A chat with Prof of the Month Gil Refael

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Girl raped 5-year-old in India hospitalized, sparks protest
Syrian troops seize town 5 days of fighting and 80 deaths preclude takeover
High death toll in Nigeria 185 civilians killed in fighting between military and Islamists

How did you find your way to Caltech?
Getting to Caltech was a fluke. Right after my graduation, Michael Cross appeared in my office at the KITP in Santa Barbara. I assumed he was looking for my office mate, Arun Paramekanti, who was interviewing for professorships that year (currently a Prof at UToronto). So I was quite surprised when he invited me to apply for a junior faculty job. I asked my two Ph.D. advisers, Daniel Fisher and Eugene Demler, what to do. Eugene thought I should apply in other places as well, but Daniel said that it is extremely unlikely for me to get a job so soon, so I should just go down there and have fun. I took it for granted that Fisher had the right idea (that was my experience as a grad student - he very rarely makes any mistakes), and only applied here. Somehow, they offered me the job! I was happy to quickly accept before they realized the error they made...

Caltech has been wonderful to me at all levels. In particular, I feel at home with the undergraduates. Many students remind me of the people I ran into when I competed in the International Physics Olympiad, and later trained the Israeli team - brilliant, and engaged, always keeping me on my toes, and ready to accomplish anything. This environment is very rewarding to me as faculty, and it helps me love Caltech as a very unique place.

Join Professor Refael on the Olive Walk this Thursday for a POM reception.

A chat with Prof of the Month Gil Refael

SANDHYA CHANDRASEKARAN
News Editor Emeritus
What courses do you teach? For how long have you been teaching them?
The main classes I taught were Ph127 - statistical mechanics and thermodynamics - which I taught for 4 consecutive years just as I arrived at Caltech in 2005, and Ph12b - intro to quantum mechanics, which I taught this year for the second time.
I have also developed a bit of an untraditional class - Ph50a, aka, Caltech Physics League. This is essentially a ‘physics club’ where we meet weekly and discuss real-life physics problems and situations. There is no set curriculum, but so far our discussions covered the range of renewable energy, noise, plasma and fusion physics, all the way to flat tires. I’ve been teaching this class for the last four years, and it has been a lot of fun.

What major changes have you made to your course(s) over the years?
The most major shift I made had to do with lecture notes. When I teach a class for the first time, I try to write down what I’m going to say. I do it in a rather clumsy way; it is almost my stream of consciousness just as if I were speaking. I then look it over to eliminate embarrassments, and it becomes my personal textbook. At first, I only gave out summaries to students, since my notes are so close to what is actually said in class. Over the years I decided to open up, and give my notes as is, essentially, to the students, as yet another source which they could use alongside a textbook and their own lecture notes.
This appeared to be a good move, but not without mixed reviews. Students often say they like the notes quite a bit. On the other hand, I don’t always manage to release a dignified version right after class, and some students became reliant on these notes. This is one cause for unhappiness.
On the other hand, I’m a terrible proofreader. My notes are informal, and also have typos. I always warn about this, but I guess once I put something out there I’m responsible for its quality.
So in my reviews there was some discontent about some missing constants, wrong signs, and the like. The intention is not to keep students on their toes - so next version will be a bit more typo free.

How would you describe your teaching style?
Informal, and also old fashioned. I use a blackboard, and I tell silly jokes. I try to derive everything from scratch, and I want my students to be able to deploy what they learn easily, by having an intuitive understanding of how the theory, the math, and the logic all fit together.
At the same time, I’d like my students to make use of the new tools we have available, such as computer programming, and easily accessible information on the web. In Ph12b this meant mandatory use of Mathematica in the problem sets.

How do you incentivize students to attend class and participate?
I come from an academic culture where students are held to be responsible adults who can make their own mind. If they’d like to come to class great, if they don’t, it might be harder for them to become proficient with the class material, but that’s their decision to make.

On my end, I try to make lecture coherent and engaging as possible. In addition, I take students’ questions seriously, and answer them even at the cost of shifting the lecture’s focus. Occasionally that leads to some boring tangents I inflect on my class, but most of the time it helps to clarify topics that were not easily accessible the first time around. Students who are not attending cannot partake in this back and forth.
Also, the group that attends becomes more familiar with me and vice versa. This makes the class a much more pleasant experience for those who participate. At least that is my hope. I’m guessing some students may think that such a style is overbearing though.

