

Counselors at Large

Being a campus counselor requires having a genuine liking for young people—whether they're agreeable and neat or barefoot, bearded, and bellicose.

When Caltech's psychologist Kenneth Eells retired in 1969, he was succeeded by Ian Hunter, who soon became as overburdened in the job as Eells had been. Last June Nancy Beakel was hired as a second psychologist and immediately found herself as busy as Hunter. Is this a manifestation of Parkinson's law? Not really. The fact is, Caltech's counselors not only dispense therapy, they also elect to be a part of campus life. This, it turns out, is an innovative way of working. In their relations with other colleges and universities, Drs. Hunter and Beakel both find that many campus psychologists are still so medical-center oriented that students don't see them unless a problem has already developed, and generally the medical center is alien territory at best.

Both Ian and Nancy see their task as two-fold: They must not only practice therapy but also do what they can to help students improve their ability to relate to other people.

Five days a week they keep regular counseling hours at Caltech's Young Health Center. They both come in, ready for their first session, at 9:00 a.m. Nancy has a good half hour drive from the Beakels' home in Sherman Oaks. Ian lives only ten minutes away from campus with his wife, Jan, and small son, Bruce.

Monday through Friday they each devote about 15 of the traditional 50-minute therapy hours to individual therapy with students who come regularly. In these cases the average counseling span is from six weeks to two months—generally until the specific problem bothering the student is pretty well in hand or the counselor feels he has done all he can. Occasionally they may see a student on a long-term basis if they feel they can be particularly helpful.

Who sees which student depends on who has the time—at the time—although students are always asked if they have a preference.

The biggest complaint that brings students to Ian's and Nancy's offices is pressure, which they say every Caltech student feels to some degree. The next most common problem is any number of variations on the inability to make friends, loneliness, and depression.



After their mornings of counseling—with the ten-minute breaks used mostly to return phone calls—lunch hour is generally a catch-as-catch-can affair. They may use the time to see a client if the need is urgent. They each manage to drop into a student house at lunchtime about once a week. This is probably easier for Ian than for Nancy, since many of the residents still accept a man's presence with a little more equanimity than a woman's. With Nancy, some students tend to act as if she isn't there at all, or she gets a "Who's *that* dame?" look. Nancy usually goes through the lunch line, sits down at any vacant place at a table, and starts asking questions until she can get a conversation going.

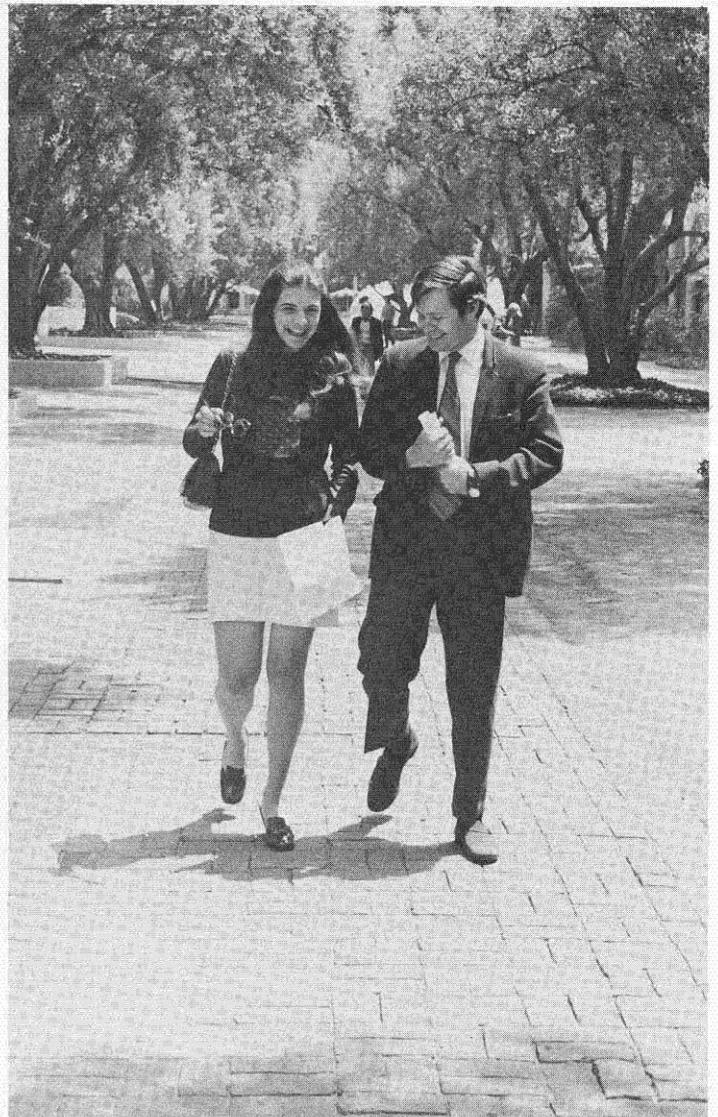
Several times a week Ian tangles into the noon basketball game at the gymnasium—a long-standing



mix of faculty and graduate students for the most part. On other days he may play touch football or get in a few games of tennis. He can cram this mini sports program in by skipping lunch, and since he continually battles the weight problem, he looks on a missed meal as a skirmish won.

