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ALUMNI NEWS

Dr. Weir checks returns in the Caltech alumni survey.

THE ALUMNI SURVEY

By JOHN R. WEIR

Caltech has never made a comprehensive alumni survey. A number of departments at the Institute have expressed a desire to have one made, but somehow no one had the time or inclination to take on the job.

When I came here last year as Associate in Psychology, this was suggested to me. There were three major reasons for wanting to conduct such a survey:

1. To verify our assumptions concerning the status, the activities and the functions of the alumnus after he has left school. These assumptions, of course, are used in setting up academic courses and procedures and, in general, in defining the total functions and objectives in the administration of the Institute. If these assumptions are not valid, as revealed by the results of the alumni survey, then it is assumed that they will be brought into line with these results.

2. To identify how and in what ways the Caltech alumnus is similar to and different from college graduates in general—this to be done by comparing the proportions of responses to the various items from the Caltech group with college graduates in general as given in the book, They Went to College (which you'll find described a little later in this article).

3. To evaluate the relationships between the non-academic student activities and the alumnus' accomplishments and needs which arise in his later life—in other words, to determine the extent to which non-
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ber of items in the questionnaire are of extreme value and interest to us, and we feel that this questionnaire essentially accomplishes the purpose we had in mind.

Questionnaires were mailed to all Caltech alumni in the latter part of July of this year. They went to all graduate, undergraduate, and foreign alumni. Every effort has been made to keep the questionnaire returns completely confidential. The alumnus' name was on the questionnaire when it was mailed out, but this was done solely to permit a follow-up letter to be sent to those alumni who did not return the questionnaire within 30 days of the date of the initial mailing.

When the questionnaire is returned, the name of the alumnus on the back of the questionnaire is obliterated; thus, there is no way in which an individual questionnaire can be identified. The questionnaire data are considered to be entirely confidential and are not seen by any one on the campus except myself and my assistant.

The results to date have been very gratifying. There were 5,640 questionnaires mailed out the latter part of July. Up to the middle of October, 3,609 had been returned as completed. This represents approximately 64 percent of the original sample. Returns are continuing to come in—up to a dozen a week—and I expect that we will end up with somewhere around 67 to 70 percent. This is an excellent return. The Time questionnaire survey got only 55.6 percent return, in spite of the use of several additional procedures which we do not contemplate using.

Alumni who have not as yet completed their questionnaires are encouraged to do so. There is no deadline for their return. In addition, if any alumnus has not completed and returned a questionnaire and wishes another one—having lost his initial one—he can write to either Engineering and Science or to me and another copy will be sent immediately.

The job now is one of coding the items of the questionnaire, punching them into IBM cards, and tabulating the results. All results will be reported in terms of percentages of the total group. This is the same method used in the They Went to College study.

It took Time Magazine four years from the mailing of the questionnaires to the publishing of the book, and involved approximately 9,000 questionnaires. We have, in our survey, approximately 3,700 questionnaires and have high hopes of completing the work in about a year. The present plan is to publish the results in Engineering and Science, in several separate reports, each report covering certain related aspects of the data collected in the questionnaire.

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