

All About Elections

February is ASCIT election time. Once again the Associated Students of the California Institute of Technology will issue a thunderous mandate to their chosen representatives. Having been a candidate last year, I've had occasion to observe the thunder in its finer details. It's an awesome process.

The campaign actually begins sometime in January. Would-be candidates attend the previously deserted Board of Directors meetings, anxious to demonstrate their civic zeal. The value of this maneuver is doubtful, since only other zealous candidates and the case-hardened directors are present. The meetings are interesting, however, since many of the directors know they will be running against each other in the coming election. Such seemingly innocuous statements as, "Mr. President, I do not think the situation would be fully implemented at this time by the gentleman's proposal," can better be interpreted as, "Ha! It's obvious that idiot doesn't know what he's talking about. Elect *me* next month, and keep him from ruining ASCIT."

The nominating assembly officially opens the campaign. A golden rule here is, "Be nominated by a man from another house—someone with lots of campus prestige." This is supposed to show that you have the support of the campus leaders. Actually it shows that you're adept at buttonholing people, but again the difference is small, since only nominators and nominees are present. The speeches have a certain element of suspense. Since one man will often nominate several candidates, there's a good chance for an embarrassing mixup. Assuming that all goes well, though, the president thanks the speaker and asks the nominee if he accepts. After a few seconds pause, perhaps to steel himself for the duty that lies ahead, the candidate does accept, in the interests of better student government.

Now it is the candidate's duty to write a letter for our campus newspaper, *The California Tech*, expounding on the issues that have forced him to run. It is perhaps the *Tech's* proudest boast that it has been able to survive this yearly influx of enthusiasm.

About a week before elections, the signs go up. Now the true test of votesmanship begins. A poster like this one, for instance, is a sure loser:

Vote		
CLYDE T. ALLAMERICAN		
for ASCIT DOORMAT		
Cleancut	Dependable	Absorbent
Intelligent	Courageous	Thrifty
Experienced	Athletic	Obedient
Handsome	Durable	Kind

Clyde's opponent will counter with:

Vote
JOHN DOUGH
for ASCIT DOORMAT
modest

It's a safe bet that Clyde will lose votes. This doesn't necessarily mean that John will *gain* votes, but he's really not expecting to. Generally speaking, votes are lost, not won, and the race goes to the one who started with most and lost least.

Here is another example of poor votesmanship: a hypothetical inexperienced candidate meeting a not-at-all hypothetical Caltech phenomenon, the analytic voter.

Analytic Voter: Why are you *really* running for ASCIT Ground Hog Day Chairman?

Inexperienced Candidate: I—uh—well, that is—because I want to serve the Student Body as best I can.

Analytic Voter: Ha! (He walks away unconvinced, with a smile on his face.)

Here's how an experienced candidate handles the same question:

Experienced Candidate (in loud, confident voice): I'm power mad, old chap. Napoleon complex. Runs in the family, you know.

The analytic voter is trapped. He's met the type of person he most admires—warped as they come, but straightforward about it.

Speeches are made in the various student houses. They're on about the same level as the newspaper articles, but a little harder to avoid. The best part of the campaign is saved for the last night before elections, the night of the Election Rally (or, as it is often called because of the intellectual stimulation it provides, the Erudition Rally.) Here the young Disraelis present short skits, illustrating the pressing socio-philosophic problems of this and other times. The weighty intellectual atmosphere is interrupted only for the serving of tea and for brief periods of modern interpretive dancing.

A few hours of voting, and it's all over. The newly elected officers are usually shocked to find that their jobs involve doing things, as well as talking. Some of them never recover from the shock.

—Brad Efron '60