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President, Provost Open Forum Athletics, academic quality, tolerance at center of discussion

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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

The semesterly President and Provost Open Forum has become a time-honored tradition at IIT. Organized by the Student Government Association (SGA), the President and Provost Open Forum provides IIT students a chance to ask any questions they might have regarding university policy to the top two individuals at IIT. It is for this reason that students, staff, and faculty converged on the Hermann Hall Ballroom during the lunch hour of October 16. Attendees were greeted by a lunch spread, a table of Affy Tapples, and the company of Provost Cramb and President Anderson as they entered the ballroom.

After a short introduction by moderators Kelly Lohr and Rani Shah, the President of SGA and the Vice President of Student Life of SGA, respectively, the forum began. Questions had been submitted in the weeks leading up to the forum via the internet, and both the President and the Provost went through answering these questions.

The first question posed was by a student wondering why student organizations were charged to use the sports facilities in Keating Hall, while student orgs that used facilities elsewhere on campus did not have to pay. The President answered this question, explaining that the point of charging for space in Keating was to control demand. Space at Keating is in high demand, and by charging orgs to use the space it both limits how many orgs will be reserving space and ensures that orgs that do reserve space will actually go on to use the space as opposed to making a reservation and not showing. The President also explained that Keating is an expensive facility to operate, and by charging student orgs, the school is able to recover some of the extra cost it takes to keep it open.

Another question regarding sports and athletics followed up this first one. A student submitted a very well thought out question regarding IIT's current transition from NAIA athletics to NCAA Division III athletics. The student commended the administration on making a move to an athletic association that will have us competing with schools more similar to our own such as MIT and Carnegie Mellon. The student, however, also brought up that these other schools spend quite a bit of money on their athletics programs and have world-class facilities to house their athletics programs in. The student expressed concern over the state of Keating Hall, saying that it can't match the facilities that schools like MIT and Carnegie Mellon have. The President took the lead on responding to this question, maintaining that by moving to NCAA Division III, athletics will continue to support academics at IIT. The President expressed his belief that IIT should have been a part of the NCAA all along, saying that it will allow us to compete against schools that have more similar academic missions, something that being a member of the NAIA doesn't allow us to do. As for the state of Keating Hall, President Anderson admitted that Keating wasn't state-of-the-art, but said

that it was okay. He said that while Keating was aging, it was still better than many university athletic centers due to its large amounts of open space. He said that currently Keating fits the needs of our athletic program, but that more will be needed in the future. Anderson talked of plans to build a new rec center at IIT, but explained that to do so, \$40 million was needed – money that the university currently doesn't have. In the short term, however, the school will be retrofitting the soccer field with artificial turf this coming summer. Anderson closed his statement by explaining that switching to a more well-known athletic association supports the academic mission of IIT because it will bring more top students to our school.

The next question dealt with IIT's current national ranking, and how we might increase it. Provost Cramb answered this question, and prefaced his answer by saying that improving a university's national rating doesn't necessarily improve the quality of the university. He went on to explain that US News and World Report now asks the opinion of high school counselors when creating their rankings, and that these counselors skew the rankings because they lean towards large state schools that spend millions to make their names well known, something we don't and won't do. Cramb also explained that many of the statistics that these rankings were based on were very long term statistics, such as the six year graduation rate. He explained that even if huge strides were made in the short term, these strides would not be reflected in our ranking until years later. Despite his qualms with college rankings, Cramb explained that the university is making some efforts to improve its ranking. To do this it is working to improve retention between the freshman and sophomore year, and throughout all four years. Cramb mentioned that IIT's current Freshman retention rate is 98%, and that this will help raise our national ranking.

One topic that enjoyed a lot of conversation was the administration's plan to establish a learning center at IIT in order to improve professor performance. The plan to do this just gained steam because an IIT alumnus just agreed to make a lifetime gift in order to establish this center. Anderson and Cramb talked about how the center would take model professors, study their methods, and work to share these methods with all professors at IIT. Cramb stated that this center should be established within the next five years. The conversation about the center lead into a heated one about professor evaluations. Cramb and Anderson both emphasized the importance of students completing professor evaluations in order for an effort like this to succeed. In response to this, many students brought up instances where professors deliberately told students not to complete evaluations if they were going to say anything negative, to which the President replied that students in this situation should fill out evaluations anyway.

