the rotation experiment

Faculty fought against ranking all houses

BY SONIA TKOO

Faculty members on the Student Housing Committee (SHC) attempted to reinstate the old Rotation Rules—where freshmen could guarantee their exclusion from up to three Houses—just days before school started. This ruling was subsequently overturned by Acting Vice President of Student Affairs John Hall, allowing for Rotation to proceed as planned.

The SHC said they acted in response of the request of several upperclassmen that sent emails citing concerns with the new House rating system. Their June 5 email to the SHC warned that pre-frosh would feel “backed into a corner” by the new rules, and might try to game the system to have some semblance of control.

Not only did the SHC argue that the rules were unfair to frosh, but Caltech risked breaking a promise Admissions made to several pre-frosh and parents before matriculating to Caltech—that they could definitely avoid any three houses.

“We formally apologized to Admissions for not having informed them about our changes,” said Rudock House president Richard Jones.

These combined concerns prompted the 12-member SHC to call a meeting to discuss and vote on the changes. In the Aug 30 resulting meeting, the SHC voted against the IHC’s new changes eight to four, with one abstention.

“I thought a reasonable compromise would have been to postpone the Rotation changes until next year, so there could be more discussion,” said physics professor and former Caltech undergraduate Kenneth Libbrecht, “but the IHC wanted to implement the new policy this fall. Various people were persistent.”

Libbrecht, a former Caltech undergraduate, said he appreciated that his “opinions mattered in an absolute sense, not just as input to decisions made by upperclass students.”

Members of the IHC said they were greatly disappointed by the result of the SHC proceedings. “I actually thought that they would be completely convinced,” said Ricketts House president Chris Moody.

“Once we started talking, and I saw everyone on the committee, I had a change of heart.”

Overall, the IHC felt that their positions were insufficiently represented due to numerous factors, claiming the presentation of misinformation. “Professor Libbrecht’s information was partially incorrect,” said Jones.

“He had the opportunity to exclude houses when he was here [as an undergraduate in the late 1970’s]. We have evidence that it had not always been that way. Rotation had been changed in the interim to accommodate the needs of Rotation.”

The IHC was surprised at the end of the meeting, when it was revealed that proxy votes had been cast.


Price-matching capped at bookstore

BY NATALYA KOSTANDOVA

Students won’t be able to get the same textbook bargains this fall after the bookstore implemented a new policy that sets a lower bound on the price.

Prompted by an annual loss of $30,000 due to price matching, the change sets the minimum to be the price for which the bookstore purchased the textbook from the seller, not including shipping costs.

Although Caltech remains one of the few institutes in the country that price matches textbooks, some students find the change frustrating.

“I understand why the bookstore does this,” said Ben Zax, a sophomore, “but if they can’t consistently get new books as cheaply as the students can, then they aren’t really providing a service to the students by stocking the books.”

The change in the policy is not one that they wanted to implement, according to Judi Capron, Manager of the bookstore, and Lainwood Tabara, the Senior Buyer.

“Our mission is service, and we’re not here to make money.”

The Caltech bookstore can no longer match web prices after losing thousands to the policy.


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Volleyball women seek a win

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On October 3rd “President” Bush vetoed a bill called the State Children’s Health Insurance Program or SCHIP. This was only Bush’s fourth veto and unsurprisingly it has caused a general uproar from the Democrats who have threatened to override it. The popular and often spoken about portion of this bill is that it would provide health insurance to 6 million of the 9 million uninsured children. The vetoing of this bill is, however, a move that only goes right back into student hands in form of funding for clubs and social events. Curiously, these same groups pay almost 50% of the student budget and over $14.50 per person per term. Out of the social fund comes money for the dorms in concentrated form of funds to inter-collegiate athletic barbecues. Although there are some individual sports teams, such as the Euro Party Roy last year, most of the social budget goes to support the ASCIT Social Team, a group I myself (and you might have served on) for two years. If you want to be involved in spending the social fund, there are two openings for the fall term. Email esc@caltech.edu if interested.

Club funding is mostly distributed during a day-long meeting Spring term. Each ASCIT-registered club fills out a request form and their officers are briefly interviewed; these interviews are very low-key and serve to make sure that our money is spent effectively. The exact amount of money and restrictions on its use vary from club to club, but most clubs get the entire amount they request; this money is then used for anything from buying food for meetings to investing in new equipment.

