Frosh Advising Sees a Makeover

By June Zhang

The Faculty Board Committee approved a new Frosh Adviser system this last week. The new system, created by the Dean of Students Office and the Office of the Vice Provost, is aimed at increasing student and faculty interactions and will take effect next September.

Under the new system students will see changes in the way frosh advisers are assigned to students. Rather than assigning individual students, thirty-six faculty members volunteered to take groups of seven to eight freshmen as advisers. The groups will meet and interact several times each term and the frosh advisers will have a budget they are expected to spend on their students to get to know them better. Additional individual students still will be provided if necessary.

Next year’s frosh advisers are expected to help freshmen and academic issues as well as social and emotional issues dealing with the adjustment from high school to college. Said Barbara Green, Associate Dean of Students, “It will be a good opportunity for freshmen to get to know at least one faculty member really well... we’re really happy to see so many volunteers.” The volunteer faculty members will mainly advise freshmen and may have one or two upperclassmen advisers.

Currently, freshmen are assigned advisers based on their intended majors. The administration lets each department know how many students intend to major in that field, and the department decides how to assign the students to advisers. Instead of assigning freshmen to advisers by their intended majors, there will be lunches and other activities to do something very exciting, from a social sciences perspective.”

-- Professor Jean Ensminger

undergraduates would be good for such a study. Students enrolled in next year’s class will help gather data and analyze the information, and students are already helping to formulate the experiments as part of a preparatory class. Ensminger said that before meeting with the students “I did not have it all fleshed out... did not have the background knowledge,” connections. Since then the students have helped to refine the project before its debut next winter.

According to Ensminger, most of these students are excited about the project. Sierra Petersen, a senior in the class, said of a diagram from Ensminger’s similar work on a tribe in Kenya. “Once you see that [the diagram] everyone here is like I wonder what Caltech would be like... It draws you in.”

The houses are the first consideration that come to many students’ minds, but Petersen said she is interested to see how the other parts play out. Ensminger said, “Houses will be one element in the social network analysis that will be influential,” but that the results may challenge or reaffirm some of those assumptions, and that there may be some interesting things we discover.” Such points will focus on things freshmen should know. In addition, all frosh advisers will attend the Breakfast with Faculty Advisers during orientation. Whether the new Frosh Adviser system encourages student and faculty interactions will be up to the next year’s freshmen to decide.

Calttech Students Part of New Social Experiment

By Joel Nikolaus

In a somewhat uncharacteristic reversal, Calttech students may soon be the subjects of an experiment rather than just curious onlookers. Next year Professor Jean Ensminger, along with students who enroll in An 150, will begin what she hopes will be a long-term study examining the undergraduate social network.

By gathering information on Calttech’s social network, Ensminger said she hopes to answer such questions as how information and ideas flow between students and as the study progresses how an individual’s position in the Calttech social network predicts an individual’s success after graduation. “We are doing something very exciting, from a social sciences perspective,” said Ensminger.

An anonymous survey will be used to establish directional relationships between all the members of the community. The experiment is limited to undergraduates partly out of practical considerations. It is important to have a closed population. While there will be some connections to the outside, Ensminger hopes that the undergraduate community may be relatively self-contained. She acknowledged that it is “never going to be perfect,” but she thought that Calttech’s

Brian Walter, presumably a Caltech alumni, pondered his Caltech experience. Alumni from all classes converged on Caltech for Alumni Weekend and Seminar Day.

Student Affairs Appoints New MOSH

By Casey Jao

Starting July 1st, Professor Geoffrey Blake will assume the role of Master of Student Houses (MOSH). He got news of his appointment last Tuesday night, shortly before the Caltech Directory email announced the decision. Blake will replace current MOSH Cathy Jurca. “My wife Karen and I are very excited,” said Blake. “I think he’ll be good,” said IHC Chair Pat Gullan. “He really knew exactly how he wanted to approach the job... He has a lot of history with Caltech... very optimistic.” IHC members interviewed the final few candidates and submitted their recommendations to Vice President of Student Affairs Annelia Sargent, who made the final appointment.

“He’s a nice guy... seems pretty interested in what students are doing,” said sophomore Tristan Brown, who has Blake as his advisor. Blake received his PhD in Chemistry in 1986 from Caltech, and, with his wife, was among the first Avery faculty-in-residence. His research group studies problems in cosmochemistry, which he described as “using telescopes and chemistry” to examine young planetary systems. He has been teaching the undergraduate
I would like to take a moment and discuss the reasons why our course feedback systems are in their present state, and what will happen to them as the nature.

As of Fall 2008, all campus courses were using the "faculty TQFR", with the same set of questions serving for feedback geared towards students, professors and TAs alike. To make way for the new campus-wide TQFR, CLUE was not published this year.

