baghdad, remember that for 26 generations you have suffered under wretched and unwholesome regimes, under which one Arab house against another... This policy, the desire to Great Britain and the United States, and the desire to progress and to make the management of your civil affairs in collaboration with the political representatives of the Great Powers who accompany the British Army, so that you may be united with your kinmen in North, East, South, and West in realizing the aspirations of the race"—Stanley Maude, British General, 1916

"What's going to happen the first time we hold an election in Iraq and it turns out the radicalest wins? What do you do? We're not going to let them take over"—Brent Scowcroft, national security adviser to President George H.W. Bush, 2003

Democracy in Iraq has been a much-discussed topic since the Bush administration ever since its case for stopping Iraqi weapons of mass destruction began to unravel. But the reason. Even though Iraq’s economy and infrastructure are currently in ruins, their oil reserves and their significance mean that a strong Iraqi democracy has the potential for cultural, economic and political leadership in the region. On the other hand, if democracy fails in Iraq, then we risk a further destabilization of the Middle East, perhaps even more so than the American policy of the Cold War. The American cultural output, and decades more of poverty and misery for millions of people. But before we roll up our sleeves and start translating the Bill of Rights into Arabic, we should pause to consider how we got into this situation in the first place. Although our problems with the Arab world are more recent than often we have heard that 9/11 “changed everything”, many of them have their roots in the early 20th century. The British were far more experienced in the early 20th century at running an empire than the U.S. is today. However, things eventually went sour for the British in ways that might have been foreseen if they had looked disturbingly familiar. If we want a stable, prosperous Iraq 50 years from now, we need to start analyzing why the Iraqis choose their own government and not pretend that we know how to run their country for them. American involvement in the early 20th century was intended to install a puppet government, and structured violently, with predictable tragic consequences.

British colonialism in the Middle East

The British legacy in Iraq began with a pair of conflicting promises. In 1915 they gained Arab support against the Ottomans by promising independence after the war. A year later, however, they signed the Sykes-Picot Treaty with the French, dividing up most of the Ottoman empire between the two superpowers even before the war was over. This treaty was kept secret until the Bolsheviks seized power in Russia in 1919 and published the secret treaties of the Tsars, including Sykes-Picot. When the League of Nations made Iraq a British “mandate” (meaning that the British were to “guide” them until they were capable of self-rule) in 1920, a popular rebellion led to what was brutally suppressed using the new military technology of the time, airplanes. The British soon realized that they needed to rule from a distance, setting up a puppet monarchy under George Faisal. It was described as an “Arab facade ruled and administered under British guidance and control by a native Moslem monarch, and, as far as possible, by an Arab staff.” They wrote a constitution, installed the pro-British Faisal and immediately signed treaties with Faysal reconceptualizing most of the terms of the Mandate and the terms of the Sykes-Picot agreement. Iraq was the French, so they took Sykes-Picot and pretended to rule it instead. This mixture of ethnicities---Shi`ites, Sunni, Kurds, Assyrians, Turks and others---designed to be difficult to hold together was the idea of hedging against European GSSM’s domination of the rest of the Middle East. France complained that its companies were excluded from the reconstruction, and the Demo-

Excluding religious leaders from the political process risks a situation like Algeria’s, where local election results were annulled after fundamentalists won, plunging the country into a bloody decade-long civil war.

Each Arab nation was given a certain amount of its resources, which were to be divided among religious and political leaders, and the results of this division were then supposed to be reflected in the political process of the country. This is why it is so important to include religious leaders in the political process, especially in countries where they have a significant role. When religious leaders are excluded from the political process, it can lead to instability and conflict, as was seen in Algeria. In order to avoid this situation, it is important to ensure that religious leaders are included in the political process, and that their views are taken into account when making decisions.

The American mandate in Iraq

Admittedly, it is sometimes difficult to guess the goals of U.S./U.K. inter- vention in Iraq, was the war about terrorism, or U.S. domination of the Middle East, or was it America's oil in the region, or remov- ing an enemy so America could draw down its forces in the Middle East, or something else entirely? Regardless of which tactical decisions were made, a forceful war was launched in Iraq, despite the Bush administration's claim that it was a preemptive war to prevent Iraq from developing weapons of mass destruction. The administration claimed that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, or was developing them, or was about to use them, or was about to use them. These claims were made without evidence, and the administration failed to provide any evidence. The administration's claims were based on intelligence that was later found to be false, and the war was launched in spite of the fact that the United Nations Security Council had not authorized military action.