On social and club funding, the next major expenditures are for operations and salaries. Operations include purchasing new DVDs for the DVD library (3rd floor of SFL), maintaining equipment for the Jam Room, keeping the lights and speakers intact, and other expenses. The editors and business managers of ASCIT publications are paid salaries along with the website development team. In order to leverage this money more effectively, ASCIT has been moving money from fixed salaries to bonuses. The editors, authors and managers are rewarded for their hard work to get a publication put out on time and under budget.

The Tech is an exception to this norm; rather than ASCIT paying a salary for its editors, its funding is set by the bylaws at 10% of ASCIT’s operating budget, or about $6750. The Tech then determines this budget with subscription and advertising revenues and from this pot comes both the Tech’s overhead and salaries. This allows for greater journalistic independence; we cannot draw a salary (or even half a salary) if we were to write a critical article about us [Editor’s note: That ‘er, didn’t work either].

ASCIT’s membership fee allows for greater student autonomy. Clubs are able to operate with very little supervision or control from the school administration. Parties and fun social events can happen without dening an indiviudal’s or her/his pocketbook of ASCIT’s dues, although a measly $2.50 per term, go a long way toward improving student life at Tech.
Profes voted 8-4 for old rules

by SHC members who had not shown up at the meeting. Fleming president Rob Hunter said, “During the meeting I thought we had okay dialogue, and it seemed like we had a shot. And then suddenly [Professor Libbrecht] said we also have these email votes; four for keeping the old ranking system, one for the new one, and one abstain.” IHC Secretary Leightland Feinman said, “It felt like somewhat of an affront to me that people who had not spoken to us at all had sent in their votes.”

The 12th and absent SHC member, Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs and Campus Life Tom Mannion, did not cast a vote of any form. “I wasn’t going to vote because I wasn’t there in the debate,” Mannion said. “I’ve been a part of the process that led to the changes for two years. I fully supported what [the IHC] did, and I made that known to fellow [SHC] committee members.” According to the IHC, the odds of eliminating three houses had been accepted for years until last fall when a rumor propagated amongst prefrosh that if they rated Ricketts House all at work, they would not be placed anywhere. As a result, so few students rated Ricketts—including those that had previously expressed interest to the upperclassmen—that the House director of the number of spaces that it had reserved for new students.

“As we observed last year, ‘self-fulfilling rumors’ like ‘Everybody who ranks Ricketts will get into Ricketts’ have a disproportionate influence on the system,” said IHC Chairman Mike Woods.

However, Woods remained adamant that this had not been the case last year, claiming that regardless of rumors, “not every frosh who ranked Ricketts was placed into Ricketts.”

The IHC argued to the SHC in an email that “the change to the rating system both quells any possibility of damaging rumors spreading as well as encourages all new freshmen to give a fair chance to, and to seriously consider all of the Houses.”

“Going from ‘you can rule out three’ to ‘you can maybe rule out one if you ask nicely’ still represents a pretty significant decrease in the amount of guaranteed control frosh have over their fate.”

Senior Sami Zerrade

Bookstore losing money on textbooks

serous piano study with James Boyk, Caltech Pianist in Residence 1974-2004, internationally known recording artist, Wednesdays at 11am.

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just being curious

From the lab to the living room: Caltech's Mark Davis is one of several professors starring in the new PBS documentary “Curious.”

How they were chosen

Caltech is widely regarded as a temple for brilliant research in all spheres of science and technology, so making a choice about the works to be highlighted in CURIOUS was not easy, according to the producer. “We had to see what stories could be gorged into scenes,” said Mannucci. “We decided to work on two concepts that would be meaningful to the public—survival and the brain and artificial intelligence, which is a very timely subject.”

In 2005, Mannucci and Tara Thomas pre-interviewed 40 scientists via video conference calls. “Mark Mannucci and Tara Thomas and we [Caltech] discussed topics and people who might be covered,” said Jill Perry, director of Caltech PR. “We shared with them the projects that we thought might be interesting to television viewers and they looked at them in terms of the visual possibilities, what were the ultimate goals of the researchers, and how could these stories be translated and comprehended by the average public television viewer.”

Birth of CURIOUS

Caltech approached the former head of WNET with the idea of doing a feature on science and research in America and the role Caltech plays internationally. “The initial idea was to do an interview-based talk show,” said Mannucci.

“However, it was not visual enough to convey the concept. Many TV shows use a narrator or a host. But we wanted to let the scientists and the people whose lives had been changed by their research, be in the show. We really wanted their stories to come to the forefront. It is a very human character driven show, not a technical one.”

