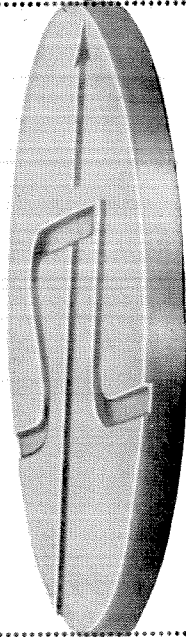


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Letters

SIRS:

In his article on the Caltech YMCA (*E&S*—February, 1960) Lance Taylor attempts a critical analysis of the organization which is "the originator and guardian of almost all organized culture on the campus." His concluding criticism pinpoints the Y's failings on the fact that "as a liberal religious organization, it imports liberally religious speakers; as a hierarchal organization, it insures that most of its discussion leaders are of one mind; as an educational organization, it concentrates on quick once-over-lightly doses of culture."

In my estimation, Lance Taylor falls into the all-too-common error of identifying the YMCA as THE Caltech organization. His criticisms, though generally sound, are misdirected.

To illustrate this point, let us examine the context in which the Y operates. Caltech is an educational and research institution. The catalog states that cultural studies are included in the curriculum "to enlarge the student's mental horizon beyond the limits of his immediate professional interest and thus better qualify him to realize his opportunities and fulfill his responsibilities as a citizen and a member of his community."

These are noble aims, but unfortunately they often fail to achieve fruition in the case of the individual student. The one-third attrition rate is not the sole evidence of this, but merely represents one solution to the great dilemma that inevitably faces Joe D. Tekman, typical undergraduate, at some point in his Caltech career: "To be or not to be? And if so, why?"

These questions are perhaps common to all college students, but the problem is accentuated at Tech because of the overwhelming pressure to "conform and meet the norm" in science and engineering. The curriculum (which as yet imposes severe restrictions on the individual's freedom of choice) is a major source of this pressure, since it carries the implication for many people that to excel in the technical disciplines is commendable and desirable, but that to

merely "get through" in the humanities is quite all right.

The second source of pressure is more insidious and subtle, for the majority of the instructors (dedicated scientists and engineers as they may be) tend to mix philosophy with fact in a manner often detrimental to the student's development as a social being.

We are therefore prompted to search on our campus for evidences of concern with the maturation of the student as a human being and a citizen of the world. And there are a number of such evidences. Though the YMCA is perhaps the only *organization* devoted to this area, there is a Public Affairs Room, capably administered by Mrs. Doris Logan; an InterNations Association; and various non-Y student groups such as the Drama Club, Debate, Model U.N., and others. To be sure, the conspicuous lack of formal participation in the area of "cultural education" on the part of the Institute is an important point to consider, but is a subject beyond the scope of this letter.

The point I am trying to stress is that, in the final analysis, the ultimate responsibility for gaining a broad perspective and concern lies with the individual himself. Others can assist in this process, but although it is undoubtedly difficult to develop in a vacuum, the vacuum often exists in the mind and not in the environment. Mr. Taylor, in criticizing the occasionally slanted program of the Y, is in reality criticizing himself and other members of the student body for failing to perceive this fault.

The YMCA, after all, is a *student* organization, and — as such — reflects student opinion and desires. I would be one of the first to agree with Norman Cousins that, in this day and age, it is imperative for every individual to be aware of world realities and to *act* on conviction. There is no better instrument than the Y for achieving this aim on the campus, but the incentive and drive must come from the student community.

— Tom Jovin '60