When asked his opinion of Western democracy, George W. Bush famously said that "it would be a good idea." Without American democracy, the world would be a much different place. The Bush administration seemed to think that American democracy was the solution to all of the world's problems, and that it could be imposed on other countries simply by being present in those countries. However, this approach is not sustainable, and it is likely to lead to instability and conflict.

When asked his opinion of Western civilization, Mahatma Gandhi replied famously that "it would be a good idea." Without American democracy, the world would be a much different place. The Bush administration seemed to think that American democracy was the solution to all of the world's problems, and that it could be imposed on other countries simply by being present in those countries. However, this approach is not sustainable, and it is likely to lead to instability and conflict.

When asked his opinion of Western civilization, Mahatma Gandhi replied famously that "it would be a good idea." Without American democracy, the world would be a much different place. The Bush administration seemed to think that American democracy was the solution to all of the world's problems, and that it could be imposed on other countries simply by being present in those countries. However, this approach is not sustainable, and it is likely to lead to instability and conflict.

Breathe fire...
Fetishizing Democracy

By Scott Schneider

As American troops fought their way into Baghdad, the world was already fielding revolutionaries who would replace Hussein's regime. President Bush pledged, "We will stand with the new government that PROTECTS Iraqis' rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness should not be merely instrumental to creating a democracy, but should be our essential goal. By focusing on democracy as an end rather than a means, we lose sight of what is truly important.

Yet amidst all the talk about how to see that the new Iraqi democracy doesn't keep one has questioned whether this ought to be our primary goal. Perhaps forming a stable, inclusive government that protects Iraqis' rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness should not be merely instrumental to creating a democracy, but should be our essential goal. By focusing on democracy as an end rather than a means, we lose sight of what is truly important.

Noneetheless, the debate about Iraqi democracy goes on. Will the U.S. create the framework for an Iraqi democracy and help them administer it, phasing out their role over time without funding, or will they convene a constitutional congress in Baghdad, and walk out of the room, and the country, as the meeting gets underway? If America's role in forming the new Iraqi government is unclear, the end result is doubly so. Perhaps this is because the central goal, "democracy," is so poorly defined.

George Orwell, writing in 1946, once said that when creation of new governments was a hot issue, took a rather disparaging view:

"The word democracy has several different meanings which cannot be reconciled with one another. Not only is there no agreed definition, but the attempt to make one is increasingly impossible, from all sides. It has become formally evident that if we call a country democratic we are praising it: consequently the definition of every kind of regime claim that it is a democracy, and fear that they might have to stop using that word if it were tied down to any one meaning.

--George Orwell, "Politics and the English Language", 1946

Is democracy essentially government by the majority? This definition has the appeal of simplicity, but few seriously felt that when we call a country democratic we are praising it: consequently the definition of every kind of regime claim that it is a democracy, and fear that they might have to stop using that word if it were tied down to any one meaning.

"The word democracy has several different meanings which cannot be reconciled with one another. Not only is there no agreed definition, but the attempt to make one is increasingly impossible, from all sides. It has become formally evident that if we call a country democratic we are praising it: consequently the definition of every kind of regime claim that it is a democracy, and fear that they might have to stop using that word if it were tied down to any one meaning.

--George Orwell, "Politics and the English Language", 1946

"The word democracy has several different meanings which cannot be reconciled with one another. Not only is there no agreed definition, but the attempt to make one is increasingly impossible, from all sides. It has become formally evident that if we call a country democratic we are praising it: consequently the definition of every kind of regime claim that it is a democracy, and fear that they might have to stop using that word if it were tied down to any one meaning.

--George Orwell, "Politics and the English Language", 1946

"The word democracy has several different meanings which cannot be reconciled with one another. Not only is there no agreed definition, but the attempt to make one is increasingly impossible, from all sides. It has become formally evident that if we call a country democratic we are praising it: consequently the definition of every kind of regime claim that it is a democracy, and fear that they might have to stop using that word if it were tied down to any one meaning.

--George Orwell, "Politics and the English Language", 1946

"The word democracy has several different meanings which cannot be reconciled with one another. Not only is there no agreed definition, but the attempt to make one is increasingly impossible, from all sides. It has become formally evident that if we call a country democratic we are praising it: consequently the definition of every kind of regime claim that it is a democracy, and fear that they might have to stop using that word if it were tied down to any one meaning.

--George Orwell, "Politics and the English Language", 1946

"The word democracy has several different meanings which cannot be reconciled with one another. Not only is there no agreed definition, but the attempt to make one is increasingly impossible, from all sides. It has become formally evident that if we call a country democratic we are praising it: consequently the definition of every kind of regime claim that it is a democracy, and fear that they might have to stop using that word if it were tied down to any one meaning.