After lunch, from 1:00 to 2:00 p.m. is the emergency hour for people who need help on short notice. If there is no emergency counseling, the psychologists will see somebody they haven't managed to work in at any other hour. They also try to keep the hour from 2:00 to 3:00 fairly open, and here they average two or three students a week who want to talk about dropping a course, or a leave of absence, or trouble with grades. Many of these are sent over by faculty members who have recognized

Nancy Beakel lived in New York City for five years after getting a fine arts degree from the University of Texas, and worked as a classical repertory actress. She specialized in Shakespeare and Shaw, and met her husband, Walter, when he directed her in Shaw's play *Misalliance*. When they moved to Hollywood after her husband became a theatrical agent, Nancy enrolled at UCLA, took a year of undergraduate courses, and then went on to get her PhD in clinical psychology.



Ian Hunter is a graduate of Occidental College and took his PhD at the University of Oregon. He served a clinical internship at the Suicide Prevention Center in Los Angeles, and held a postdoctoral fellowship at the Langley-Porter Neuropsychiatric Institute and the Mt. Zion Psychiatric Clinic in San Francisco before joining the faculty at UCLA. He taught courses in psychology there and also supervised the clinical training of graduate students.

a student in potential difficulty. Often such matters can be handled in a single session or on a “Come-see-me-again-if-things-get-rough” basis.

The psychologists keep records on whom they see and when, but the records are purposely kept sparse because of the confidential nature of the matters they deal with.

The greatest frustration for both Ian and Nancy is the lack of time. They simply cannot see as many students for as long as they would like. When it’s financially possible, they refer clients to outside therapists. But any way they face it, they have to juggle too many students and too few hours.



“Each of the girls at Caltech has to make her own adjustment to her roles as a woman and as a scientist,” says Nancy Beakel. “I hope we can help them identify some of their alternatives.”

They have managed to give themselves some leeway by starting two therapy groups. One is held on Tuesdays from 3:00 to 5:00 in the Health Center conference room, and is for students either of them has seen briefly and feels would do well in a group. Some can’t go the group route. The student who can’t make friends is often so terrified by a group-therapy situation but he can’t make use of it. Nancy and Ian are careful about putting students into groups, because they know that an individual has to be ready for this kind of experience—has to have some ability for give and take, and be willing to take some risks.

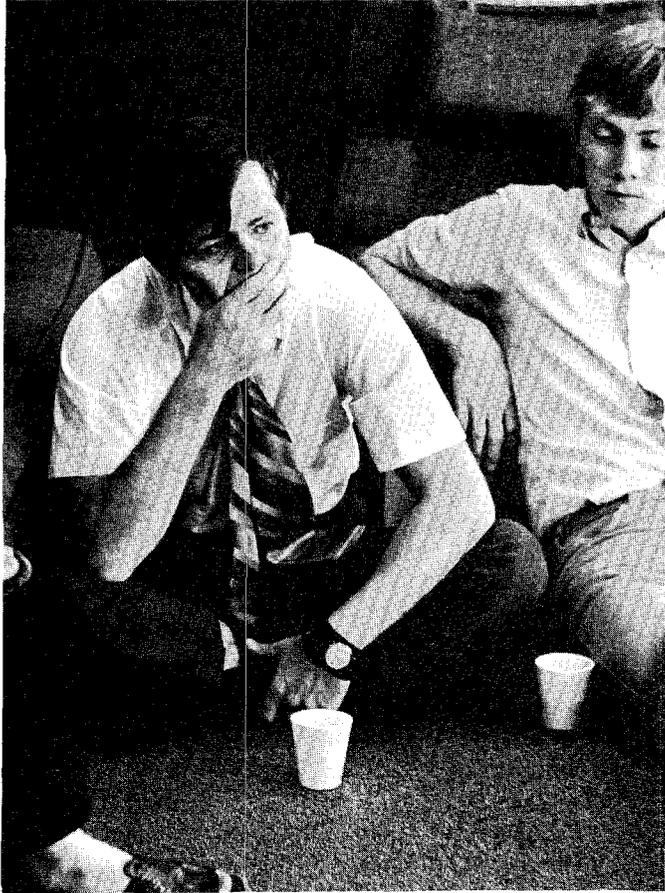
Their second group meets on Wednesdays in a clubroom in Winnett Center, and is a walk-in type. This focuses on specific problems and is a way a student can hear from others how they handled a similar situation. It may have to do with trouble in a specific course; or not being able to finish a paper; or having trouble talking to a certain professor; or possibly a student doesn’t feel comfortable with members of his research group. And then there’s always the chance of finding out how and why the other students may feel more comfortable in the presence of girls.

