

April 9, 2008

[The following letter was sent to all students admitted to the College of Science and Letters.]

Congratulations on your admission to the College of Science and Letters (CSL) at Illinois Institute of Technology! I am pleased that you are interested in studying with us and believe you will find an extraordinarily satisfying and relevant educational experience here.

As the Dean of the College – as well as a professor, researcher, adviser to students, and father to two daughters who have graduated from college, and one daughter who is almost done – I would like to offer you my perspective on what makes teaching and learning here special. This may be a broader perspective than some academics. Since earning my Ph.D. at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee in 1969, I have had the good fortune to work in several organizations – universities large and small, in the United States and internationally, as well as in the Office of Naval Research in Washington, DC. What I have experienced in my career is, in a way, what the College of Science and Letters offers to students: a multi-faceted, multi-disciplinary experience with a wide variety of opportunities, which we encourage you to take.

CSL is the academic heart of IIT, providing many of the required classes for all the majors, from architecture to engineering. At the same time, CSL is IIT's most academically diverse college. Our six departments – Applied Mathematics; Biological, Chemical and Physical Sciences; Computer Science; Humanities; Mathematics and Science Education; and Social Sciences – serve nearly 1,500 undergraduate and graduate students. We allow these students to explore their interests outside of their degree program, pursue studies across departments and fields, and otherwise learn in an independent, inquiry-oriented, multi-disciplinary, and flexible way.

Your opportunities could range from a six-week international internship in Krakow, Poland with a global information technology company; to research under the supervision of faculty as early as the second semester of your freshman year; to a place on an ethics team. Our undergraduates write articles for publication in scholarly journals (an activity normally reserved for graduate students), attend conferences, work in companies located in the tech incubator on campus, and much more. All of these opportunities give our students an advantage after graduation.

The work in CSL is rigorous, but it prepares our students well for their next steps. For some of our recent students, those “next steps” have been a biology graduate program at Yale University, medical school at Northwestern University, an applied mathematics graduate program at Cornell University, a job as a technical communicator with KPMG, a position as a science educator in the Chicago Public Schools, and other challenging futures.

In many ways, CSL offers you a small-school experience. Our students and faculty know one another, and this can make a surprising difference. For example, a faculty member might encourage a student to pursue a research project at Argonne National Laboratory or Fermilab, or to undertake an Interprofessional Project in information search and retrieval to benefit the student’s career. Students feel comfortable dropping by their department for advice or conversation. They know their classmates. It is hard for them to get lost in the crowd. On the contrary, many students find that they blossom here; there is light and room to grow. Our small size also keeps us nimble academically, able to respond quickly to changes in various fields; to add courses or even majors; to see opportunities for cross-disciplinary or intra-collegiate studies; and to keep up with new technologies, new discoveries, and new ideas.

Yet CSL’s larger-school attributes also are important. CSL attracts external research funding (approximately \$9 million) from such sources as the National Institutes of Health, National Science Foundation, Gates Foundation, and the Department of Defense. Our physics division is the home to Nobel Laureate and Pritzker Professor of Physics Leon Lederman. CSL also has been home to Herb Simon, a father of artificial intelligence and also a Nobel Laureate; Susan Solomon, who helped discover the hole in the ozone layer and co-chaired the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which shared the 2007 Nobel Prize for Peace with former Vice President Albert Gore; Victor Tsao, who started Linksys in his garage and sold it to Cisco Systems for \$500 million in 2003; and many more. Our faculty includes people like Joseph Orgel, who was awarded the prestigious National Science Foundation CAREER Award for his work on the structure of collagen, critical for research in heart disease and other areas. I could go on and on, but you get the idea. Our 10,000 alumni work around the world and are an exemplary group of scientists, business executives, entrepreneurs, public servants, and academics.

We strive to create an environment where the pursuit of knowledge remains primary, while supporting our students’ many pragmatic concerns – giving you the space to explore new frontiers, while making sure you are well prepared to compete in all ways after you leave us. I believe we will offer you an educational experience that is multi-faceted, challenging, satisfying, and relevant. I invite you to email me at mcmorris@iit.edu at any time, whether now or after this process, if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

F.R. McMorris