Caltech’s Fall Career Fair: Frosch perspective

SHANON WANG
Contributing Writer

Let me get this out of the way: I’m not an avid fan of career fairs and this piece isn’t an advertisement for future fairs. Jobs are the proverbial carrots in most of these events, and even when the opportunities are real, the fairs can still be nightmarish. Career fairs aren’t designed with introverts in mind and they’re just as dreadful for even the most outgoing and vivacious applicants, because no one is safe from being The Schmuck – the one who’s been standing third in line forever as the volume of the recruiting conversation ahead soars to all-time high and the recruiter launches into another speech with furious head-bobbing and wild gesticulating. But despite all this gripping drama, I still believe that attending the career fair is a worthwhile experience.

I was that poor schmuck during Tuesday’s career fair, feeling horribly out of place as I waited behind a graduate student who had much more business standing there than I did. I had no resume. I had much more business standing behind a graduate student who horribly out of place as I waited Tuesday’s career fair, feeling that attending the career fair is a gripping drama, I still believe with furious head-bobbing and to all-time high and the recruiter volume of the recruiting third in line forever as the one who’s been standing being The Poor Schmuck – the one who’s been standing third in line forever as the volume of the recruiting conversation ahead soars to all-time high and the recruiter launches into another speech with furious head-bobbing and wild gesticulating. But despite all this gripping drama, I still believe that attending the career fair is a worthwhile experience.

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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

Write articles for the Tech

get paid up to $30

Last week’s ASCIT Minutes*

*(Since ASCIT didn’t send us any)

Minutes for October 9, 2013. Taken by Catherine Jamshidi

President’s Report (Zach):

New important times:
- ASCIT will meet every Wednesday at 10pm in SAC 15.
- ARC will meet every Sunday at 3pm in the SFL MCR.
- IHC meets every Tuesday at 12pm in the house dining halls.

Officer’s Reports:

V.P. of Academic Affairs (ARC Chair: Malvika):

The ARC is looking for students that are interested in advising the Faculty Committee about what to do with the 9th floor space in Millikan Library. Anyone interested should contact Malvika at mverma@caltech.edu

Should we not let students view grades until they fill out TQFRs? There was an Ombuds Training Session on Friday at the Center for Teaching, Learning, and Outreach that geared towards freshmen and sophomores to prepare them for their roles as ombuds.

The ARC is looking for 2 frosh ARC reps. Interviews will be this Sunday from 3-5 pm on campus.

V.P. of Non-Academic Affairs (IHC Chair: Connor):

Rotation happened, and it went well. In light of recent events, the IHC is looking at more formal procedures for approving Rotation activities. The South House RLC search committee has made a recommendation; we are hoping s/he will start near the beginning of November.

Director of Operations (Connie):

Would like to have more ways of advertising clubs (more than just the club fair and a list on Donut).

Club (re-) registration is going on now. More information can be found at www.clubs.caltech.edu

ASCIT Inventory:

Working to standardize the process for lending equipment out to houses/GSC for parties and checking it back in in a timely manner.

Treasurer (Monica):

Club Funding Day is October 27th.

Would like to come up with a system where people requesting reimbursements for purchases must meet with Monica at a specific time/place so as to lessen the amount of back-and-forth emailing happening now to meet up with someone.

Will send out details regarding new reimbursement procedure.

Social Director (Michelle):

End of Rotation party was cancelled, but Page is working to reschedule it (tentatively this Friday).

The Carnival was last Saturday and went well.

Fleming Frosh Party is happening this Saturday, October 19th.

Secretary (Cat):

The Health Advocates Page on Donut has been updated with current information. It can be found at http://donut.caltech.edu/ascit/Health_Advocates

If you notice any pages on Donut that do not have up to date information, please send me an email and I will try to fix it immediately!
Nominate your favorite professor for the Feynman Teaching Prize!

Here’s your chance to nominate your favorite professor for the 2013-14 Richard P. Feynman Prize for Excellence in Teaching! You have from now until January 2, 2014 to submit your nomination package to the Provost’s Office to honor a professor who demonstrates, in the broadest sense, unusual ability, creativity, and innovation in undergraduate and graduate classroom or laboratory teaching.

The Feynman Prize is made possible through the generosity of Ione and Robert E. Paradise, with additional contributions from an anonymous local couple. Nominations for the Feynman Teaching Prize are welcome from faculty, students, postdoctoral scholars, staff, and alumni.

All professorial faculty of the Institute are eligible. The prize consists of a cash award of $3,500, matched by an equivalent raise in the annual salary of the awardee. A letter of nomination and detailed supporting material, including, but not limited to, a curriculum vitae, course syllabus or description, and supporting recommendation letters should be emailed to kkerbs@caltech.edu or directed to the Feynman Prize Selection Committee, Office of the Provost, Mail Code 206-31, at the California Institute of Technology, Pasadena, California, 91125. Nomination packages are due by January 2, 2014.

