John Johnson awarded Feynman Prize

In this issue

NEWS
New ASCIT minutes

OPINION
Moya Chen discusses Ricketts

FEATURE
Evil Dead a must-see for horror fans

SPORTS
A mixed bag of results for tennis team

Feynman Prize Committee

The committee met once, on February 6th, 2013, to consider the seventeen nominees for the 2013 prize. The field for the Feynman prize is always very strong. Creative and innovative teaching is alive and well at Caltech, and so this committee’s decision is often a difficult one.

However this year, one candidate immediately emerged as exceptional – a “true outlier”, in the words of a committee member – and the committee’s decision virtually made itself.

We unanimously and enthusiastically recommend that the 2013 Feynman Prize be awarded to Prof. John A. Johnson, Assistant Professor of Astronomy and Astrophysics.

Prof. Johnson, who came to Caltech in 2009, received ten nominations from students at both the undergraduate and graduate levels for his teaching across three classes: Ay 117: Statistics and Data Analysis in Astronomy, Ay 105: Optical Astronomy Instrumentation Lab, and Ay 20: Basic Astronomy and the Galaxy.

All writers in one way or another denominated him “by far, my favorite professor at Caltech” or “the best teacher at Caltech.” They lauded his “passion [not just] for education, but … for finding the best way possible to educate.”

Many had more than one class with Prof. Johnson, and almost all had words to the effect that they had “learned much more through [his] teaching style than [they] had in most of [their] other classes at Caltech.” Some even suggested that his influence went beyond the classroom: one student lauded “the influence he has had on our department in the three years he has been a professor” and another claimed that his teaching was so extraordinary that it “rocked the boat in the astronomy department, challenging our conceptions of how astronomy, and the sciences in general, are taught.”

Certainly, his influence on his students was profound. Praising him as “enthusiastic, proficient and insightful,” one student said that he is “a remarkable teacher who can not only enlighten students in the classroom but also sculpt their spirits for their future careers.”

Another called him “the kind of teacher who can change one’s life forever.” One of his graduate students said that that “he reminded me … why I wanted to be a scientist in the first place.”

Another called the experience of being his student “life-changing and inspirational.”

Students praised many features of Prof. Johnson’s teaching and mentoring:

• Working with his TA in setting up labs so that he knew firsthand exactly what the students were working on;
• Holding office hours late at night for the students’ convenience;
• Setting up “ExoLab” – weekly meetings in which his research group would talk about current results and work together on problems;
• His ability to “appear normal,” his approachability, “personal focus,” and clear concern for “students as people.”

But the feature that occasioned the most impassioned paens was his innovative use of class time. Rather than giving long lectures in class and then assigning illustrative problem sets as homework, Prof. Johnson kept lectures very brief (where he gave them at all) and divided the class into small groups, and has them work on worksheets together. He and the TA go from group to group to help with problems and answer questions as they arose. Students found this approach extraordinarily helpful. A “spirit of exploration” characterized Ay 20, said one participant, the “worksheets … lead [sic] us step-by-step to discover for ourselves the important results in astronomy.”

Attendance was consistently above 90%, and one student regretfully anticipated having “a huge gap in my life next term where all the wonderful hours of Ay 20 used to reside.”

And all whole taken Ay 117 likewise praised Prof. Johnson’s use of this technique in teaching statistics. One student said that it showed “how to structure a course that provides a deep theoretical understanding of underlying principles while simultaneously training students how to correctly apply these methods within their own day-to-day research activities.” Another remarked on the “efficiency and fertility of Prof. Johnson’s class: theory digested, independent thinking trained and cooperation developed.”

Making mistakes was no longer a thing to be feared, students learned that “errors are another way of learning.”

All agreed that a normally dry subject like statistics could be taught in such a user-friendly way.

In sum, we recommend that Johnson be awarded the Feynman prize because, in the words of his students, he “without question belongs to the extraordinary contingent of people that … leaves one grappling for superlatives.”