What has been your hardest challenge as a professor?
Advising. Providing the intellectual and personal support to my close junior collaborators be it SURF’s all the way to postdocs. This is a relationship which is at the core of our academic tradition, and I believe that one should not underestimate the care that must be given by a mentor to a student, as the student takes their first steps as a scientist.

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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 beginning 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 15th, 2013. Taken by Allika Walvekar

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

Guests: Eugene Vinitsky, Connor Rosen, Zach Rivkin, Malvika Verma

Call to Order: 10:03pm

President's Report (Diego):
Leadership Conference will be held on April 27th. The subject material will focus on issues that students care most about. The BoD will be working with Anneila to choose representatives for a student self-governance task force.

Officer's Reports:

V.P. of Academic Affairs (ARC Chair: Pushpa):
The ARC is currently going through the nominations for ASCIT Teaching awards which will be held on Thursday May 23rd. Professor of the Month: Gil Rafael
An SFL occurred on April 17th and it was very successful.

V.P. of Non-Academic Affairs (IHC Chair: Connor):
Prefrosh Weekend was this past weekend. If you believe a violation of PFW Rules may have occurred, please contact a member of the IHC.
Affiliated room picks are happening over the next few weeks for all the houses. Applications for Skurves to live in Ricketts were due last Friday; decisions will be released on the 26th. Applications for non-Skurves are due on the 24th. If you would like to appeal the decision of eligibility, please contact bweir@caltech.edu to set up a meeting with Dr. Anneila Sargent, Vice President for Student Affairs.

Director of Operations (Mario):
The Club Fair occurred on Friday 4-5:30. It was very successful and most registered clubs were in attendance.
Mario checked in on the Big T and they have been very diligent about taking pictures at all events.

Treasurer (Puikie):
Puikie is working on securing funding for the final costs of ASCIT Funding. The party went overbudget, so Puikie is contacting various resources for funding.
She would like to remind everyone that the Take A Professor to Lunch program is still active. Feel free to email her with questions and requests.

Social Director (Michelle):
ASCIT Formal: The formal went well but was over budget. 430 people attended, and the Observatory tours were very successful.
Upcoming Events: Blacker Interhouse (Week 6), ASCIT Movie Night (Week 7), Ruddock Frosh Party (Week 7), BFP (Week 8), Europarty (Week 9)

Secretary (Allika):
Working on a Mental Health UCC page on Donut.
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: 11:15
**THE CALIFORNIA TECH**

**Opinion**

Trends and fashion: As seen at ASCIT Formal

**Nina Budaeva**  
Staff Writer

April 22, 2013

The Saturday before last was a big night for Caltech undergraduates. It was our Tech version of High School Prom, also known as the ASCIT Formal. In an appropriately romantic setting up on Mt. Wilson, hundreds of starry-eyed Techers nestled among the telescopes for a night of everything fancy. The decorations were very tasteful and the gas lamp heaters were perfectly placed to make everyone feel at ease in the brisk mountain air, no matter what they chose to wear. The food was delicious and filling — a perfect complement for the amazing bar that opened later.

Being the most formal event of the year, most attendees took the hint and dressed to the nines. Attempts were made to match accessories, outfits were planned days in advance, and emergency e-mails got spammed asking for hairdo and dress help.

I personally love any occasion that calls for dressing up but when the time finally comes to doll up, I don’t want this. Therefore, in choosing a hue would have been cold: all of these, but I will not rant too much about them, because this is a matter of opinion. However, I will say that I just do not understand the high-low skirts (the ones that are very short in the front and very long in the back). Occasionally they look good, but anything can look good occasionally, even a trash bag cleverly worn at an ABC party.

Most of the time, they look to me as though the wearer either could not decide what length to wear, or has read too many tabloids where she sees a Pr i l 22, 2013

**This to be false. Our gents showed a number of different looks — but all adhered to the same rule.**

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**ZACH RIVKIN**
ASCIT President candidate

Pre-Frosh Weekend has come and gone, and with it the often asked question of why Caltech? For me, originally, it was the research opportunities, prestige, and the oh-so-beautiful weather. These still ring true, but in my heart I have learned that truly makes Caltech unique is the house system, the Honor Code, and of course the people. I am running on the notion that this year, I am the reason why I am running for ASCIT President.

