Should Caltech forget US News?

BY AUTUMN LOGDEN

US News and World Report’s annual college ranking guide came under fire at the end of last term when a group of students from top universities formed the Forget US News Coalition (FUNC), which encourages colleges to withhold information from US News. Albion, Michigan, Pittsburgh, Rice, and Stanford have already passed measures supporting the group, and ASCIT will consider the issue at next week’s meeting.

“The value of a college education cannot be expressed as a magical number determined by a compilation of poorly measured factors,” said Maryana Ilander, Rice Student Association President and a member of the coordinating committee of FUNC. “Even worse, people assume the rankings are statistically valid and use them in making life-changing decisions.”

Despite FUNC’s efforts, US News stands by its rankings, saying they are a valuable source of information for students considering college. Some FUNC members say US News’ rankings have influenced administrative decisions at their schools, but this does not seem to have happened at Caltech.

“I don’t pay much attention to the rankings — of course it’s better to be ranked high than low, but...there are more substantive issues for the future of Caltech,” said Caltech President Tom Everhart, “It’s not a priority to get a high ranking.”

In the next two weeks the student governments at Yale, UC Berkeley, Smith, Mt. Holyoke, Harvard, MIT, Syracuse, Wesleyan, Carnegie Mellon, U. Chicago, Wisconsin, UC Santa Cruz, Claremont McKenna, and Princeton are also expected to vote on measures condemning US News’ annual college survey.

For more information about FUNC, check out their web page at http://www.island.stanford.edu/group/assufunc/, which contains links to articles about the group and a current list of colleges supporting FUNC.

Faculty serve up Sunday brunch for Avery

BY VICTOR HUANG

After enjoying an extra hour of sleep last Saturday night, Avery House residents awakened Sunday morning to the smells of fresh pastries wafting from the apartment of the Faculty-in-Residence.

Over fifty people found their way to Professor John Hall’s apartment, which he shares with his wife Nancy and son Galen. Residents were greeted with a slew of treats, including delicatessen, pastries, fresh juice, and piping hot coffee. Professor Geoff Blake and his wife Karen, together with Professor Jeremy Kahn, helped organize the brunch while Nancy Lan impressed with her culinary skill. Galen Hall and little Garrett Blake busied themselves by showing the visitors around and bringing them food.

Behind the apartment lies the little patio where picnic tables were set up and the hungry Avery residents sat down to enjoy their food and one another’s company. Students had a great time sharing their inverent humor with the faculty members. The loudest discussion originated with Professor Kahn’s musings about aging having “Buddha nature.” Said sophomore Xin Liu, “The brunch was very enjoyable, and I had fun chatting with the other residents. It was a great way to meet people, too.”

The brunch is only the first in a series of social events planned by the faculty. Said Mrs. Karen Blake, “It’s a nice way to get to know the students, and an easy way to entertain. However, Avery House is still in a growing stage.” She outlined plans to organize dinner and dancing parties, where faculty members and students will get to mingle. She also mentioned that the cafe will be a great place for people to meet. She continued, “This is a beautiful residence and we want students to want to live here.”

Social activities organized by other groups within Avery are also in the works. The RA, graduate student Weng Ki Basu, has the usual dessert nights and social outings lined up, with sign-up sheets galore outside his door. A party planning committee has also been set up; they intend to continue the tradition of spirited on-campus parties, and appear poised to spring a surprise any time now.

With this successful brunch, the faculty residents have shown their commitment to improving Avery residents’ quality of life, and helped Avery House on its way to becoming a diverse, yet cohesive, community.

FSC seeks student input in search for new Tech President

BY DAVE RIVERA

Caltech is currently in the process of searching for a successor to Tom Everhart, who plans to step down next September. Two committees have been formed to find, select, and recruit the next President of Caltech.

The Faculty Search Committee, chaired by Kip Thorne, has been commissioned with finding a short list of candidates qualified for the position of President and relaying that list to the Trustees’ Selection Committee.

Over the next several months, this committee will search for candidates for President. Nominations and suggestions can come from all members of the Caltech community, as well as the Alumni and Friends of Caltech. The search will encompass all “walks of life” — members of the military, the government, and industries will be considered, as well as people from outside universities and at Caltech. Due to the secrecy involved in such a search, the names of the candidates will not be released to the public.

