

# Student Life — Some Problems and Proposals

The Caltech YMCA, at the start of each school year, holds a conference to plan projects and activities for the year. Since this is the 50th anniversary of the Y, the 1965 conference was seen as a valuable opportunity for discussions probing deeper and ranging wider than merely the program for the coming year. This conference, then, was designed "to identify deep-felt student needs, to see how these needs are being met or how they are not being met on the campus today, and to discover the Y's role in meeting these needs."

On the weekend of October 22-24 approximately 25 interested faculty members and 30 student leaders met together at the home of Kenneth Rhodes, chairman of the Y Board of Directors, with the hope of producing provocative discussion.

The aim of the first discussion Friday evening was to identify the difficulties that face Caltech students and to evaluate in a general way how these are being met. The four independent discussion groups which were formed moved, surprisingly enough, in the same general directions, with a consensus that there are some important problems which are not being adequately dealt with. Four major problem areas were identified. First, and quite obvious, is the fact that Caltech is all male. An overwhelming majority of students felt that, despite intensive house social programs, this remains a serious problem. There simply is no opportunity to meet girls on a casual everyday basis, and this stifles students' development of social skills and emotional maturity.

Second, students feel isolated and cut off from other students, faculty, graduate students, and the Pasadena community as a whole. Students view Caltech as a "walled city," and there is a noticeable lack of beer joints, coffee houses, or bookstores nearby where students can go.

Third is the apparent conflict between grades and learning which the student faces. Many have learned to expect a level of academic achievement from themselves which is simply impossible at Caltech. Ideally this should lead to a re-evaluation of motives and a more mature view. Instead, there seems to be a collapse of the whole motivational structure, which ties in with the fourth problem.

The fourth problem is a loss of perspective and commitment. Students feel they are racing on, but somewhere along the way they've forgotten why

they entered the race in the first place. A large number of courses seem pedantic and concerned only with trivia, primarily because the instructors fail to relate the material to work which is important and going on now, or to show students a glint of the enthusiasm which they obviously must feel for their profession. When students lose sight of the over-all goal, not many courses are fascinating enough in themselves to provide adequate motivation. Caltech requires a great deal of its students, and when sight of the goal is lost, students begin to feel as though they're being pressed into a mold which does not fit them or their desires. Outside of courses there is a lack of involvement in contemporary social, political, and cultural problems and issues. Too often commitments to science, politics, or a religion are subjects for derision.

With problems better defined and out in the open, the discussion on Saturday turned to concrete proposals for alleviating some of them. Out of the ebb and flow of discussion during the day evolved seven specific ideas:

1. Establishment of an associated women's college.
2. Creation of a coffee house for students, faculty, and outsiders with a relaxed and intimate atmosphere.
3. Evaluation of the Institute's campus development plan with the goal in mind of providing areas for students conducive to relaxation and reflection.
4. More weekend conferences and retreats like the annual Caltech-Scripps conference.
5. Arrangements to involve faculty and grad students more closely with the student houses. Programs in faculty homes.
6. A course for credit involving work projects on cultural, social, and political problems in the Los Angeles area, perhaps in cooperation with a girls' school.
7. Means of transportation which would be open to students, such as a car pool.

Many of these proposals are not new, and some of them are perhaps unrealistic, but they *do* provide a nucleus for constructive efforts to help Caltech students solve their problems. Already, fresh discussion is raging, and working groups have been formed.

— Fred Lamb '68