“Classroom experiences that are intellectually engaging, practical, and entertaining are incredibly rare. Through his teaching style, attention to detail, and unique course structure, Professor Johnson provides just such an experience.”

News briefs from around the globe

Helping readers burst out of the Caltech bubble

Need to know < 100 words about the world this week – topics sorted from good to bad by The Tech Eds

Advance in HIV research
1st time scientists track immune response for multiple strains

BRAIN Initiative unveiled
$100 million sought by Obama to fund major brain research

LA plans water cleaning
$290 million-a-year project would clean up pollution in rainwater

Anti-blasphemy law
3-week ultimatum given to Bangladesh gov to impose law, rejected

N. Korea nuke test
4th test country has made is hinted at to S. Korean intelligence

Search for kidnapped
2 boys taken by father from mother-in-law’s house, believed on boat

Religious strife in Cairo
1 killed and 80 injured in conflict following funeral of 4 Christians

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Food with Mannion!
Do you like eating food?
How about free food at nice restaurants?
Ever want to tell the world exactly what you think of said food?
The Tech will be becoming a new column to chronicle the foodie experiences of new writers every other week...The Catch: They’ll be going head-to-head with Tom Mannion who will be reviewing the same restaurant. If you have ever thought you were more of a gourmand than our resident master chef, now’s your chance to prove it!
Email us for a spot on the list at tech@caltech.edu

ASCIT Minutes
Minutes for April 1st, 2013. Taken by Allika Walvekar

Officers present: Diego Caporale, Pushpa Neppala, Mario Zubia, Michelle Tang, Allika Walvekar, Puikie Cheng, Connor Coley

Guests: Zach Rivkin, Connor Rosen

Call to Order: 9:16 pm

President’s Report (Diego):
Caltech won the Pasadena Games last Friday.
Games: Monster Croquet, Hunger Games, Ultimate Frisbee, Lego-es, Don’t trip the waiters, Human Race, Human Hamster-ball,
A task force has been established through the President’s Office to assess the Caltech Brand.
Honore code student committee will have a sign up this week ASCIT Formal is this weekend. It should be a lot of fun and remember it only a happens every other year.

Officer’s Reports:
V.P. of Academic Affairs (ARC Chair: Pushpa):
Professor of the Month reception for Gil Rafael is coming up ASCIT Teaching awards is Thursday May 23rd.
Option fair: April 5th at noon. Tom provided delicious food and attendance was high amongst freshman.

V.P. of Non-Academic Affairs (IHC Chair: Connor):
PFW: Pre-Frosh Weekend will take place between April 18th and 21st. PFW Rules can be found at http://ihc.caltech.edu/documents/prefrosh.html

Director of Operations (Mario):
Club Fair: Mario is working on the planning for the PFW Club Fair. Only registered Caltech clubs are allowed to participate. The Club Fair will Occur on April 19th from 4-5:30.

Treasurer (Puikie):
Toastmasters Club asked for funding for recording equipment. ASCIT advised them to assess the current recording equipment on campus and then return if they still need funding. Puikie will invite them to come next week.

Social Director (Michelle):
ASCIT Formal: April 13th 9pm - 1pm
Buses will transport students at 7:45. Dinner begins at 9pm
DJ Matt Gudis and Blown Out will be performing
Security and Bob Paz have been hired
Lloyd Interhouse was this weekend.
Upcoming events: Blacker Interhouse (Week 4), Iron Man 3 (Week 6), BFP (Week 8)

Secretary (Allika):
Checked in with Jon Webster about Coffee House Manager position.
Resolved confusion over the Sustainability Council Representatives.

If anyone has any questions or concerns about a section of the minutes please email the appropriate officer. We are happy to answer any questions.

Meeting Adjourned: 10:15
Administration unjustly punished Ricketts

MOYA CHEN
Contributing Writer

The houses do a lot for us undergrads. They are our safety nets during our first years away from home. They provide support, familiarity and friends when we need it most. For many of us, the houses are our surrogate families. So when there is supposed to be a surprise to anyone why I, along with many other undergraduates, find the effective disbandment of one of our houses to be extremely alarming.

