

## **Justin Tan, Class of '09**

One line struck me when I researched the *Massachusetts Institute of Technology* as a prospective school to attend for college: “Sleep, work, social life: at MIT, you can only choose two of the three”. Naturally, it was too unbelievable to warrant any serious validity. However, it wasn't the first time I had heard it. Thus, following Mark Twain's suggestion, I threw off my bowlines and sailed away from the safe harbor, casting myself away from my beloved Canadian hometown of Montreal and into the fast-paced American culture. I could have stayed in a familiar environment with my friends and family. I could have attended the local university where my parents worked. I could have continued doing research with a group of scientists willing to let me pursue my own interests. But I decided to experience something new, challenging, and potentially irrational. So far, my choice has made all the difference in who I have become.

My first semester at this institution has taught me so many different aspects of living and learning. All my life I have pursued the most difficult of challenges by enrolling in the toughest courses, attending the most competitive schools, and competing for the highest honors. Once I arrived at MIT, however, I knew I would be required to make choices...and sacrifices. I started the year off ambitious, enrolling in the most difficult class in each of the subjects I was pursuing. Furthermore, I committed to an intense undergraduate research opportunity and decided to take up varsity pistol. The result: endless days and sleepless nights. I have since learned to focus on what means the most to me, on what truly sparks my interest.

The most difficult aspect of MIT has been neither the competition nor the pressure. It has been the choices. Never before have I been presented with such an immense repertoire of opportunities. Since I arrived, there have been innumerable opportunities in all aspects of college life. It was horrible narrowing the field down, and as apparent by my schedule, I obviously need more practice. Even concerning potential majors, I was originally set on pursuing some sort of engineering. However, now that I have arrived, my interests transcend many different fields, from management to brain and cognitive sciences, economics to biological engineering. It seems overwhelming, but I must admit that the students at MIT are more than adequate inspiration and support. Unlike most other institutions, MIT's philosophy of undisclosed rankings among students fosters a cooperative environment. It is hard work, but I would not trade my experiences at this school for anything...period.