The coming year will be impactful towards the houses as Ricketts is revamped and a joint committee of students and faculty evaluates the efficacy of the current Honor Code. It is important that the ASCIT President supports the IHC at this crucial moment in the history of the housing system. While ASCIT should defer to the IHC in some of these matters, it is important that the entire student government act as a united force, particularly when interacting with the administration.

At the recent Student Faculty Conference, there was heated debate on the Honor Code and its implementation. The new ARC Chair will sit on a most influential committee that may determine the fate of the Honor Code going forward. As with many issues, ASCIT should be transparent and help solicit student opinion on these matters so the full undergraduate perspective is considered.

**RAJ MIPURU**
ASCIT President candidate

Rarely in human history there emerges a true leader, someone that people can really get behind and push with a chaff. I am not such a man, but I would like to tell you a story about one.

In Brazil, in 2010, a leader was forged from the weak, flimsy shell of a clown. His name? Tiririca. Some say he ran as an act of protest against an increasingly corrupt system, some say that he was a clown, and others say he was illiterate and other people made him run.

In any case, he ended up running, not in a marathon, oh no, but in a race for a seat on Brazil’s Congress. He famously ran as an act of protest against the House, and made him the second most voted-for congressman in Brazilian history.

Why is this relevant to me and my candidacy for ASCIT President? You see, it is very complex: I am one of the reincarnated forms of Tiririca the Clown. I too am a clown, illiterate, and the last bastion of hope for honest people living under the corrupt shadow of the organization known as ASCIT. You should vote for me to end our great corruption, nay, you should vote for me to screw the veil of peace of the hearts of men! After all you have no choice to vote for a vote for me my fellow comrade:

A vote for “No” is a vote for “Raj” is a vote for “Raj” is a vote for “Raj” is a vote for any other candidate is a vote for “No” and thusly a vote for me!

So then in closing, just remember: we may struggle with the Deans, with each other, with that inescapable feeling at 3 a.m. that you are going nowhere and the following feeling at 4 a.m. that things are not okay – but it cannot get any worse! Vote Raj!

**DHIRAJ HOLDEN**
ASCIT President candidate

One of the duties of the ASCIT President is to provide a voice for the students in discussions with faculty and administrators.

Why, then, have the ASCIT Presidents in my time here not done this in a satisfactory manner?

During the last two years, there have been numerous issues with mental health, the graduation rate, and overall happiness.

In 2011, Caltech’s Task Force on Mental Health and Suicide Prevention offered reasonable recommendations such as longer and more convenient hours of counseling center hours. These could have been helpful in the wake of last year’s suicide, or potentially this year when I nearly transferred out. Also on the table is Blacker alum Peter Buhler’s report on improving counseling center hours, advocating for improved UCC training and the addition of Mental Health Advocates. He and I corresponded with an MIT student this summer to improve their Mental Health safety net. Now it is time to improve our own.

Caltech is an incredible institution, but there is certainly room for improvement. If given the opportunity, I promise to serve the student body diligently and lead it passionately.

As previously explained, I am well qualified to take on this position. My previous leadership experience on campus has allowed me to understand the viewpoint of a large segment of the undergraduate body and develop valuable relationships with administrators. Both of these experiences will make me an effective proponent of student well-being, including the improvement of overall mental health.

Thank you for reading and I look forward to representing you all.
MATEO MARTINEZ
Director of Operations
candidate

We all have a reason why we chose to come here. Nevertheless, that reason of community consists of 90% of the brightest minds in the country, half of us trying to survive and the other half enjoying the bliss that boot camp is over. There is a commonality to this community that finding more important than classes, our sense of belonging and our identity as Techers. When I came here, I thought that I was just here to learn to be a good Chemical Engineer, get a good job, and get on with it. However, I have come to realize that it has been the bonds I have made with close friends here that have changed me the most. It has been these friends from all around the houses that have taught me one thing: we are Techers first. To get far, one just needs to share the reason why I am running for Director of Operations.

CONNIE HSUEH
Director of Operations
candidate

Director of Operations can be a very methodical, routine job. It involves overseeing clubs and publications, allocating funding, and keeping inventory, and it's hard to imagine anyone saying that they are passionate about this kind of paperwork. But I am passionate about you, the students of Caltech, and I believe that I can best serve you as your Director of Ops.

