Caltech, Harvey Mudd, and Scripps party- a success?

By Joel Nikolaus

Anthony Chong, ASCIT President, said that Tom Mannion estimated that over four hundred Caltech students attended the party this last Friday, well over the original estimate of only two hundred to three hundred students. Regardless of the large turnout, student reactions to the party were mixed. Some had good things to say about it, calling it "a great party". Several Mudd students said it was good to be "maintaining a nice, healthy rivalry."

Many Caltech students complained about the unconventional layout. Instead of being confined to the various house courtyards like most Caltech parties, the event was spread out on a large open space between the Mudd dorms, and it lacked the characteristic Caltech construction.

Some student complaints centered on the music. For the buses and the music- due to the ASCIT Board of Directors interest and not correctly guessing the "peak hours", according to Chong. "Originally, we planned for two buses and a third between the peak hours," said Chong. The purpose of the event was not just to put on a party, but to test the idea of mixing with another school.

Many students, both Harvey Mudd and Caltech, said that "it would be nice to do in the future." One Harvey Mudd student said that the party might not have been the best, but he was also quick to point out that "nothing went wrong." Several of the interviewed Mudd students asked, "Will you guys put one [a party] on?"

Chong said that it is "hard to do a first thing," and that he would "like to see something happen" that builds on this party. "I don't know what it would be.”

-- Anthony Chong, ASCIT President

Many students noticed the similarities between the two schools. Spread among four of Mudd’s eight houses, the party showed off similarities between Caltech’s Houses and Mudd’s Houses. At the different Mudd houses students gathered around a bonfire, played water pong, and listened to the Mudd jazz band.

One Mudd student said that Caltech students “fit in well” and said that they thought they were the “same kind of people.” Caltech students made similar statements. Some said they thought there would be more single house interaction, after noticing that students often congregated by school on the dance floor.

Freshman matriculation surges to 257, fears of a housing crunch

Administrators say it’s not a problem

By Tina Ding

Admissions confirmed 257 students have currently matriculated to Caltech this year, an increase of nine students from last year. Although the number is comparatively high, Caltech Housing says that it will still be able to accommodate the enrollment of the possible large class.

"The real negative aspect of a large class is sophomores getting pushed off the houses,” said Rick Bischoff, Director of Undergraduate Admissions.

The Interhouse Committee (IHC) only made space for 248 students. However, according to Peter Daily, Director of Housing and Dining, housing the students should not be a problem.

"We have flexibility on the balance of the Housing properties should it be necessary — given some advance knowledge that we will need to house additional freshmen,” said Daily. There is a discrepancy between the matriculation number and the students that actually attend in the fall. According to Bischoff, last year’s matriculation number of 248 dropped to a final number of 236 students. Some students decided to attend other schools once they were admitted off of those other schools’ waiting lists.

The number of last minute withdrawals was higher last year than in previous years, and Bischoff believes this year’s rates will be even higher due to the slow economy. According to Bischoff, attending college is especially stressful for the typical upper middle class family, which can’t easily pay college tuition but isn’t poor enough to receive aid.

So far, administrators don’t know about Harvard and Princeton’s waitlist situation, important factors for the number of students that drop Caltech admission at the last minute. Last year, Harvard and Princeton each accepted about 200 students from their waitlists.

“Our target is 230 students, which means a target of approximately 245 current matriculations,” said Bischoff. "While I would put my faith in Bischoff’s idea, I believe that if the number goes above the number given on the long lines for 12 IHC beds, the dorms will be a disaster,” said former IHC Chair Chris Watson. He envisions students being kicked out of their rooms or “unfairly” forced to share large singles as doubles.

The higher than targeted matriculation is surprising, according to Bischoff, because “Admissions made the exact same number of offers as last year and eliminated the merit scholarships.”

The increase in matriculation, Bischoff believes, is due to the “superior recruitment” in the last year. Admissions introduced webinars, online information chat sessions in SURF, student life, and medical school run by the representatives from each division, including alumni.