--George Orwell, "Politics and the English Language", 1946
PM: Do you think people should adopt similar strategies in future issues, or do you think that some effort should be made to reorganize existing governing bodies to be more effective?

LB: (pauses) That’s a very interesting question, and I’m not going to answer it quite that way because I’d prefer to see a governance body that can play this role. Otherwise, every time an issue comes up, you generate a different group with whom we work, sometimes more successfully, sometimes less so. And you have all these ad hoc groups coming and going and they represent maybe a large group, or maybe only twenty people, but you don’t know.

One of the things we’ve gotten in trouble with here is that I’ve met with certain one-issue or two-issue groups, only to find out after we’ve had negotiations and discussions and come up with a compromise that this compromise is not acceptable to the next group down the way. And so I end up like Henry Kissinger, running around all the countries in the Middle East. You end up caught in the middle, where it’s a very uncomfortable position for me or any dean to be in.

It would be really helpful to us, and it would really help communication, if there was a clear governing structure on campus. But that’s not the MIT way. I see that across the board. I think faculty are in a similar situation. You go to a faculty meeting and maybe thirty faculty come out of what, nine hundred faculty. That’s an important fact. I don’t think those thirty faculty speak for all nine hundred faculty, and so when something actually happens there, it’s bound to be faculty who say, “Wait a minute! I didn’t agree to that. What’s this crazy new policy they’re putting out of nowhere?” You’re always behind the eight ball on the communication front.

PM: Why do you think that happens at MIT?

LB: (pauses) I have no clue. I get here two and a half years ago... that’s just the way it is. You guys have been here longer than I have and probably have a better sense of what is going on here.

PM: Some people remember, actually, suspicio

The semester is hectic. It’s usually busy from the beginning, but has a very narrow agenda, a very narrow focus, and was very articu

LB: It’s not the role of MIT to be the parents.

PM: -- they need to conduct their meetings in contexts where students have an opportunity to thoughtfully present their views and to thoughtfully consider what’s at the core of their committee. My experience on the dining committee was that the structure made that very difficult. The committee made several of its most important decisions at meetings when there were four people in attendance, and most people hadn’t done the reading. From speaking with people who were involved in RSIT, I know there has been a lot of dissatisfaction with how that committee interpreted its survey results. There’s been a lot of controversy, at least. I heard from somebody that student attendance at the RSIT meetings was remarkably low because the meetings, at one point, were scheduled for 9:30 on a Friday morning. Now maybe the student representatives should have been more assertive. But I was wondering, have you heard of this sort of problem?

LB: This is the first I’ve heard of it. I had never heard of this from the RSIT students. I heard just the opposite: they outnumbered the staff at some of the meetings. After the first year I did not go to the RSIT meetings.

PM: Grace Keosseman [former DomCon President] told me that there were always some students there, but most students had problems making it to the meetings.

LB: I’m talking about the first year, when I was chairing it.

PM: Over the past few years, MIT has made several major changes in policy, particularly student life, and some people think that this trend, which seems to be echoed to varying extents around the nation, is a move towards loco parents.

The now infamous Faculty Newsletter article that the Dean of Admissions wrote actually explicitly said that we as an institution have to acknowledge that the role of loco parents is part of the game, when she described millenials. And certainly, some aspects of the Scott Krueger decision reflect that attitude from a liability standpoint. What do you think about that issue?

LB: Can you discuss it on a floor with a coed bathroom? I don’t want to hear it, because that means you’re going to become responsible for the next group down the line. It means, for example, that I’m not going to call you if your son is found with a can of beer down on the Lacrosse field or on the astroturf or whatever. I’m not going to call you if your son breaks 80. I also said, “You guys are so close to living like the residence hall room they get, because we don’t assign them to rooms.”

If your daughter is on a floor with a coed bathroom, I don’t want to hear it about her, because that means you’re going to become responsible for her actions.

PM: I know a few years ago, Marline Jones’s faculty newsletter article mentioned that some parents had wristbands identifying themselves as prefrish. I think some undergraduates dressed up as sheep.

LB: Are you sure it wasn’t a hack?

PM: Yeah, it was a hack.

LB: I actually wore one, and that wristband was given out by our parents.

LB: Are you interested in what you’ve heard?

PM: I think that’s important for you to understand, philosophically, where we’re coming from, at least where some of us do.