Additional information including guidelines for the prize and FAQ may be found at http://provost.caltech.edu/FeynmanTeachingPrize. Further information can also be obtained from Karen Kerbs (626-395-6039; kkerbs@caltech.edu) in the Provost’s Office.
CONNEW ROSEN Contributing Writer

This is the third in an ongoing series of articles examining Caltech’s involvement with and initial forays into online education. Previous articles have introduced MOOCs, Caltech’s partnerships with Coursera and edx, and the anticipated benefits of these partnerships.

Previously, I stated the potential benefits that MOOCs could offer to Caltech. One of the primary goals, according to Provost Edward Stolper, was “to improve … how we educate future generations of scientists and engineers here at Caltech.”

There are a number of ways that using MOOCs and Coursera is supposed to benefit Caltech students.

One innovation that MOOCs can offer to Caltech courses is the “flipped classroom” model. In this model, students watch the lectures and do readings on their own at home, leaving class time to work on problems and with small exercises to assess learning. Then, in class, they have the opportunity to reinforce the fundamentals they learned with harder examples, extensions of the material, and general “gelling of the information,” as Professor George Djordjevski describes it in the Caltech MOOC Report on Youtube.

The flipped classroom is one form of “mastery learning.” Mastery learning, or “Feedback-corrective” instruction, is a form of instruction where students assessed multiple times and corrective feedback is constantly applied. In this way, students have more opportunities to learn from their mistakes and reinforce gaps in their understanding. Because the students come to class already having been exposed to material, class time with the professor can be used to give careful feedback on the small gaps left by the lectures. MOOCs also use mastery learning through the quizzes embedded into lectures, which provide constant feedback and check understanding at a basic level.

While mastery learning is a well-founded pedagogical method, it is unclear why a partnership with Coursera or edx, or even the use of MOOCs in general, is necessary to implement mastery learning in Caltech courses. Lectures could be easily pre-recorded for most classes at Caltech – in fact, a number of courses are already recorded by students, at no cost or additional effort to the professor, and posted on the Caltech network for review by the students in the course. Clicker quizzes in some classes could, if used properly as a learning tool instead of a method for forcing attendance, serve the role of the embedded quizzes. Mastery learning techniques could be incorporated into recitation sections and office hours through more comprehensive TA training and collaboration between professors and the New Center for Teaching and Learning. In short, MOOCs offer no clear pedagogical advantage for Caltech courses over an easy and cheap (in terms of both time and money) in-house fix of re-recording.

Another possible benefit of MOOCs, according to the professors who taught them, is that the repeated practice and re-recording allows professors to improve their lecturing. We can, in this instance, quantitatively examine the impact preparing for a MOOC has on a professor’s perceived instructional ability: Professor Antonio Rangel taught Ec11 two years in a row, in Spring 2012 as a normal Caltech course and in Winter 2013 as a Coursera course with pre-recorded lectures and the supposed benefit of more practice.

Comparing TOFR reports from these two terms indicates that there is no significant increase in any aspect of Professor Rangel’s lecturing – from the overall quality to his ability to connect course topics to each other. There was no significant decrease in any of these, either – it appears that preparing for a MOOC fundamentally has no effect on the quality of instruction.

In the Caltech MOOC Report on Youtube, the flipped classroom is one form of “mastery learning.” Mastery learning, or “Feedback-corrective” instruction, is a form of instruction where students assessed multiple times and corrective feedback is constantly applied. In this way, students have more opportunities to learn from their mistakes and reinforce gaps in their understanding.

Because the students come to class already having been exposed to material, class time with the professor can be used to give careful feedback on the small gaps left by the lectures. MOOCs also use mastery learning through the quizzes embedded into lectures, which provide constant feedback and check understanding at a basic level.

While mastery learning is a well-founded pedagogical method, it is unclear why a partnership with Coursera or edx, or even the use of MOOCs in general, is necessary to implement mastery learning in Caltech courses. Lectures could be easily pre-recorded for most classes at Caltech – in fact, a number of courses are already recorded by students, at no cost or additional effort to the professor, and posted on the Caltech network for review by the students in the course. Clicker quizzes in some classes could, if used properly as a learning tool instead of a method for forcing attendance, serve the role of the embedded quizzes. Mastery learning techniques could be incorporated into recitation sections and office hours through more comprehensive TA training and collaboration between professors and the New Center for Teaching and Learning. In short, MOOCs offer no clear pedagogical advantage for Caltech courses over an easy and cheap (in terms of both time and money) in-house fix of re-recording.
Arcs & Spotlight: New Math Professor Net Katz

JONATHON LIU 
ARC Representative

Nets Katz, a professor of mathematics, is one of Caltech’s five new faculty members. Katz earned his PhD from Rice University in 1990 and his PD from the University of Pennsylvania in 1993. Before coming to Caltech, he taught at Princeton, Michigan State and Indiana University Bloomington, and was named a Guggenheim fellow in 2012. He recently answered a few questions about his research and Opinions, and his experiences teaching Math 1a, the freshman core mathematics class.