The diversity in the incoming class is also higher: 14% incoming students belong to minority groups, up from 8% last year. The percentage of women stayed steady at around 43%.
There is a saying in music that the first rendition of a piece you hear becomes your definitive rendition. I fell into a similar trap with TQFR. When the new TQFR results came out, I was sorely disappointed by the lack of entertaining comments that had made the previous TQFRs interesting to read. The survey questions are comprehensive and relevant. The response statistics give a detailed, concise if unspiced summary of a professor’s teaching. Many points normally covered in written critiques are enlightened in the questions. Many vague survey questions from the old TQFR have been refined. Instructors looking for targeted assessments of their performance will likely find the new TQFR valuable. But students would find TQFR even more helpful if they could view the course comments, which are currently restricted to text. Can these survey authors open-ended questions because no battery of questions of reasonable length can anticipate everything students have to say. Moreover, students often put more thought into their written responses than their 1-to-5 rankings. Further, words matter more than numbers in very small classes, when statistics don’t say much. In a class of three, for example, it’s likely that the students get offended since they are the subject of the comments. Maybe we should screen the comments from the professors instead. Perhaps a more workable solution would be to find students to screen the comments each week and mention them in the email. Compared to a permanent staff members, students would probably be everyone else, they might also accept other forms of compensation, like food. Alternatively, one could automate the screening process. Some online discussion boards automatically mask blacklisted words. It should not be hard to also flag variations such as those obtained by spacing the letters or inserting padding symbols. If a forum uses words to manage to evade a carefully written screening routine, it probably would evade a human reader as well.

Prior to TQFR, students turned to the ASCIT Chalk for course and instructor evaluations. This service is restricted to students who are members of ASCIT, hence cannot access the comments. As such, a lot of feedback we used to place on Clue with few results. By so doing, TQFR is open to both faculty and students, so will likely make a bigger impact on the Caltech experience. The surveys ought to continue. But there is no real benefit to withholding any part of the survey results from the community.
“State of Play” engages despite its sharp title

By Hillary Walker

The journalists face scenes that are both physically and emotionally frightening, and the film effortlessly maintains a mood of intense anxiety. Despite innumerable twists and new directions, the narrative remains quite taut. The history and motives of the characters are revealed through tiny fragments—a few illuminating sentences sprinkled here and there. In general, this subtle method strikes the ideal balance between clarity and concealment.

At times, “State of Play” pushes the bounds of plausibility, but this is a rather minor flaw in a thriller. The film’s end, however, is a larger problem. “State of Play” introduces grand topics such as the decline of newspapers and the privatization of war but unfortunately forsakes these subjects without thorough contemplation. The final vigorous twists pull the film into tangles, but these knots never seem to sum to a meaningful whole. By the closing minutes, everything feels disconnected. With abundant emotional thrills, “State of Play” is quite enjoyable, but ultimately, the work is perhaps too rich in scope to be forced into a package of two hours.

ASCIT Board of Directors
Meeting – Minutes
May 8, 2009

Officers Present: Anthony Chong, Andrey Poleteyev, Pallavi Gumalan, Murali Muzzoeei, Nadia Iqbal, Laura Conwill

Officers Absent: Michael Maseda

Guests: Tom Mannion, Sarah Marzen, Brian Merlob

President’s Report:

• Alumni Weekend: Alumni Weekend will be May 14-17. There will be lots of alumni around that weekend and they will be participating in house activities and attending academic lectures.

• V.P. of Nonacademic Affairs (ARC Chair): The ARC met with Melany this week, and they decided to go ahead with improving CLUE and make it the primary feedback website. About 30 faculty members have been recruited to be freshmen advisors for next year.

• V.P. of Academic Affairs (ARC Chair): The ARC is trying to organize more interviews for appointments. Two of the new RAs have been appointed; the other two will be appointed within the next week. Page had a productive meeting with the deans and the IHC on Wednesday regarding the alcohol policy.

• Operations Director: Mike has been emailing Tom to set up a meeting regarding the Big T. Mike emailed the grad student in charge of the bike shop who said that keys to the shop and available, and that every other weekend he has an open shop, a better option for many students. Mike is meeting with Dvin and Josh tonight to talk about dividing the work on the donut website between DevTeam and the donut team, and he will subsequently meet with the donut team.

• Treasurer: Murali has been working on finishing things up with last year’s budget, including DevTeam and some clubs.

• Social Director: The jazz band for ASCIT Formal is Lounge-o-rama. The HMC party is tonight and the ASCIT movie is tomorrow!

Other:

• Tom Mannion: Tom Mannion said the Beckman Institute is a very versatile party location. Several years ago, it was used for a Young Presidents’ Organization event. ASCIT should have no trouble holding ASCIT Formal at Beckman.

Submitted by Laura Conwill
ASCIT Secretary