LB: I think it’s important for you to understand, philosophically, where we’re coming from, at least where some of us do.

PM: There were some statements like that. Have you read Marline Jones’s faculty newsletter article that mentioned that some parents had wristbands written in that were very different than the attitude you just described.

LB: I understand, but I’m not talking about general trends in any particular category of students like millenials or boomers or anything like that. What’s important to me is this -- and this is why the philosophy of not moving to in loco parentis is important -- you’re going to learn as much outside the classroom as you are in the classroom. Many faculty disagree with me, but in terms of life skills, communication skills, collaboration skills, negotiating, team building, these are all very important and are going to be very important as you’re going to be running a company or on the faculty.

The fact is, these are the kinds of skills you need, and these are the things you learn outside the classroom. You’re learning a very important lesson by doing these kinds of things, as if you were sitting in a lab. You come here for the academic experience, no question about that. But your education is a lot more broad than just academic experience.

PM: How do you do laundry?

LB: Silly things like that, but also, how do you run a house government? How do you run the UA? How do you run a club sport? Do you know how much experience you get running a club sport, in terms of scheduling and organizing, and team work and negotiating?
I think the in-house rush works pretty well. I wasn’t convinced of that my first year here.

Somewhat we’ve got come up with a system that meets many goals, some of which are the same. Then we’ve got very active counseling during dining, with student input. I know attendance was up and down, but the fact that freshmen who were interested really were interested, they’re looking for help. I basically said, “Look, it’s your house. You talk about what kind of house you might want. You come back to us and we’ll talk about how we can help you do that; rather than the dean coming in saying, right, next House is going to do this and that.” At some colleges (ones that I’ve been at, actually), the administration would simply go ahead and “fix the problem.” Well, what we decide is a fixed problem, you may not think it’s a problem. The best experiences and most positive for both sides were those where we’ve worked from the beginning with students to help develop policy. That meant students and faculty coming together, actually to work with students, and it doesn’t mean that we’ll always have policies that students like.

There are, for example, some safety concerns, where we’ve got to play a little bit heavier-handed than we might otherwise. Just before I got here a number of procedural policy changes were made with heavy consultation with the administration again for health and safety reasons. Now from one point of view you might think that’s very good. Steer Road is a good example. About the flaming toilet paper to light the fire – the fire department had some concerns about that. Well, they worked with the students, and they’ve got some new contrap- tion and it’s all fine. So the point I’m making is, it really is the experience of the entire system, in terms of roommate complaints, unhappy parents, and those kinds of issues.

There are problems with this system, don’t get me wrong. I’ve had student leaders tell me that, you know, you’ve actually assigned every student to every room, and I’ve had more problems with those kinds of issues than I’ve had in the past. But within the system, in terms of complaints, procedures and policies, I think everyone is relatively satisfied. We’re not 100% successful. I’ll be honest with you. But we’re also not 0% successful.

I was talking to some parents of students who don’t like this. I had an interesting letter from a father who was not pleased that his son had decided to join a fraternity. He wrote me and said, “I want you to know that I withdraw my permission for my son to live in a fraternity.” I wrote back and said, “Thank you for sharing your concerns with me, but this is not my decision, it’s your son’s decision, and you need to tell your son you don’t want him to live there.” Well, the father said I had told him the son shouldn’t be wanted to live there anyway. In the old days, the dean would have stepped in and made that decision. That is the procedural policy.

I think students think the administration has a secret plan. You give us too much credit. Honest to god, you give us too much credit. I went to talk to one of the fraternity leaders the other day. This was my first question: “How many of you think the administration is picking on you?” Every hand went up. I said, “How many think that the administration has a secret plan, that we’re trying to get you?” Every hand went up. You can give us too much credit. There’s a lot of time to early to talk to one of the fraternity leaders. One of the problems is that certainty served some students as a comfort. If I withdraw my permission, there are some students who are hurt by the uncertainty. Because I think students think the administration has a secret plan.

I think the admin has a secret plan. You give us too much credit. Honest to god, you give us too much credit. I went to talk to one of the fraternity leaders the other day. This was my first question: “How many of you think the administration is picking on you?” Every hand went up. I said, “How many think that the administration has a secret plan, that we’re trying to get you?” Every hand went up. You can give us too much credit. There’s a lot of time to early to talk to one of the fraternity leaders. One of the problems is that certainty served some students as a comfort. If I withdraw my permission, there are some students who are hurt by the uncertainty. Because I think students think the administration has a secret plan.
CELEBRATE
DEVIANCE

Love your beaver.

http://web.mit.edu/savetf/p