Caltech students take part in education reform

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chemistry, as well as laboratory and humanities requirements which are equivalent to MIT's.

Chan sees the number of students leaving Caltech without degrees — about 30 percent of each entering class — as another significant problem. Caltech is also not attracting as many of the top high school students as it would like because of its reputation as a narrow and pressurized school, Chan said in a recent report by a faculty committee on admissions.

Both faculty and administration felt it was time to look into educational issues again, Chan concluded. Several years have passed since the institution's last comprehensive self-scrutiny.

Students participate in reforms

In preparation for their report, scheduled for the end of February, the committee is seeking substantial student input. They will have held after-dinner discussions in all seven Caltech dormitories by next week, as well as talking privately with students and contacting both alumni and dropouts. The two visitors noted their long-term involvement with student affairs: Wales is a former dean of students, Chan a former master of student houses.

Students play an important role in education reforms at Caltech, Chan and Wales agreed. The faculty and administration, in their turn, have been "pretty responsive" to student suggestions in Chan's judgment. For example, some required courses have undergone changes in the syllabus at students' request, he said.

Caltech's size — it has less than one-fourth as many undergraduates as MIT — helps faculty and students communicate. Chan felt: "We're a very small place. It's like a family," he said.

Faculty-Student Conference

Caltech will hold its fourth biannual Faculty-Student Conference on Feb. 22. The idea for this event came originally from students, Chan and Wales said. "They're the ones that really get it going," between 100 and 200 of Caltech's 800 undergraduates have attended the last two conferences.

Students participate in panel discussions and draft "white papers" for consideration at these meetings and have been actively planning the next conference, scheduled for Feb. 22, since October, Wales added.

Teaching quality and student morale are among the items on the student-generated agenda for the upcoming conference, according to The Califorma Tech, the student newspaper. "High teaching quality is something which many of us do not expect. The standard excuse is that Caltech is a research institution, and hence the students should not expect good teaching as well," according to the Nov. 1 issue.

But Chan saw teaching quality as a problem chiefly among new teachers. He was also optimistic about morale: "Student morale at the present time is very good. . . the freshmen are unusually responsive."

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