I love that Caltech students find ways to pursue their interests inside and outside of science. I love that you guys sing, and build robots, and juggle. In the spacious dorms and when I visited as a prefresh, the Longboarding, High Fiving, and V-neck Club heckled prefrosh, the Longboarding, High Fiving, and V-neck Club heckled prefrosh, the Longboarding, High Fiving, and V-neck Club heckled prefrosh, the Longboarding, High Fiving, and V-neck Club heckled prefrosh, the Longboarding, High Fiving, and V-neck Club heckled prefrosh. However, I have come to realize that it has been the bonds I have made with close friends here that have changed me the most. It has been these friends from all around the houses that have taught me one thing: we are Techers first. To get far, one just needs to share the reason why I am running for Director of Operations.

MALVICA VERMA
ARC Chair candidate

Your 9 a.m. class has unannounced in-class quizzes worth 30% of your grade. Your new P.E. class has mandatory lectures and a final (what?). The professor gives your class an add that only he could finish. Your 9-unit class has sets that take 20 hours of study. This is when you contact your local ARC rep. My name is Malvika Verma, and I would like to be your ARC chair. These are just a few of the issues I can help communicate to our professors. I have a vision for the ARC. It should have students who are interested in interacting with professors and administrators, students who are confident about voicing opinions on academic matters. The ARC is an additional guardian of the Honor Code. When there is a question about a collaboration policy, we help the students and professors clarify the policy together. I would like to create monthly BOC meetings with professors so that we can understand our dedication as undergrads to uphold the Honor Code. I also have a new strategy for handling course complaints. If there is a complaint with a class, run a survey and develop suggestions for constructive changes. As scientists themselves, professors will respond to numbers. Surveys are a great way to communicate student opinions. It is important to constantly assess the state of our academics.

MICHELLE TANG
Social Director candidate

I have served as ASCiT Social Director in some capacity for four school terms thus far – one as an undergrad, the other three as elected. During this time, I have become incredibly familiar with the ins and outs of the position. As the current social director, I have continued to uphold old social traditions including Big Interhouse, ASCiT Formal, ASCiT Movie Night, Europarty.

I have personally initiated several new events/traditions during my term as well. These events include Medieval Games, Cabin Carving, Chuse Holiday Bash, Winter Wonderland, Be A Kid Again, A Night at the Rathbudder, and a variety of other free food events and parties.

I ultimately try to ensure that social events occur every weekend by planning an event on any weekend that appears to be free. In addition, I have a number of ideas for social events that I hope to be able to carry out in the subsequent year if elected.

I would plan another ASCiT Movie Night at the Edwards Theater in Alhambra so everyone can watch Iron Man 3 for free, coordinate with exchange students to host Europarty once again, and hopefully bring back Mudeo a campus-wide mud war.

Furthermore, I hope to continue the ASCiT Social Director for more frequent events and arrange for more off-campus opportunities.

Throughout the past year, I have also attended a lot of experience working with members of the Board of Directors, Tom Mann, and other important members of administration. As a result, I have developed strong relations with all of them. Furthermore, I have accumulated a number of reliable social contacts in the area for DJs, rental spaces, etc.

I believe that after serving as ASCiT Social Director for more than a year, I am incredibly receptive to what Caltech students want and will do my best to ensure that you students out if they have new ideas.
Today's Puzzle: Crossword

Across
1. Fraudulent business scheme
2. Computer memory, initially
8. Double
12. Instance
13. Horn
14. Common
16. Netherlands city
18. Cover with liquid for cooking
19. Indicates maiden name
20. Signal fire
22. Beverage
23. Measure of rum
24. Not widely known
25. Agree
28. Decay
29. Relating to the backbone
31. River in central Europe
32. Ireland
33. Box of maps
34. Spanish resort, Costa del
35. Qaf
36. Spanish resort, Costa del
37. Book of maps
38. Observe
39. Oaf
40. Spanish resort, Costa del
41. Ascent
42. Concentration
43. Departed
44. Alleluia
45. Serving dish
46. Beak
47. Chair of state
48. United Arab Emirates, initially
49. Persian Gulf
51. Opposing
52. Public space
54. Tally
57. Term of address
59. Borneo sultinate
61. Evergreen
62. At right angles to the length of a ship
63. South American country
64. Ireland
65. French Stewart
66. Gratuity