Help choose Caltech’s next President!

Julie Kornfeld, Associate Professor of Chemical Engineering, is collecting information from graduate and undergraduate students. She can be reached at jak@cheme.caltech.edu.

If you send a nomination, please provide:

* the nominee’s name and identifying information,

* the reasons you think this person might be an outstanding president.

Contact Gina Armas at x6174.

Public Events has openings for (paid) student ushers. If you are interested, please e-mail Ramanuj Basu at rbasu@cco.caltech.edu.

The Coffeehouse is now hiring any and all interested students. Free food, no qualifications necessary. Contact Gina Armas at x6174.

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I hear this a lot, in fact I even say it myself. It's the text-book reason for not voting for a third-party candidate in America. But this year it's dawned on me that such reasoning isn't always solid. Here's why:

The two big political parties (and to a certain extent the Reform Party) are different from the third parties in many ways; but perhaps most importantly, they don't have rigid platforms. If a few planks of a big party's platform need to be dropped off in order to win the election, they're gone. (This is not to say they won't pursue these objectives in office, but they won't advertise their intent to do so beforehand.) Getting into office ranks well above the principles for which they (sort of) stand. Such flexibility seems to be necessary to win modern-day elections. Parties that really do stand for a cohesive ideological view point, be they right, left, or center, don't really have a chance.

Yet here I am to tell you that voting for such parties is not, even pragmatically, unwise. Let's pretend, for example, that you are a Libertarian at heart. (In case you don't know, Libertarians want to minimize governmental regulations of all types; not anarchy, but society.) Provided you subscribe to the "wasted vote" manifesto, the Republican Party can count on your vote, because they are most assuredly close to your point of view than the "competition," the Democrats. Given that's clearly the case, they have no reason whatsoever to move in your direction to take away such a useless true effort at the massive legislation on your agenda. Instead, they will try to soften their sound, and even the candidates they pick, to better attract independent centrist voters who aren't so keen on the ideas to which you subscribe. So long as they stay on your side of the major-party political fence, the Republican candidates can count on your vote and you can count on them to be better than "the alternative," but little more.

Suppose this year you and your fellow Libertarians actually decide to vote for Libertarian candidates. It is unlikely many, if any, of them will win. But by so voting you make it just as likely that the Republican Party as a voter can't count on you to subscribe to the "wasted vote" theory. They want to win the elections, and so it will behoove them to do what it takes to win your vote back. You will have essentially made a strong push for getting more of what you want onto the Republican platform... and most likely had more success in swinging the nation toward your point of view than you would have had by voting Republican.

The same idea obviously helps if you can count adherents of other parties: Greens who are in the-bag Democrats, Natural-Laws who are going to vote Reform, and soon. The Democrats have become less forest green and more green money green year by year, and it's because they know they still look like spring buds next to the Republican party's dried tobacco. (Which is not to say you can trust the rhetoric; my district's Republican legislator commonly backs environmental regulation and research more than his colorful neighbors do.)

Many of the third parties are running very strong tickets this year, without sacrificing their ideological views. (Too bad they have been shut out of the political discussion by the big boys.) Of course, the Reform Party wants to see billion dollar presidential campaigns, but the Greens have consumer advocate Ralph Nader running a $5000 ceiling campaign, the Libertarian wide selection of links to follow to find out more. You might also want to take the "World's Smallest Political Quiz," at www.self.gov.org/. It provides an interesting map of where your opinions fall (in a somewhat Libertarian-stilted set of questions) relative to those of some of the candidates. The Internet is most certainly a tool for democracy. Such access to information may indeed open our eyes to new possibilities, and spread the gospel to those who are most effectively engineered into a certain aspect of the system. If ever they get into office they will do a surprisingly good job of making voting a... 

Getting into office ranks well above the principles for which they (sort of) stand.

What You Don't Know Can Hurt Us All — Even if you are an "informed voter," it is unlikely you are familiar with every issue list on your ballot. You vote Democratic, Minnesota, and being far from home, have even less likely had the difficult to know about the challenge at hand.