For those of you who have not been informed of what has occurred, I will give a summary. On Friday, March 1, shortly after 3 p.m., an email was sent to the members of Ricketts House from the Dean's office. According to the email, members of Ricketts had committed violations that violated [deleted] Institute policy, and that “If the egregious nature of the actions—both actual and planned—the administration has no choice but to intervene.” Without detailing what these actions were, except saying that they were “confidential,” the email then went on to say that the punishment to the house. The punishments were as follows: “We are removing the leadership of Ricketts House from their positions, effective immediately.” “The house’s bursar’s account has been frozen, and no social events will be approved until further notice.” “Ricketts will not participate in rotation next year.” “Current members of Ricketts are not guaranteed a spot in the house next year.” “They will need to apply along with any other interested students, and residency will be approved by the dean’s office.”

In the past few weeks, additional actions against Ricketts have come to light, but rather to understandings for all our students that there are consequences to the choices that they make.” I find this to be a clever, but ultimately inaccurate, redefinition. Actions taken purely for the sake of creating consequences (rather than, say, repairing or illuminating damages), is, by definition, punitive. For example, the removal of rotation privileges would only be non- punitive if Ricketts had committed some rotation violation. As far as we know, this has not been the case—I will thus be using the word punishment to accurately describe the situation.

For me, this whole situation raises a barrage of questions. From those that had caused the problem. I can understand how a person, especially an administrator, frustrated as those administrators may have been, they dealt with the first group, innocent or otherwise. Additionally, while the administration may not be a formal court of law, their actions in recent events would be considered ineffective disbandment of one house automatically new freshmen in that house as a whole. Yet, despite all of this, no administrator in the past has so been brash as to act as they have done in recent events. In the past, if Ricketts did something wrong, the first thing that the administrators did was to deal with the individuals that had caused the problem. If Ricketts broke a window, people in the house were told to pay for it. If an individual was seen playing frisbee, the individual was given due process through the CRC and dealt with by regulated trial. As frustrated as those administrators may have been, they dealt with the events on a case-by-case basis, not as punishment to be doled out to everyone as quickly as possible. It is a procedural standpoint; their assumptions are full of holes. Rather than proceeding in a reasonable, open way, the administration has taken in a hasty manner. For the sake of the Caltech undergraduate community and the housing system, I want to see Ricketts live and thrive under their own terms, not extorted by outside forces that take impetuous actions out of lack of understanding.

I can only hope that in the future, those in the administration will take to heart the meaning of the phrase “Prenat tel que je suis.”
THE CALIFORNIA TECH

FEATUERE

Evil Dead brings horror genre back to its roots

CAMERON ALLEN
Contributing Writer

WARNING! THIS REVIEW MAY CONTAIN SPOILERS!

'Don't run into the woods! Don't turn around! Drums! I'm in ballroom dancing with her, you idiot!' These thoughts ran through my mind as I alternated between occupying the edge of my seat and seeking some kind of comfort and hiding by physically merging with the cushions. I never shielded my eyes, however, for fear of missing every nuance of the gore. I simply could not look away.

This year's Evil Dead is a remake of the 1981 horror cult classic, The Evil Dead. Like the original film, it tells a story that has become an archetype horror film: five college students drive out into the backwoods of rural America to spend time in a secluded cabin. Upon exploring the cellar, they come across the Necronomicon Ex-Mortis – The Book of the Dead. Some of its passages are recited, and an evil force is awakened and begins to possess the characters, forcing those remaining to do whatever is necessary to stay alive. Sam Raimi, the director of the original, produced this film and noticeably exhibited some creative control.

At the center of the story, we have Mia. A character without much glamour, she is a heroin junkie in desperate need of an intervention. The story is framed around this addiction, Mia's friends take her out to the cabin as a method of making her go cold turkey. The sickness withdrawal symptoms add an extra layer of depth to the first act, as it is often unclear whether Mia's experiences are real or just hallucinations. Mia is portrayed by Jane Levy, an actress who had personally never heard of but her performance was convincing and really displayed the frustration she was facing. I hesitated to call Mia the protagonist, however, her brother David carries out much of the action in the second half of the film and connects more with the viewer, representing the hero everyone doing the best he can in an extreme situation.

