



Small, informal discussion groups were the heart of the conference.

STUDENT-FACULTY CONFERENCE

AT CAMP HESS KRAMER, a few miles north of Malibu, some sixty persons were engaged in a Caltech student-faculty conference. Some of the participants had wandered down to the Coast Highway—to the lone market or to the beach. In the main hall of the camp scattered groups were playing games or singing around the piano.

One undergraduate wandered away from the piano, passed the ping-pong experts on the porch and started back toward the cabins. The youth shuffled along the path and then suddenly paused to look up at clear, bright stars and breathe deeply of cool, fresh air.

It was a good thing to get away from the noise and hilarity for a while and try to organize his thoughts. A myriad of new ideas had come his way today, and if he was going to contribute intelligently to tomorrow's discussions, he would have to straighten out all of these new thoughts and make them fit with his old ones. He could already see that some of the old ones had to be discarded.

His elders had frequently emphasized that his point of view would change. Several different faculty members had said that the late adolescent years tended to breed discouragement, implying that values changed as a person became older.

But he was being urged to base his present actions on some future, hypothetical values. It struck him as nonsense: if a person had different values at different ages, which values are *right*?

He was distracted from this difficult train of thought

by the approach of a second youth. After exchanging comments on the tranquility of the evening, they drifted into a discussion of the techniques of the conference. The small, informal discussion groups which were the heart of the conference were proving excellent for bringing forth difficult and touchy problems, and faculty and students had seemed to easily reach a plane of mutual understanding.

"If we can just get across to them," said the first youth. "—if we can just make them realize that we really are dissatisfied, and if we can get them to respect our opinions, then I'll be satisfied, even if the thing doesn't come out with any real improvements at all."

His companion nodded agreement, but soon moved down the path, leaving the philosopher alone with his thoughts. He wondered whether the ideas that seemed good at first would hold up later. Someone had suggested that the ME15 computing period be used in other courses. Computing period was described as a problem-working session in which both the instructor and one's classmates were present to keep one on the right track. The idea still seemed good and he believed that he could imagine it being favorably applied to his junior year physics courses.

He remembered a long discussion about proposed coordination between mathematics and physics in the first two years. Thinking back over his own underclass years, it became apparent that this was not really a major problem, and he was amazed at the time that had been spent on it.

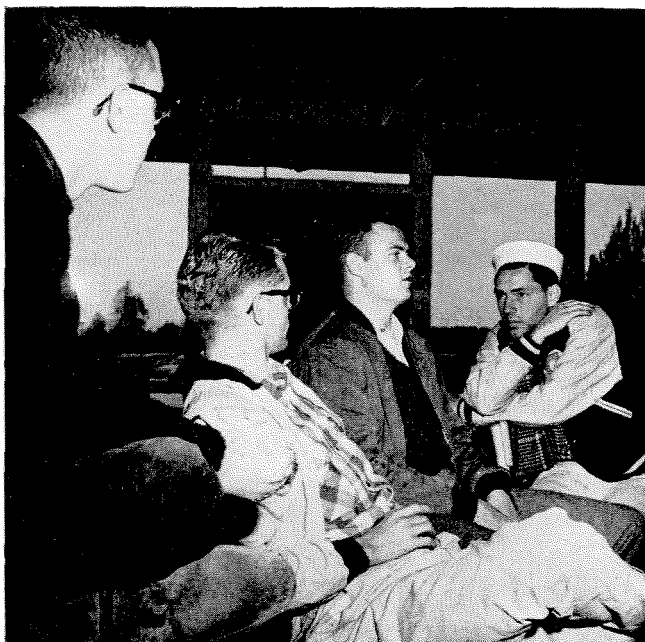
**A student view
of the weekend conference held by the
Caltech YMCA, January 18-20**

His own group had worried about the dulling effect of "cook book" laboratory routines, and he gloried in the immense significance of this until he remembered that it was partly his own idea, and he was prejudiced.

Then it came to him that this was all useless. We are only dealing with surface problems, he thought. Too much time is being spent on topics like academic freedom, which do not matter to a majority of the students. Why don't we try to get to the heart of the problem? What causes bad student morale anyway?

He revolved the problem in his mind, and it began to seem closely related to the general school atmosphere. Many students seemed to feel that Tech had a bad effect on their personality development, and that they did not have an opportunity to express themselves. Are attitudes too narrow? he wondered. Are activities too limited in scope, in effort, in results? Are the faults not in the school officials or in the curriculum, but in the students themselves?

But how could he say that the Admissions Committee was doing a poor job of selecting "the man whose intellectual power is combined with the spark of leadership and human understanding"; how could he say that Techmen tend to be weak-willed and narrow-minded



Student tries to sell pet theory to fellow students



Student tries to sell pet theory to faculty

without damaging his school, his friends, and himself?

Overwhelmed by his own thoughts, he walked purposefully back to the lodge to seek a friend. Together they headed down the road to the beach, and their conversation took a lighter, easier turn.

The market at the bottom of the road doubled as a lunch counter, and a large group of students was delightfully engaged in guessing the age of an intriguing waitress. Students and faculty shuffled in and out, laughing and talking together in a manner that amazed the good-natured proprietor.

These activities were undisturbed by the entrance of the new pair, who joined in for a while and then bought some liquid refreshments to take down to the beach.

A small fire sparkled on the beach, and the newcomers found a noisy, jolly group, boisterously singing college songs, both old and new. They located a place to sit in the cool sand, opened the bag of potato chips, took a few swallows of bubbling liquid, and relaxed. Deeper thoughts were willingly put aside while they joined the warm camaraderie.

It was sometime later that the youth withdrew from the group and wandered down along the sand. In a sudden flash of brightness, he realized that everyone present probably had his own pat explanation for the world's problems, and there was no reason to suppose that his own was any more useful than the others. He saw that the conference would not bring any immediate, far-reaching answers, but he saw, too, that his weekend would give him enough impetus to get through one or two more weeks of school.

And then he would go home to see his girl, and that should give him enough push to last two more weeks, and by that time the pressure of finals should get him through the term.

And somehow he would finish the remaining year, and when it was all over, the soothing haze of forgetfulness would pass over everything, and he would be glad he had seen it through.

Inspired, he hurried over to speak with his friend. "Let's hit the sack, huh?"

—Bob Walsh '58