The ROCK THE VOTE campaign, namely the effort to make voting a "cool thing to do," is an excruciatingly influential problem. Are we to reject a 10% increase in voter registration? If the majority of new voters for Bill Clinton cause he has the big hi or back Bob Dole because they think Vice President's wife is leader of the Record Lyn Gesto? To the extend that the "Rock the Vote" campaign encourages a new generation to invest in and think about how our own work makes the difference, it is a good thing, it is simply effecting an increase in the number of people who show up at the polls isn't a laudable goal, if the majori ty are just going there to "hit and split levers.

The California Tech
TFM over MIT

The Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine ranked top schools based upon daily availability of varied, low-fat, cholesterol-free, and vegetarian foods, at breakfast and dinner. For example, schools offering a daily variety of low-fat entrees and make-it-yourself bars ranked higher than schools with only a salad bar and steamed vegetables each day. A partial listing follows:

1. Duke University
2. University of Pennsylvania
3. University of Notre Dame
4. Columbia University
5. Brown University
6. Stanford University
7. University of Kentucky
8. Amherst University
9. University of Minnesota
10. Smith College
11. Howard University
12. Arizona State University
13. California Institute of Technology
14. Georgetown University
15. Pomona College
16. Wellesley College
17. Harvard University
18. Rice University
19. Southern Methodist University
20. Yale University
21. Dartmouth College
22. Massachusetts Institute of Technology
23. Bryn Mawr and Haverford Colleges
24. Case Western Reserve University
25. Washington University

The Outside World

by Myfanwy Callahan

GERMANY - DETROIT, MICHIGAN - In efforts to control Devil's Night, 30,000 volunteers patrolled the streets of Detroit on the night before Halloween. This night has been marked by scores of arsons for more than a decade.

UNITED STATES - Dr. Francis Collins, head of the Human Genome Project, formally withdrew five papers on leukemia that were printed in leading scientific journals because a junior colleague had fabricated data. The graduate student confessed to systematically fabricating data for the past two years.

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Are you a graduating senior or a PhD graduate interested in learning how a "case interview" works? If so, please join us for an informal session given by The Boston Consulting Group on the "case interview" experience.

Monday, November 18
4:00-6:00pm

Beckman Institute Auditorium
Hosted by
Susan Moffet (BCG Los Angeles)

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MÖBIUS: Rob takes a look at this week’s elections

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

in the sheriff’s race, or why the incumbent third district judge isn’t seeking reelection. As a result, I abstain from voting on those races with which I am unfamiliar; even if only one candidate is listed on the ballot. Often the temptation is to vote anyway, either along party lines or simply for the incumbent. Having some faith in my fellow citizens, I prefer to leave decisions to those who cast a ballot in the election. But this leads to some major problems. (Section 10(a), Article 2, CA Constitution; my thanks to Arnel Fajardo for the information.)

I Have a Proposition for You — Speaking of those “Propos,” let me say that some of California’s propositions really turn me off, and I’m glad I’m not called upon to vote on them. Why? Take Prop 209, the (infamous) “Civil Rights Initiative.” There are well-meaning, rational, morally-upright people on either side of this initiative. But there are also some real scum bags on either side: greedy, self-serving egoists who want to make their piece of the pie as large as possible, at any moral cost. I’d be in favor of Prop 209 if I could count on the moral fiber of my fellow Americans; but the very clear need for affirmative action earlier in this initiative is obvious. So I oppose it.

Affirmative action attempts to move society toward equality by mandating unequal treatment of certain groups; clearly we can’t have an egalitarian society so long as laws are in place. The question is whether repealing such laws at this point in time will help us continue our approach toward equality (which I think we have done since the 60’s) or simply encourage an already occurring trend to slip back into the racist, bigoted thinking of yesteryear.

Do I have an answer for you? Not really. Like I said, I’m glad I’m not a California voter. The optimist in me would tell you to vote for 209; the pessimist says hell no. There’s not much of either in me. The realist, which constitutes my larger half, says whatever the result is, I might as well live with it.