One issue that comes up when comparing the original film to its remake is the protagonist. In the 1981 version, the main character who goes crazy and becomes possessed is Ash, a goofy yet lovable guy who becomes Raimi's personal punching bag. In this film, we have Mia. A character without much glamour, she is a heroin junkie in desperate need of an intervention. The story is framed around this addiction, Mia's friends take her out to the cabin as a method of making her go cold turkey. The sickness withdrawal symptoms add an extra layer of depth to the first act, as it is often unclear whether Mia's experiences are real or just hallucinations. Mia is portrayed by Jane Levy, an actress who had personally never heard of but her performance was convincing and really displayed the frustration she was facing. I hesitated to call Mia the protagonist, however, her brother David carries out much of the action in the second half of the film and connects more with the viewer, representing the hero everyone doing the best he can in an extreme situation.

The actual horror in this film is not what modern audiences are accustomed to, that is, the horror is not built around children crouching on refrigerators or Bed sheets suddenly floating up in the breeze as a passive-aggressive sound engineer pours a jar of marbles on his keyboard. I get surprised when I drink my coffee and find out that the waitress mistakes me for a child. The reasons we go to the cinema to experience the scariest, most exhilarating and spectacular third acts in recent memory. When I originally heard about this project, I immediately assumed that it would be schlock, another tired reboot, a boring and shameless retreat of old material without the soul or heart that was invested in the original. Recently, a popular trend in Hollywood has been re-imagining old horror films from the '70s and '80s as cheaply and as possible. Why? Money, mostly. These films often earn five to ten times their budget at the box office. Michael Bay's production company, Platinum Dunes, has done various remakes of 80s horror, has the resources and time to create this pet project, one that he and Campbell have been working on for years.

The two reunited with Robert Tapert, the producer of the original trilogy, and the three-hand-selected a Uruguay director, Fede Alvarez, who had previously only directed short films. However, Alvarez has proven himself to be a quick study and can breathe new life into the franchise (topical quality, I suppose). They could have easily turned a quick buck selling out the franchise based on its name recognition alone, but their goal was never to make money; it was to introduce a new generation of movie-goers to the wonders and magic of Evil Dead. And in that intention, they have certainly succeeded. Raimi has said that the reason he loves filmmaking is that he has the opportunity to work directly with the audience, and that he considers his work to be a success if viewers are "uplifted" by the experience. In that respect, it was the most fun I have had watching a movie in a long time, and has reminded me of many things. I can now begin to think of entertainment, escape, and immersion.

I believe this installment will both please fans of the original trilogy and hopefully inspire new fans to delve deeper into the swarms of new horror films. If you are a fan of horror, you simply must see this one. For appropriate audiences, Evil Dead is recommended with.4 PN and a score of 9.9. Go see it!
Will changes to patent law hurt Caltech?

ELLA DODD
Contributing Writer

“Unlike a Cuisine—everything gets chopped up,” Dr. Raymond Deshaies, a professor of biology and the director of the new Institute for Stem Cell and Regenerative Medicine at Caltech says.

According to a 2010 report by the US Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) on the number of patents granted to Academic patent holders from 1969 and 2008, only the University of California and MIT had more patents than Caltech. Stanford University, located in the heart of Silicon Valley, was ranked fifth.

All that can change, however, due to several key provisions of the Leahy-Smith America Invents Act (AIA) that recently came into effect. The AIA calls for major changes to patent law that could have a serious impact on the way universities like Caltech and Stanford handle their intellectual property.

Caltech, Stanford, MIT, and nearly every other technical university in America has an office of technology transfer (OTT) that is responsible for taking concepts developed by professors and turning them into commercial products. This is typically accomplished by means of patents and licensing agreements, both of which benefit the university as well as the public. Patents help protect the investment made in research, and they can attract corporate and federal funding in the long run.