The changes to the questions and survey format that the Council on Undergraduate Education and Melany Hunt implemented during second term made the surveys reasonable for lecturers and TAs's, but made the comments invisible to students. As Casey Jao pointed out in last week’s issue, this change all but eliminated the student-to-student functionality of TQFR. This was done partly under the approximately 100 hours of work per term necessary to screen the approximately 100 hours of work per term necessary to screen the comments, and partly under pressure from members of the ARC, who receive it despite hard work on their material and presentation.

Another argument, according to Melany Hunt, is that no surveys publish their comments such as "synthetized," "depersonalized" form. According to Prof. Hunt, this does not encourage constructive feedback and improvements to teaching.

Objectively, students and faculty have different expectations for course feedback content; what is useful for faculty is not necessarily useful for students and vice versa. The term "constructive feedback" to the faculty is essentially something that will help them improve, but the range of feedback that is useful to students is much wider, as most people look to TQFR for factual information and opinions. It is not necessary to make the TQFR not as a survey, but more as an information resource. Therefore, we have also explored several alternatives that would allow publication of student-to-student feedback, such as appending the feedback to the published question to TQFR. However, for such questions to be useful results, it must contain rather explicit directions that would be put to work for the survey. Splitting all the comment boxes in the current TQFR into student- and faculty-oriented feedback will not be able to put in the approximately 100 hours of work per term necessary to screen the comments, and partly under pressure from members of the

The California Tech

Torture vs. Beheading?

By Daniel Alvarez

The extreme left loons that believe Bush and Cheney are war criminals and should go to jail are few, but they are a loud few. Personally, I am in favor of harsh methods of interrogation, methods of terrorists, so long as it is only used on people that we have significant certainty terrorists and the intent is to save American lives. The argument that truly makes my blood boil is when it is said that torture making for the Talibah and Al Queda. I Qaeda, I would like to tell someone the feeling of internment in the Talibah and Al Qaeda. It is said that we are just as bad as the Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the man who admitted to torturing Daniel Waterboarding him with a doctor present at all times. It is said that the only way to get the truth is by accusing Americans who we keep us safe for 8 years. When, was the rage when the video of Nick Berg being beheaded was released as part of a campaign to silence the Talibah for torture it’s illegal for us to do the same. I cannot stomach the argument from the right that waterboarding (or waffling for that matter) are not torture. The Geneva Conventions. Why? Well, aside from the fact that the US has prosecuted accused war crimes of waterboarding, we have convicted democratic law enforcers for waterboarding in the past 30 years. Yes, there is a way to get those enhancements, Enhanced Interrogative Techniques were taken from a program designed to train US soldiers for torture, aside from the fact that the Bush administration and represent but a tiny sliver of the full picture, seem already staunchly convinced that the efficacy of torture was it was not a success. However, if it is discovered that the torture of terrorists prevent the Talibah for torture it’s illegal for us to do the same. I cannot stomach the argument from the right that waterboarding (or waffling for that matter) are not torture. The Geneva Conventions. Why? Well, aside from the fact that the US has prosecuted accused war crimes of waterboarding, we have convicted democratic law enforcers for waterboarding in the past 30 years. Yes, there is a way to get those enhancements, Enhanced Interrogative Techniques were taken from a program designed to train US soldiers for torture, aside from the fact that the Bush administration and represent but a tiny sliver of the full picture, seem already staunchly convinced that the efficacy of torture was it was not a success. However, if it is discovered that the torture of terrorists prevent the

Cheney Goes to Jail

By Evans Boney

I can’t believe we’re having this conversation. Whether or not the professional war criminals in our borders should even be prosecuted? If we violate our constitutional right to due process, accountable must be punished. What kind of country are we living in today? However, if it is discovered that the torture of terrorists prevent the Talibah for torture it’s illegal for us to do the same. I cannot stomach the argument from the right that waterboarding (or waffling for that matter) are not torture. The Geneva Conventions. Why? Well, aside from the fact that the US has prosecuted accused war crimes of waterboarding, we have convicted democratic law enforcers for waterboarding in the past 30 years. Yes, there is a way to get those enhancements, Enhanced Interrogative Techniques were taken from a program designed to train US soldiers for torture, aside from the fact that the Bush administration and represent but a tiny sliver of the full picture, seem already staunchly convinced that the efficacy of torture was it was not a success. However, if it is discovered that the torture of terrorists prevent the

The Future of TQFR and CLUE

By Andrey Poletayev

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The California Tech is obligated, under the ASCIT Bylaws, to publish the minutes of the Board of Directors. The BoD minutes are published as received and without further abridgment. For unabridged versions of the minutes, consult Laura Conwill, ASCIT Secretary.