The Wisdom of Our Forefathers — It is common, heck, it is typical, for Americans to vote for or against a given candidate strictly on the basis of their position on a few key issues. (How else to explain the vile, immoral trash being continually reelected on both sides of the political aisle?) While I can certainly see the logic in acting that way, let me share with you what I view as a pearl of wisdom from the writers of this nation’s constitution. The founding fathers realized, (perhaps with somewhat condescending logic) that not every citizen of this country would be able or willing to keep up with every political issue needing the nation’s attention. I think this is what led them to make the United States a representative democracy, rather than a true democracy, despite the logistical obstacles to running the latter in their time. In the early years, voters selected the nation’s leadership from the respected leaders of their communities, often without the candidate’s exhortation. The logic required of such choices was simple: “Who do I trust to be of sound mind and moral character, responsible enough to inform themselves thoroughly concerning the issues, and articulate enough to spur their fellow thinkers in Congress to see the logic of their reasoning?”

These days, no longer. We all think we know more about every issue than the people we send off to Washington to represent us... and given who we choose to send, it is quite possible that we do. Ask yourself if you’d trust the candidates you vote for to make “the right” decision on some new issue that comes up during their term of office. Do you trust their judgement and logic, or do they just check the same boxes you do in the voter’s pamphlet? Surprise, surprise, those folks see a backlog of new bills each session: most of which you never hear anything about. If your congressional repsentatives only have to satify you on a handful of key issues get your vote, they are free to pursue pork-barrel projects; the vast majority of cases you have no clue about: be it farm subsidy, nuclear waste, the DC budg medical fraud, or science funding. I still hold to the old myth of choosing a congressman: find someone I trust. Even if you don’t agree with them on every issue (and I usually don’t) I still think that I’m making the right choice. I’m lucky to have a few people I think I can trust in my home district. One is a Repub, one is a Democrat, but they really plays to the part. To make up their own mind, and tell me what I want them to do. I’m there to do better informed than most. I’d think that I can trust in them to do.

Rob, you’re an old fart.

—Will Reyans, whom I trust for a very helpful critical rev of this article.

So I beg of you, when you vote, only vote on those races and issues of which you have a solid understanding and knowledge.

November 14, 1996

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PRESIDENT: Faculty Search Committee wants your input

CONTINUED FROM PAGE I

candidates are not likely to visit the campus before being chosen. This secrecy will protect candidates who might feel uncomfortable with the attention associated with candi-
date for Caltech President.

Once the short list of candi-
dates is compiled by the Faculty Search Committee, the Trustees’ Selection Committee (made up of members of the Caltech Board of Trustees) will choose a candidate. The chosen candidate will be con-
tacted, and if he or she accepts the position, he or she will take over the office of President after Presi-
dent Everhart’s retirement.

The Caltech President is heavily involved in raising the money required to keep Caltech running on a day-to-day basis. Good communication skills and a keen political (and business) mind are key. The president must also promote Caltech’s reputation both by meeting with national and in-
istitutions, and by giving speeches nationwide. The presi-
dent must keep up to date with current trends in science and in-
dustry to keep Caltech in touch with a changing world. He or she must deal with the faculty on a day-to-day basis. The president also appoints and manages Caltech’s vice-presidents. Candi-
dates for the job of president are expected to possess good leader-
ship skills and the knowledge nec-
essary to allow Caltech to succeed in cutting edge technologies and scientific fields.

The search committee has been consulting members of the Caltech/JPL community over the past several weeks, receiving in-
put from the faculty, staff (on campus and at JPL), graduates, and undergraduates. The commit-
tee will also seek advice from outside sources in academia, in-
dustry, business, and government.

The Faculty Search Commit-
tee has already met with mem-
bers of ASCIIT and the IHC. The stu-
dent officers have asked the com-
mittee to seek a president cerned with undergraduate educa-
tion and student life, especially the honor system and the honor system. Other issues that student raised included controlling tuition increases and fostering great-
student-faculty interaction.

Members of the Faculty Search Committee are: David Anderson, Pat Jennings, Julia Komfeld, Tom Pi-
rey, Tom Prince, Douglas Rui, David Stevenson, Kip Thom (Chair), and Jerry Nunnally (Advis-
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