

# Student Life

## The 1982 Student-Faculty Conference

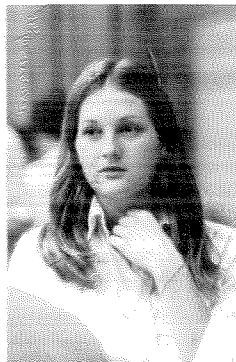
by Sue VandeWoude

THE 1982 Student-Faculty Conference was held at JPL on February 19, an Institute academic holiday. Approximately 125 students and faculty attended, among whom were Caltech President with Mrs. Marvin Goldberger, Provost Jack Roberts, several division and faculty committee chairmen, Interhouse Committee officers, and a number of students of the California Institute of Technology. All were gathered to discuss "Improving the Quality of Undergraduate Education at Caltech."

Dr. Arden Albee, chief scientist at JPL, welcomed the group, and Dr. David Wales, dean of students, began the meeting by introducing members of the Core Courses and Curriculum panel, who led off the presentations of the day. Humanities and Social Sciences, and Feedback, Advisers, and TAs were the other two panel topics discussed during the morning session. Each panel of faculty and students gave a 30-minute presentation of its topic, which was followed by another 30 minutes of open discussion. Freshman labs and chemistry, sophomore math, and freshman humanities were mentioned as courses needing reorganization; the need for an introductory computer-programming class and a wider variety of humanities courses was cited; improvements in the Teaching Quality Feedback Report, and ombudsmen and upperclass advising systems were suggested. Comments were enlightening, inspiring, entertaining, and debatable, but the overall attitude that prevailed seemed to be one of cooperation.

Chairman of the afternoon session was Dr. Jim Morgan, vice president for student affairs. Presentations and discussion centered on the honor system, student body size, and undergraduate research. Of particular concern was the need to educate grad students and new faculty about the honor system, and evaluation of student usage of master keys, expansion of student housing, and endowment of the Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship (SURF) program.

As expected, the tone and topics of the conference were quite different from the



*Sue VandeWoude is a senior in chemistry who was elected ASCIT president last fall. It was under her leadership that the conference was planned. At the right, attentive participants evaluate a statement by David Sundelson, Mellon postdoctoral instructor in literature.*

Faculty-Student Conference of 1980. There were several reasons for this. At the last conference, faculty became aware of the major problems with undergraduate education at Caltech. Since the first conference, many improvements have been made in student-related interests. People at Caltech are more aware of the problems students and faculty face, and concentration on improvement of weak spots in undergraduate education has continued.

The panel format also differed from the conference two years ago, and helped bring faculty and students together before the conference in order to prepare their presentations. The organization of the conference also involved both students and faculty members. ASCIT members, the Caltech Y, the coordinator of student activities, the deans, and the vice president for student affairs as well as the chairman of the faculty — all helped to coordinate various aspects of the meeting.

In the past two years, interaction between faculty and students seems to have improved tremendously. In general, faculty seem more responsive and attentive while students seem more willing to communicate. This was evidenced by the praise students gave to options with improved teaching and feedback methods, and the faculty's agreement with many student-proposed suggestions.

Ed Lambert, vice president of ASCIT,

gave closing remarks on behalf of the students. He stressed the importance of communication in improving Caltech education. Dr. Morgan also offered a summary of the day's events, emphasizing that a discussion is a starting point for action.

The conference was extremely worthwhile. It was an educational, informal discussion between student and faculty leaders, which is probably the most effective device to implement useful changes in undergrad education. The deans, a student from each panel, and Dr. Fred Anson, chairman of the faculty, met one week after the conference to delegate recommendations arising from the conference to appropriate committees for action. The effect of the conference is already being felt in several areas; freshman chemistry is to be restructured next year, and endowment of the SURF program is being seriously discussed.

Faculty and students at Caltech should continue to take advantage of the opportunity to have regular conferences to avoid the "education gap" that exists between these groups at many prestigious institutions. The conferences will take a commitment on the part of both, but are well worth the effort. Indeed, these meetings can continue to assess and improve the quality of undergraduate education at Caltech for future generations of Caltech students. □