Assignment #4:
A Researched Science Essay for the General Public
Due: 4/15
9-10 pages

For this assignment, you will investigate some area of research in science or engineering that is going on here and now at MIT, and you will write an essay about it for a general audience. Through this assignment, you will gain experience in:

- going out and researching a topic "first hand" (more about this below);
- finding and using additional (e.g., published) sources of information about your topic; and
- presenting a highly specialized and technical subject in a way that is both accessible and interesting to a general audience.

Your first task will be to find a topic that interests *you*, and that you think could be the basis for an intriguing and informative essay for people who have little or no previous acquaintance with this general subject. If you are involved with a UROP, you could write about something related to that. However, there are endless other possibilities. I recommend that you begin your search for a topic by browsing the website of a department you're interested in and checking the links to research labs and groups in that department. Read about the research that's going on in those labs and groups until you find something that especially interests you.

Your next task will be to learn more about that lab or group by visiting it and talking with one or more people that are involved in the work. I recommend that you email someone (e.g., a postdoc or graduate student listed on the lab's website): explain what you're working on and ask whether you can drop by to visit and find out more about their work. Perhaps one of the more senior members of the group (i.e., a professor or research scientist) would also be willing to meet with you. If you need me to help facilitate this contact, let me know. I can, for example, make the initial contact with a member of the research group, explain the assignment, and ask whether he/she would be willing to have you contact them to arrange to visit the lab and talk with someone.

With some preliminary background on the topic, you should be able to decide on the specific focus and audience of your essay. As we discussed in class (3/11), the notion of a "general audience" can be viewed as a continuum. That is, some "general audiences" are more "general" than others: the audience of <u>Discover</u> magazine is quite different from the

Must do 1st hand research

audience of <u>Technology Review</u>. Where would you imagine your essay (article) appearing? Don't approach this as a "report" on a lab at MIT. Rather, the essay should reflect your own idea about how to effectively make a technical subject interesting, engaging, and informative for your designated audience.

As you map out your essay and begin to write, you're likely to discover that you need more information about certain aspects of the topic. You should consult additional sources of information, such as articles, books, and websites.

Your essay may include subheadings if you think they are useful for the reader. It may also include illustrations.

The first version of the essay should be double-spaced and, of course, it should have a captivating title.

NOTE:
MIT is a large and complex organization. In addition to departments, you could look for a topic by browsing the websites of some of the independent labs, programs, and institutes, e.g. CSAIL (Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence Lab), the Media Lab, the McGovern Institute for brain research, among others. Each of these comprises many research groups, with each group having its own specific focus.

What am I going to pick ???

She thinks should just pick

Email prof or grad students
                    ↑better choice

She can help if have problems
    - but this is part of real world

Could read review articles
    - google search   → - journal article of recent
                                developments

Talk to a lib research specialty
    - wish they saw more undergrads

Thur → topic workshop

Next Tue → read articles (on stellar)