Down
1. Light or short
2. Anaglyph
3. Item of value
4. Encountered
5. Detection device
6. Rapidly
7. Note
8. Invest with knighthood
9. Country
10. Canberra is the capital
11. Tardy
12. Invent
13. Pasture
14. Spanish resort, Costa del
15. Pasture
17. Spanish river
18. Light sleep
26. By way of
27. Main course
28. Come back
29. Ego
30. Young girl
31. Fairy
32. Pillage
33. Capital of Romania
35. Small island
36. Fish eggs
37. Observe
38. Drinkard
39. Serving dish
40. Beak
41. Related
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54. Allies
55. Jordanian currency
56. Embossed
57. Watery part of a plant
58. Wading bird
59. Borneo sultinate
60. Garden tool
61. Evergreen
62. At right angles to the length of a ship
63. Consumed
64. Common gull
65. French Stewart
66. Gratuity
67. Ski slope
68. Sharp
69. Formerly known as Persia
70. Sulk
71. Snakelike fish
72. Fringe benefit

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1. Fraudulent business scheme
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Experimental Performance Lab presents Tesla

CINDY DE MEZA Contributing Writer

The Experimental Performance Laboratory at Caltech and The Pasadena Playhouse present Tesla, a radio play for the stage. Directed by acclaimed Los Angeles director Michael Ararban with live sound effects by the SFX artist Tony Palermo, Tesla will run for one day only on the Mainstage of The Pasadena Playhouse, Saturday May 4th, 6:00pm.

Special guest stars include Phil Proctor (“Big Brother,” “Fry Story”) as Thomas Edison; French Stewart (“Third Rock from the Sun,” “Stoneface”) as Tesla; Sandra Tsing Loh (Caltech alum and NPR’s “The Loh Life”) as Katherine; Dr. Ashley Stroupe (JPL Mars Rover Curiosity Engineer), playing multiple roles; and Brian Brophy (“Star Trek: The Next Generation,” director of Theater Arts at Caltech), playing multiple roles.

A partnership with The Pasadena Playhouse and Caltech is the perfect synergy of science and art...This project...features actors from the multi-talented Caltech/JPL community alongside professional actors from the theater and film world.

- Brian Brophy

Out of Orbit tells the story of a Mars Rover Mission Specialist at Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL), played by Dr. Strope, a “real-life” JPL Mars Rover Driver. Can a brilliant scientist relate to a learning deficiency in her daughter? Can she keep up with her life on two different planets?

Sila is a powerful, gripping, and poetic play about climate change and its consequences for the people and animals living in the Arctic Circle.

The Washing of Water by Marcus Renner is the final play in the series on June 1, directed by TACIT artistic director Brian Brophy.

The Washing of Water is based on over 60 interviews conducted across Altadena, La Cañada Flintridge, and Northwest Pasadena.

The Washing of Water follows an artist activist, a homeless teenager, and a mother whose stories intersect as they fight a polluted past and search for a fresh start amidst the wilds of the Hahamongna Watershed Park.

See www.tacit.caltech.edu for more information about the New Plays Festival.

http://www.puzzlechoice.com/
Caltech baseball succumbs to CMS after lead

GOCALTECH.COM
The Real Sports Editor

Late game scoring innings were the difference in both games as ClaremontMudd-Scripps swept a doubleheader from Caltech on Saturday afternoon.

Game One – CMS 10, Caltech 7

In a back-and-forth game the Beavers put together enough offense in the late innings to pull out the win.

The visitors got on the board in the third inning when Christian Hoxsie and Brent Wantanabe crossed the plate. Caltech responded with a four-run bottom half of the inning.

Brian Penserini started the scoring when he crossed the plate on an error by ClaremontMudd-Scripps. Derek Kearny continued the momentum with a two-run double that scored Albie Lavin and Jerome Skelly. Kearny also drove in two to aid in the Beavers offense. Wite’s three-hit, three run day highlighted the visitors attack.

Matulevich, Penserini, Skelly, Freedman, Casey and Kwok each had multi-hit efforts.

Daniel Chou went the distance for the fifth time this season.

GoCaltech.com
Acquired Taste

by Dr. Z

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

For more photos, videos, and archives of previous issues, check out the Tech website!

tech.caltech.edu