What kind of research do you work on? I’m trained as an analyst. When you think of analysis, maybe you think of something like the epulon delta proofs that you learn in Math 1a. That’s what I’m interested in on some level – I’m interested in proving inequalities. However, under certain conditions there’s an element of counting involved as well. So, I’m also very much a combinatorialist. For example, some of the problems I work on currently have to do with Euclidean geometry. One result that I’m known for involves estimating how many points those distances there have to be between any set of N points. In such cases, you know how many points there are, but you don’t know where they are. From there, you want to know how many different numbers are distances between those points, that’s sort of work I do.

How did you first get interested in mathematics? I’ve basically been doing math my whole life – I guess more precisely, the work that I did, I was quite good at it, and my father was a physicist, so we would often have conversations about mathematics and physics. I think I remember that he’d say something like: “These mathematicians, they don’t know what they’re doing. They talk in ways that I can’t even think about.”

I think that everything that’s on going on at the moment is kind of unusual, that someone with my mathematical mind is actually at an underlying level, so the mathematics that I do is really about finite problems.

I hear that you’re teaching Math 1a this year. What are your goals for the class, and why? First, I’d like to say that I really don’t want to teach Math 1a. It’s kind of unusual that someone who just got here would be doing that. Usually, you take a few years and then it’s considered worth it to do these things. But, I actually want to do this – I’m very excited because the students here are so much more than the students I’ve used to. And what I want to get through to the students in Math 1a is that math is something you can understand at a very basic, fundamental level. Even if they don’t end up being math majors, it’s still important to teach them to do things right and realize that it’s possible. Math is something very, very basic, the beginning of the field. By teaching Math 1a, I hope to talk about what things of my field to broad as an audience, as possible and to be able to do that in a way that I think about things. That’s what I’m after, and I think that Caltech is practically the only place in the world where that’s possible.

Can you give me an example of how you teach Math 1a in your own style? There are some differences between what I’m doing and what other people have done in the past. For example, one thing I’m doing that seems a little strange to some people is that I define the real numbers as infinite decimal expansions. In Apostol, the textbook with the more common approach, it’s defined by a long list of axioms. After some careful and rigorous thinking, you find out that there’s really no advantage to a long list of axioms, and that’s the real numbers. Personally, I find that approach sort of off-putting, because you talk about things that are way too advanced.

What do you think about Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs)?

I think it’s a very interesting development, and I think it depends on the details of how they work. I listened to a presentation by Professor Djokoberg who taught cosmology last year. He said that he had 5 students in his Caltech class, and 50,000 on Coursera, about 5,000 of whom took it seriously. That’s a remarkable scale, but on the other hand, Coursera puts limitations on how you can teach. As I understand it, the online lectures had to be in 15 minute chunks, which can be quite limiting. For example, I couldn’t teach Math 1a in 15 minute chunks – my lectures really have a beginning, middle, and end, which requires a full hour. The other real drawback is that the grading is somewhat limited. Because of the scale, it’s difficult to have the more involved grading that happens with Caltech problem sets.

What do you like to do in your free time? What are your hobbies? I play chess. I’m not very good at it, but I play, mostly online. They have some really great online chess clubs. I also watch TV and read novels. I’m a really big fan of Homeland, which seems slightly cheesy, but I really like it. One of my favorite books is The Mists of Avalon, by Marion Zimmer Bradley. It’s a really long book, but it’s something that tries to reinterpret how early English history occurred; basically, because of the scale, it’s difficult to have the more involved grading that happens with Caltech problem sets.

What are your research interests? My research interests center on infinite series and in particular, infinite series in a very combinatorial way. For example, I study infinite series in a way that I think about things. That’s what I’m after, and I think that Caltech is practically the only place in the world where that’s possible.

I’d like to give an example of what I think is a really neat thing. One of my favorite books is The Mists of Avalon, by Marion Zimmer Bradley. It’s a really long book, but it’s something that tries to reinterpret how early English history occurred; basically, because of the scale, it’s difficult to have the more involved grading that happens with Caltech problem sets.