The Editors include minutes from IHC meetings and excerpts from the ARC’s meetings voluntarily as a service to the community.

The Editors

The Academics and Research Committee is pleased to announce:

2009 ASCIT Teaching and Staff Awards

- Kerry Vahala - Professor, Applied Physics and Information Science and Technology
- Sandra Trojan - Professor, Applied Physics, Aeronautics and Mechanical Engineering
- Tim Raub - Lecturer, Geology
- Chris Umans - Professor, Computer Science
- Steve Frautschki - Professor Emeritus, Physics
- Liilan Wong - Teaching Assistant, Mathematics
- Deepak Mishra - Teaching Assistant, Biochemistry
- Chris Wegg - Teaching Assistant, Physics
- Charlotte Whitel - Teaching Assistant, Chemistry
- Peter Daily - Director of Dining
- Gilbert Rodriguez - Dining Staff

Thank you for your outstanding contribution to this school and us! Awards Ceremony Date TBA, week of June 1st.

We have received a total of 126 nominations.

FEATURES

May 18, 2009

Social Experiment

From SOCIAL EXPERIMENT Page 1

of interest include just how the various houses, and the individuals in them, interact with one another.

While Ensminger is optimistic about the project, she also said it could fail. Her biggest concern is that in order for the results to be meaningful the response rate from students has to be “something very close to 100 percent...one of the main determinants of whether this succeeds is the response rate of the survey.” Some of the students currently involved with the project, and aware of Techers’ attitudes towards surveys, showed some concern.

Most still seemed optimistic. “I think it’s going to work well. Most Techers should appreciate we are doing this for science, not the administration,” said Joe Salamon, another student in the course.

The students are working with Ensminger to make the survey as brief as possible, “homing down to the very minimum of questions.” There will also likely be some sort of incentive for students filling out the survey. If the experiment goes well, Ensminger said that not only will they have data on the interactions of Caltech in any given year, but will be able to see how the social network changes over time.

There will also be four years of data on single individuals.

Combined with other data that can possibly be obtained from the registrar, it will provide a broad set of information with which to compare students after they leave Tech.

One fact that she was clear to point out was that the project is “not attempting to change Caltech culture.” Salamon said she made this fact very clear at the beginning of the class.

Any additional information gathered from the registrar or other sources would only be with student permission. Additionally, Ensminger said there would be “very strict protocols regarding the confidentiality of the data...absolute anonymity,” said Ensminger.

The idea is in line with Ensminger’s other work involving tribes and groups in Africa. The idea to do a similar study on the Caltech student body came to her seven years ago. She went far as to speak to all the house presidents about it, but the project was postponed when she became the Division Chair of H.S.S. and then again by a sabbatical.

In describing the plans behind the project, Ensminger rolled out a large chart with a multitude of colored, interconnected dots. The chart is meant to show the connection between individuals of a Kenyan tribe in response to the question “Who do you go to for advice?” Caltech would produce a similar diagram.

ASCIT Board of Directors Meeting – Minutes

May 15, 2009

Officers Present: Anthony Chong, Pallavi Gunalan, Michael Maseda, Maral Mazrooii, Nadia Seif, Laura Conwill

Officers Absent: Andrea Polen

Guests: Tim Black, Perrin Considine, Sarah Marzen

Call to order: 12:15 PM

Funding requests:
- Harvey Mudd Party: We will have to pay for buses for the Harvey Mudd party, at an extra cost of up to $500. An official vote will occur next week, once the exact amount is known.
- Boba Party: Perrin got MHF funding for the boba party! It will likely occur on Friday, May 29. She requests additional money from ASCIT. Again, an official vote will occur next week, once the exact amount is known.

President’s Report:
- New MOSH: We have a new MOSH! His name is Geoff Blake, and he is a professor of chemistry and planetary science and a professor of chemistry.
- We have received a total of 126 nominations.
- President of the project, Ensminger rolled out a large chart with a multitude of colored, interconnected dots. The chart is meant to show the connection between individuals of a Kenyan tribe in response to the question “Who do you go to for advice?” Caltech would produce a similar diagram.

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Susan Lim

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PhD Comics

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OF THE POTENTIAL RESPONSES TO MY BRAKES' FAILURE, I DID NOT CHOOSE THE BEST.

HELLO, YOU'RE ON CAR TALK.

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Dear Gerard,

We regret to inform you that, due to the Economic Crisis, funding for all Humanities characters has been cut.

Sincerely,

-PHD Comics

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The OASIS Annual Culture Show

8:15 pm Friday, May 22, 2009
Ramo Auditorium

OUT OF CONTEXT

Out of Context: A Capella

MUSIC

DANCE

DRAMA

DINNER

Antarang... discover the soul of the subcontinent

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