Although initially the interviews were supposed to be only a couple hours, the project soon became very extensive. “As Mark and Tara started learning more and about the research projects, they decided they didn’t want to shortchange these stories that deserved much more delving, much more footage, many more voices,” said Perry.

“So, for example, it just wasn’t going to be ample to interview Mark Davis in his lab about the human trials he’s involved in at City of Hope. That would have done an injustice to him, the patients, and all the individuals at City of Hope who are also working on the project.”

Mark Mannucci believes that being an outsider to the scientific research culture helped a lot with the production. “It was really important for these stories to be clear to the general public,” said Mannucci. “It would have been harmful to be an insider because when you are so deep inside sometimes it is hard to step back and see how to get it out there. I used myself as a filter and to represent people elsewhere.”

CURIOUS is a co-production of Thirteen/WNET New York and Caltech and will air in Los Angeles on KCET on Thursday, November 15, from 9 to 11 pm.

KAUST Discovery Scholarship

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PLACE: The Avery Conference Room -- Avery Building

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‘Avoid Boring People’ a bit boring

BY MARK EICHENLAUB

James Watson’s title for his newly-released autobiography, Avoid Boring People, turned out to have nearly as many twists as does the double helix structure of DNA he co-discovered more than fifty years ago.

Watson sat, his pleated right pant leg folded comfortably over the stage in the lineup. ‘Vers ving’ was his first impression on the stage of Ramo Auditorium last Tuesday, Sept. 25. That same day marked the release of his book, a didactic recounting of his life story. Sharing the stage was a Caltech colleague, placed there so as to have someone with whom to converse, and a single plant on a table, placed there for reasons not explained.

Watson was far from the intimidating image his scientific, and public, reputation might suggest. But although Dr. Watson may have looked completely ordinary to me, I was sure that if I could only peer a bit more closely through the densely-packed crowd I would, instantly, recognize double helices parading around Watson’s head like a crown of laurels.

Near the beginning of his conversation, Watson explained that Avoid Boring People has a double meaning. If ‘boring’ is an adjective, the title becomes a brash, implicit condemnation of a presumably large portion of humanity. If ‘boring’ is a verb, the title becomes either a much-humbered admonition to make yourself interesting, or possibly advice to refrain from permeating horror movie-like assaults on your fellows with a cordless drill.

The full irony of Watson’s title only struck me later, while walking through the volume’s text and reaching my hand up to cover yet another yawning. How could I be bored by a book about a life as rich as Watson’s? For starters, in 347 pages and nearly eighty years of life, there is not one giant explosion in the entire book (although there is almost an atomic bomb, but not quite). Second, here is the book’s sexiest scene, copied word for word...

Astonished, Watson’s book doesn’t hide any aspect of his life in science. He discusses the science he and his colleagues advanced, but just as much the politics of how it was made to work, and the social life that barely had time to exist around it.

After finishing his description of each stage of his life, Watson leaves the reader with bullet-marked bits of advice, like “Choose a young thesis adviser.” “Work on Sundays”, and “Don’t anticipate a fluctuations Santa Clara gift [when accepting your Nob­bel Prize].” For readers in a hurry, these are collected on the last few pages.

Volleyball seeks first win

BY YANG YANG

The Caltech women’s volleyball team lost in straight games 30-16,30-21,30-15 at Claremont-Mudd-Scripps on Friday. Junior Marie Giron and sophomore Lisa Yee led the team in kills with three apiece while freshman Kathryn Petersen led in digs with seven.

The Stags faced a team all above 5’8”, while the Beavers’ tallest player was 5’10”. [The CMS team] were a bunch of Amazons, said senior David Kenstner. “They were extremely tall.”

Friday’s game at CMS was preceded by a disappointing loss to Whittier on home court. The Beavers lost in straight games 30-19,30-12,30-26.

The game was supposed to be one of the team’s best chances at garnering its first SCIAC conference win. Whittier had been previously winless in conference play. The CMS’s lone win came against La Sierra University, which Caltech almost beat 3-2 in the home opener.

“It was very disappointing,” said team captain Sarah Stidham. “We should have won. I still feel like we were the better team. It just didn’t come together like it should have.”

Although only 63 people attended the game according to official records, finding a seat in the Blachers was quite difficult.

“For Caltech, so many fans there,” said Stidham. “It’s much better than playing in an empty gym.”

Several seats that ranked the home crowd, one of the referees was escorted out of the gym by security after match ended.