Licensing agreements ensure that discoveries have the opportunity to reach the stream of commercialization, and the public can use them, and they often generate income for the inventor and for the university. Licensing agreements are a mainstay of university research at the more important institutions. Deshaies noted, start-up companies “produce broader societal value” when they license inventions co-founded by research professors at universities like Caltech.

According to a 2010 article by Dr. James DeSue of the University of Southern California, University of Maryland, and Howard University, the impact on the way universities like Caltech and Stanford handle their intellectual property is enormous.

Deshaies says he went through several good/bad/crazy routines with the OTT when he started his company. On one hand, Caltech only wants to license patents to companies that are fully funded and can actually make use of the technology. On the other hand, he has been Caltech’s experience that venture capitalists “tend to be skeptical of academic inventions … so we need to fund companies that already have a licensing agreement for the patents they need.”

Deshaies said they “try to make this process ‘as user friendly as possible’ still rather opaque,” the OTT’s job. This makes the OTT’s technology transfer process already makes it likely that professors will be the first inventors of file patent applications for their discoveries.

Director of Stanford’s OTT Katharine Ku stated in an email that the AIA was “likely to change anything and will probably have to be filed sooner than we’d like,” but in unison, the AIA was “likely to change anything. With the AIA, we can be more lax in filing provisional patent applications on everything.”

In other words, the OTT’s technology transfer process already makes it likely that professors will be the first inventors of file patent applications for their discoveries.

Although the AIA calls for broad changes in the US patent system, Hodas said that the new laws “won’t really hurt or change much in our operations,” in part because the OTT is so aggressive about patenting. She argued that “Caltech is a sophisticated repeat player” in the world of intellectual property. She explained as he pointed to his office, “this office is unusual because we don’t have fears. “But when the fledgling company wants to start up companies, “produce broader societal value” when they license inventions co-founded by research professors at universities like Caltech.

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Caltech Public Events is now hiring student ushers. $15 per hour to work concerts, performances, lectures, films and parties.

No experience needed, no hard labor, flexible schedules.

*Requirements: Caltech student, Positive attitude, Friendly personality

To apply email Adam Jacobo (ajacobo@caltech.edu) or call (626)395-5907

For info on Caltech Public Events visit: www.caltech.edu/content/public-events
The nationally ranked Pomona-Pitzer men's tennis team posted a 9-0 win over Caltech on Saturday afternoon.

The Beavers mixed-up their singles line-up as several players competed at higher spots than they have all season. Rushikesh Joshi played at the top spot for the first time in 2013. The first-year played a spirited match before falling 6-4, 7-6 (2) to Frankie Alinson. Luka Mernik moved up to the second singles spot as he fell 6-2, 6-1 to Kevin Prescott. The steady play of Alex Henny nearly pulled out a three-set victory.

After winning the first set in a tiebreak, Henny dropped the final two sets with the final set a 10-4 super tiebreak. The Sagehens swept the three doubles matches en route to the win.

Caltech got a solid effort from Joshi and JD Co-Reyes at the No. 3 spot before falling 8-6 in a tight match-up.

During the previous day, The Occidental men's tennis team recorded an 8-1 win over Caltech. The Tigers dropped just five games en route to sweeping the doubles points. Occidental took four of the six singles matches in straight sets as they posted their seventh team win of the season.

Caltech got solid singles plays from Alex Henny and Luka Mernik. Henny won his third match of the season as they first-year posted a 6-4, 7-5 win at the No. 4 singles position. Mernik won the first set at the No. 3 singles spot but couldn’t hold the momentum as he fell in a three-set match.

In Caltech’s women’s tennis match with La Verne on Saturday afternoon Rebekah Kitto made school history. Kitto remained undefeated in her 14 matches at the No. 2 singles spot. Her 14 wins set a new school record for most singles wins in a season. She pass the mark set by Natsuko Kagawa and Alexis Johnson.

La Verne won the team match 8-1 as they swept five of the six singles matches in straight sets. The top doubles match saw a pair of nationally ranked teams square off.