On afternoons when they aren’t “grouping” they try to have a staff meeting—sometimes with Dr. Daniel Siegel (the Institute psychiatrist) or with Dr. Louis Breger, who is visiting professor of psychology this term.

These get-togethers are a comforting—and necessary—thing since they both acknowledge that they tend to pick up low moods from their clients. “Nancy and I can shore each other up and remind ourselves that these things do happen,” Ian explains.

They try to keep time for a lot of meetings, many with the Caltech YMCA in activities planning. They meet as consultants every Tuesday evening from 5:00 to 6:30 with the student leaders of the Y’s various encounter groups. With the YMCA personnel Nancy is now planning a seminar which will bring noted women scientists to the campus for informal discussions of their careers and philosophies. Both are working on plans for a Y-sponsored weekend in the mountains—and they will go along on the weekend as well.

Nancy recently led a group at a Fleming House encounter-group weekend. In this case, her husband came along and led a group himself. As a former repertory actor and director, he is just as interested as Nancy in getting people to realize their own potential, and he does his own version of therapy in the volunteer Student Development Center in Los Angeles. This is a center where school dropouts learn to put more value on their own worth. Beakel has the youngsters doing all kinds of classic theater, the idea (which seems to work) being that getting into a role not only unblocks tensions, but also brings heightened personal confidence to the student as well. It is possible that Walter Beakel will start an acting class on the Caltech campus this winter.



“Alienation, distrust, fear of disclosure, withdrawal, and loneliness are common to people in our society,” declares Ian Hunter. “We’d like to help reverse some of that.”

Ian and Nancy’s campus activities take up many more hours than their counseling. If there are any other free-time chinks in their days, there are countless ways to fill them. Ian is collaborating with Richard Dean, professor of mathematics, on new teaching techniques for the latter’s courses, and tries to get to a Dean class when he can. Nancy is turning her dissertation on intrafamilial communication patterns into a publishable research paper, and is working on a speech she will give at the December dinner of the Friends of the Caltech Y.

On the two campus psychologists devolves much of the task of helping students build up an informed and rational attitude toward drugs. Last summer, after plowing through almost everything written on drugs, they gleaned the best of it—several hundred books and articles—and catalogued it all. The drug library for students is now housed in the Caltech YMCA.

Each will teach a course this year, which will take up three hours a week, plus preparation time. Ian will teach abnormal psychology in the winter quarter—as he did

last year. Nancy will teach a course in social psychology in the spring. This will be on the behavior of groups, the effects of communications on people, the process by which people operate in large and small groups, how groups form, and why certain people pick others to associate with.

Even though they seem to stretch their professional activities to infinity, it is remarkable what people can cram into their lives when they like what they’re doing. As a carry-over from his days at UCLA, Ian still has some clients in therapy out in the west end of Los Angeles, and he sees them one night a week at an office in Santa Monica.

They both work their families into their activities when they can. Jan Hunter is as well known as Ian to many students, because she comes with him to dinner in the houses and on some of the weekends the students plan. Walter and Nancy Beakel like to drop into the Athenaeum basement on a Friday night and talk to the graduate students who gather there for an end-of-the-week letdown.

Their preferences in relaxation during the few hours when they are private citizens are widely different. The Beakels are home people and like to buy things and decorate. The Hunters are inclined to clear out of town, if Ian’s schedule permits. They go camping at the drop of a sleeping bag, for a weekend at the beach, or sailing.

Ian and Nancy look on themselves as humanistic psychologists, Ian describing the term as “finding out what people are really like and then adapting our society to fit people’s needs.” They feel that the people they see in therapy are victims of society’s preformed, arbitrary notions of institutions and behavior; that some very normal parts of their natures have been suppressed.

“Every person we see eventually brings up his loneliness,” Ian says, “and how far away from other people and from himself he feels. There are successful techniques that can bring him closer to other people, and Nancy and I hope we can make a little progress in showing Caltech students what these are.”

—Janet Lansburgh