In a shift from earlier questions, the next question posed dealt with raising the English proficiency levels the university asks of its international students, saying that there

isn't enough right now, as evidenced by the fact that international student stick to social groups made up of people from their country, not others. The President promptly responded to this question, fiercely saying that domestic students shouldn't be so adamant about people speaking English. He explained that international students are stepping out of our comfort zones by coming to America, and that domestic students should help international students. Cramb then stepped in and recounted his own personal experience as an international student in America, explaining that no international student comes to America without the intent to meet and become friends with Americans. He further explained that international students try very hard to get to know others, and we should return some of their effort by getting to know them, helping them with their English, and introducing them to both Chicago and America.

Despite the length of the President and Provost Forum, not all questions that were posed online were able to be answered. Four submitted questions were not answered during the Forum, but were later answered by the President and Provost. Their answers are below:

IIT is well known in Chicago, how do we push those associations past city limits, to have a global impact?

The Board of Trustees, in collaboration with Vice President Jeanne Hartig, has just completed a study aimed at developing a strategy to increase the visibility of IIT at a national and international scale. One tactic involves print and social media, another is associated with student admissions and recruitment. More focus is on engagement with alumni around the country and the world. The president, other senior leaders and faculty members are traveling more extensively to talk about IIT. We are more aggressively courting the interest of companies, especially through the CMC. Promotion of the university is a task that we must all accept – alumni, students, staff and faculty. Students can help greatly by talking about IIT in a positive way when they return home or meet friends from other universities.

Is IIT working to become an "ivy league" institution?

We are continuing on our path towards excellence in all academic and non academic pursuits. To be an "Ivy league" institution we would have to become a humanities-centric or liberal arts institution – this is not our plan. Our vision statement says we are university with a technical and professional focus; we will continue on this path.

It was recently explained on SGA's votebox that the issue of hookahs had been closed. It was explained in the description as to why the issue had closed that the President and Provost's office threatened to put in place stricter policies by bringing up this issue. I also know that at several points last semester the Provost threatened to punish certain organizations which were attempting to establish a dialogue concerning hookahs. I want to know why the President and Provost feel it is okay to run this

school like a police state, where simply bringing an issue up for conversation will lead to threats and punishments. These actions are sharply at odds with the administration's recent push to 'listen to the student' through Student Speak.

The Provost has listened to the views of an individual and small groups of students who wish to use a Hookah within the University boundaries and has made the universities position clear about Hookah use in campus buildings – the current ban on Hookah use will remain in effect and there will be no change to the current policy in the student handbook. As to "several points last semester" – the Provost does not remember any times when he personally threatened to punish any organization nor does he think any organization was asking to use a "Hookah". He only spoke to individuals about their wish for personal use.

The Provost did make it clear that it was his opinion that smoking in any building on university owned property was already subject to the appropriate state and city laws and to university policy, making the discussion of Hookah use on University property moot, as he assumed that University policy and State law was being followed in all buildings situated on university property. If a discussion of the potential for implementation of a current university policy is a viewed as a threat or punishment, then the Provost cannot agree with this viewpoint.

It was also made clear that the issue of smoking on campus was an issue that those advocating "hookah use" may not want to bring into a broader discussion, due to unintended consequences. If the discussion of the rights and wishes of smokers on campus were to be fully discussed, the rights and wishes of non-smokers must also be discussed. The Provost believes that a discussion of smoking (or of whether smoking should be allowed) on campus is now occurring among the student body. The Provost will wait for a recommendation from the student body concerning whether smoking should be allowed anywhere on campus property, assuming that such recommendations will take into account current policies and the relevant city and state laws.

It is the Provost's view that everyone should carefully consider the potential detrimental health effects of smoking on themselves and others in their decision to smoke and should at least hold others harmless should they decide to smoke.

When will faculty/staff be trained on working with undocumented students? Deferred Action - work authorization for IIT students and who at CMC can they work with?

The issues of undocumented students are well-recognized at IIT. As to the CMC, I will ask Dennis Roberson to ensure that the staff of the CMC is trained to be able to offer advice to any students who request such advice. As to faculty/staff training, we have no specific training planned that is focused on the issues of undocumented students. The issue of documentation is a personal issue and as such is a private issue of the person. There is no reason for a student's status to be known by any staff/faculty member.