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Today’s Puzzle: Crossword

Across
1. Spear
6. Misplaced
10. Unwanted email
14. Fruit of the oak tree
15. Part of a foot
16. Adjutant
17. Yell
18. Cat sound
19. Secret plan
20. Advanced in years
22. Spoken
24. Mineral
25. Mixture of smoke and fog
27. Large serving dish
29. Motley
32. Precarization
33. Piece of metal money
36. Smooth fabric
40. Away from home
41. Mayhem
43. Poem
44. Preliminary version
47. Large and scholarly book
49. Rod
49. Anger
51. Larval frog or toad
53. Trap
57. Move rapidly and lightly
58. Floor covering
59. Baby carriage, in short
61. Reuse
65. Prejudice
66. Matured
69. Large artery
70. Malevolent
71. Rend
72. Percipient
73. Abnegate
74. Showily imitative
75. Muscular organ
76. Robust
77. Large artery
78. Floor covering
79. Baby carriage, in short
80. Advanced in years
81. Prejudice
82. Floor covering
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92. Large artery
93. Malevolent
94. Showily imitative
95. Muscular organ
96. Robust
97. Large artery
98. Floor covering
99. Baby carriage, in short
100. Large artery

Down
1. Young girl
2. Dull pain
3. Midday
4. Naval vessel
5. Inter
6. Part of the mouth
7. Burden
8. Remnant
9. Exhilaration
10. Deplete
11. Fly a plane
12. Worship
13. Measuring instrument
21. European freshwater fish
23. Rostrum
26. Dwell on with satisfaction
28. Beverage
29. Rain down
30. Scintilla
31. Turl
33. Seed case
35. Wanderer
37. Implement
38. Not in active use
39. Indicating maiden name
42. Aromatic wood
45. Swimming shoe
46. Ambush
48. Road surface hazard
50. Misprint
52. Deliver a sermon
53. Implant
54. Inexperienced
55. Dye
56. Glimpse
57. Muscular organ
58. Floridly imitative
59. Showily imitative
60. Animal flesh
62. Region
63. Celestial body
64. Male red deer
66. Crafty
68. Ironic
69. Large artery
70. Malevolent
71. Rend
72. Percipient
73. Abnegate
74. Showily imitative
75. Muscular organ
76. Robust
77. Large artery
78. Floor covering
79. Baby carriage, in short
80. Large artery
81. Prejudice
82. Floor covering
83. Baby carriage, in short
84. Large artery

Answers to last week’s crossword puzzle from puzzlechoice.com

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
GoCaltech

The Caltech women’s volleyball team hosted a pair of matches against Bay Area foe Mills College on Saturday, October 19. Playing their best and most effective match of the season, the Caltech women’s volleyball team swept Mills 3-0 (25-18, 25-9, 25-10) on Saturday afternoon.

The senior had a match high 15 kills and a .387 hitting percentage. She also set a personal season high with nine digs.

Just as effective for the Beavers offense was Catherine Jamshidi. She tallied a 10-kill effort on 15 swings with just one error (.600 hitting percentage). Rebekah Kitto and Connie Hsueh each chipped in five kills. Rachel Hess dished out 31 of the team’s 34 assists.

As a team, the Beavers had 37 kills in helping them compile a season best .478 hitting percentage. In addition to their offensive exploits, the Beavers recorded a season high 11 service aces.

Weekly Scoreboard

Men’s Soccer
at Whittier
L, 5-0 Final

Women’s Volleyball
vs. Claremont-M-S
L, 3-0 Final

Men’s Soccer
vs. Chapman
L, 7-0 Final

Women’s Volleyball
at Occidental
L, 3-0 Final

Volleyball triumphs against Mills, Logan sets kill record

GoCaltech

Volleyball triumphs against Mills, Logan sets kill record

Logan set a school record of 22 kills to aid in the Beavers cause. Earlier this season she set the Institute mark for kills in a career. The first set saw the Beavers serve well as they served four aces and tallied 12 kills en route to the opening set win. The home team never trailed in the stanza. In an exciting second set the Beaver responded with a rally late in the frame.

Down 24-22, the Beavers won three straight points to gain their first set point. On Caltech’s third set point they converted as they took a commanding lead in the match. Caltech rallied late in the final set to pull out the win in three set. With the frame tied at 20-20 the Beavers rode solid serving from Lisa Lee and got a big kill from Logan to seal the win.

Social Science Experimental Laboratory

Caltech

ssel.caltech.edu

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Acquired Taste

Was there a career fair this week or something?

Yes.

Why do you ask?

Unoriginal Jokes

What has four legs, is big, green, furry, and if it fell out of a tree would kill you?

I don’t know...

A pool table!

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

tech.caltech.edu