The Leopards duo of Laina Matsuda and Jeanette Losaria came into the match ranked 10th while Kitto and Monica Li had a ranking of eight. The La Verne combo won the match by an 8-5 tally.

Just a day prior to that, the Caltech women’s tennis team picked up its first SCIAC win of the season with a dominating win over Occidental. The Beavers swept the doubles matches then won five of the six singles matches in posting the 8-1 victory.

Caltech posted solid wins at the No. 1 and No. 3 doubles spots as they combined to drop just two games.

The No. 2 doubles match was a tight one throughout but the tandem of Michelle Lee and Jessica Yu prevailed 9-8 (7-3). With all the momentum in their favor Caltech swept four of the six singles matches in straight sets. The match was clinched when Michelle Lee completed her 6-0, 6-1 win at the No. 5 slot.

Caltech continues SCIAC play when they host La Verne next Friday afternoon at 2pm on their home court.

Upcoming sports events

April 10: Women’s Water Polo at Cal Lutheran

April 12: Women’s Tennis vs. Pomona-Pitzer

Baseball at Chapman

April 13: Track/Field at Pomona-Pitzer Invite

Women’s Water Polo vs. P-P

Baseball vs. Chapman

Men’s Tennis at Claremont-M-S
You may think the Murderer of Weaver Lake is a myth. Think again.

Many years ago when I was in college, I had a close group of friends: John, Tommy, Rob, and two girls whose names we never cared to find out. We did everything together, from getting drunk at football games, to partying hard on Friday nights, to warning preteens about the dangers of alcoholism under court mandate.

Well, it was Spring Break. My uncle had a cabin on Weaver Lake way up in northern Minnesota, and he said we could spend our Spring Break there. So, we all piled into John's station wagon, strapped the girls to the roof, and hit the road.

A few miles before we got to the cabin, we stopped for gas. The gas station attendant, a peculiar old man nearly blind with cataracts, hobbled over and muttered, “You be careful. Strange things been happening around here.” But we didn’t take his warning very seriously, especially because he had directed it toward a broken gas pump.

When we got to the cabin, we could all sense something strange about it. But none of us wanted to admit it. So, we unloaded the girls, set to work cleaning the cabin, and ripped the electrical and telecommunications wiring out of the walls.

That night, we were sitting around the living room. The girls had stripped down to their bras and panties. We asked them why, but they didn’t really know either. Just as we had begun pairing off to have affectionless sex, there was a tremendumous thump outside.

The cabin fell silent. Tommy murmured that he wanted some fresh air and went to check out the noise.

As we walked outside, armed and ready, Rob asked, “Guys, can we split up?” It seemed like a reasonable request. I began walking into the dense forest and was working out the second verse of my newest polka-punk single when I heard a blood curling scream to my left. Then a cry from my right. “Polka all night, Polka feels right,” I thought. It was then that I saw the masked man running towards me.

He was hideous. Looked like a collection of corpses sewn together, with strips of scaly flesh flapping like cherry blossoms in a gentle, spring rain.

I ran back to the station wagon, jumped in, and started the engine just as the man threw himself on the hood. Our gazes met. Mine, fragile and inexperienced; his, bespeaking a carnal intensity repulsive yet strangely irresistible. Then, I threw the transmission into reverse, hit the gas, and sped out of there, throwing the masked man off the car and running over Rob in the process.

When I got back home, I didn’t tell anyone what had happened because there just never felt like a good time to bring it up. Sure, there was a police investigation, but we were white college students, two of us female, so society didn’t really care.

But that was long ago. Nothing like that has ever happened again, at least not to my knowledge. I’m just glad that that everything is finally back to norm—

Whoops, my pen ran out of ink. Like I was saying, I’m just glad that everything is back to n—

Goddammit! I need a new pen. What I’m trying to say is that I’m glad that everything . . . what was that? Is . . . NO! GET AWAY—

Sorry about that. I’m just glad everything is finally back to normal. Totally normal.