With 11 matches down, the Beavers have improved team communication with three freshmen starters in the lineup.

“We are definitely coming to gether as a team,” said Stidham. “We understand better how we play. Letting a ball drop between two people or running into another person doesn’t happen as much.”

Petersen believes the team has yet to play in its best form. “I just don’t think we’re playing to our fullest potential,” she said. “Hopefully we’ll find our groove. I hope the second half will be better.”

The Beavers will be looking to start off the second half with a win at home against West Coast Baptist Monday night. The team had previously lost 3-1 to the Eagles on Sept. 13. This time, however, Caltech will hold the home court advantage.

“Exciting to have them playing here. They packed their gym because there’s nothing else to do in Lancaster,” Stidham said. “We’re looking to have the crowd on our side this time.”

Men’s soccer loses 6-0 to Redlands

BY RAM KANDASAMY

The Caltech men’s soccer team lost 6-0 to Redlands on Saturday, dropping their record to 0-8 in SCIAC conference play.

The 7:1 Bulldogs tripled their score from the last time the two teams played. On Sept. 12 the Beavers held Redlands to only two goals in a 2-0 loss.

“It’s very different playing here,” Hamasch said. “The last time we played [Redlands], we lost 2-0 and we came off the field cheering and the other team hung their heads as if they had lost.”

The soccer team also lost 6-0 to Claremont-Mudd-Scripps Wednesday.

The estrogen factor

Due to Caltech’s size and strong focus on academics means, the school cannot field a women’s soccer team due to lack of participation.

However, that did not stop junior Sierra Petersen and freshman Rebecca Scholz from loving the sport they love.

“Our situation is unique,” Petersen said. “I haven’t seen another girl on any team we have faced.”

Both have played soccer from a very young age, and they have enjoyed the sport the whole time. “I started playing when I was 5 in [Little League],” Scholz said.

Although both felt it would have been ideal for there to be a women’s team, they agreed that playing soccer on the men’s team was far better than no soccer at all.

Petersen and Scholz agree that there is some difficulty in adapting to the men’s game. The men’s game is much faster and more aggressive, according to Petersen. Both knew they had to make a lot of adjustments.

However, both players were extremely happy overall to play soccer on the men’s team. Neither feels estranged by their teammates due to the gender gap. According to Scholz, she is treated not differently than her male teammates.

“It works out well here because the focus of the team is on playing for fun rather than just wins and losses,” said Petersen. “The coach is really fair about our situation.”

Upcoming games

Monday, 10/8: 5:00PM – Women’s Volleyball vs. West Coast Baptist College Wednesday, 10/10: 4:00PM – Men’s Soccer vs. Occidental College 6:00PM – Men’s Water Polo vs. Chapman Univ.

Thursday, 10/11: 7:30PM – Women’s Volleyball vs. Southwestern (AZ)

Saturday, 10/13: 9:00AM – M/W Cross Country @ SCIAC Multi-Dual (Chino) 11:00AM – Men’s Soccer vs. Cal Lutheran University 11:00AM – Men’s Water Polo vs. Occidental College 7:30PM – Women’s Volleyball vs. La Sierra University

James Watson signs his new book at his promotion two weeks ago in Ramo Auditorium.
Some think complex calculation.
We think basic logic.

Equity and Fixed Income PhD Presentation
Date: Thursday, October 11, 2007
Time: 4:00 pm
Location: Beckman Auditorium

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Date: Monday, October 15, 2007
Time: 5:00 pm
Location: Athenaeum Faculty Club

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1. Your graphics are so beautiful they rival Doom 3
2. I wish I could be DNA helicase so I could unzip your genes
3. There’s a launch party in my pants and you’re invited.
4. So, you’re a girl huh?
5. Are you busy tonight at 3 a.m.?
6. Be unique and different, say yes.
7. The voices in my head told me to come over and talk to you.
8. Are you sure you’re not a parking ticket? Because you have fine written all over you
9. Want to come see my hard drive? It’s not 3.5 inches and definitely not floppy.
10. I like your Maxwell’s Equations t-shirt... on my floor.

Comics

MY HOBBY:

Using the more obscure meanings of "affect" and "effect" to try to trip up amateur grammar Nazis.

I think that our foreign policy effects the situation.

You mean "affects."

Hey, do you ever wonder what it would be like if college were more like Hogwarts?

No.

How so?

No, no, no. I bet it would be awesome. But if I had my way, I would totally have Gandalf teach instead of Dumbledore. His classes would be really tough.

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