

Conclusions

Since Throop University was founded in 1891, student self-governance has been an essential aspect of life at Caltech. This principle of self-governance became embodied most clearly in the philosophy of the honor system, which was officially instituted in 1910. However, the perceptions of students regarding the honor code have changed substantially since that time, expanding from a simple pledge not to cheat on exams to a guiding philosophy of student conduct.

Over the past century, the student government has also grown extensively. The number of available offices has grown faster than the undergraduate enrollment, creating one office for every four students in 2002. The larger government has also extended student influence into many more areas over the course of time. While students of the 1930's and 40's primarily governed only themselves, the student government has since expanded to have a say in academic issues and broad Institute policies.

Despite this student government expansion, there has been a sharp decline in students' perception of their influence over Institute policies in the last fifteen years. This attitude comes in reaction to the increasing regulation of student life by Caltech administration that has occurred over the same period of time. Responding to national trends, Caltech has been devoting more and more resources towards student affairs. In 1980, student affairs at Caltech consisted of four faculty members working part time as the Vice-President for Student Affairs, Dean of Undergraduate Students, Dean of Graduate Studies, and Master of Student Houses. Since that time, Caltech has hired many full-time student affairs professionals to fill the positions of Assistant Vice-President, Associate Dean, Director of Admissions, Director of Minority Student Affairs, Director of Counseling, Director of Residence Life, and Director of International Student Programs (EMN 2002). In 2002, Caltech made the Vice-President for Student Affairs a full-time position.

This incredible growth has resulted not only in more student services, but also an increase in administrative oversight for those services. This increased regulation threatens the long-held philosophy of student self-governance and has made students suspect that their influence is being taken away. This perception of student influence also

plays into Caltech students' morale and their overall satisfaction with the Institute; both have been declining rapidly in recent years.

The level of concern may be rising, but the reasons students are dissatisfied with Caltech have not changed significantly through history. Academic workload, the quality of teaching, social life, regulation of House activities, and the honor code have stood as the 5 most critical student issues for over 60 years. Although these issues have all been addressed at various times, the student body has a short memory and in many cases, the same arguments play out precisely as they had just a few years earlier. The pressing concerns that caused students to protest in December 2001 were very much the same issues that have plagued the undergraduate population for decades.

Although the issues that students deal with and the complaints that students are raising about Caltech today are not much different from those aired in 1970, 1950, or 1935, the structure and responsibilities of student governance at Caltech have changed dramatically over the years. The characters of the Houses, the responsibilities of ASCIT, the scope of the honor code, and the role of student affairs administration at Caltech have all gone through major changes. However, these changes seemingly have not solved any of students' major concerns. Some of these problems are unique to Caltech's rigorous academic program and student governance traditions. Concerns over academic workload, the quality of teaching, social life, regulation of House activities, and the honor code are almost inescapable in Caltech's student environment.

The changes in student governance over time have almost always come in reaction to student complaints. However, the reformers quickly graduate, and the foundations that are established are quickly forgotten. Sometimes it is unclear if any progress is made because it is hard to establish continuity when students graduate in four years. Imparting future student leaders and administrators with a knowledge of history may help, and perhaps this study can contribute toward that goal.

Whether or not this study makes an impact on the future, Caltech student government has proven capable of responding to a wide variety of challenges in the past, and the tradition of student self-governance appears to be relatively robust. However, students' present-day understanding of self-governance does not necessarily correspond precisely with tradition, as it places a heavy emphasis on rights and largely neglects the

idea of responsibility. After investigating the history of undergraduate self-governance, it is clear that the responsibility of providing services and disciplining students were once much more prominent parts of student government than they are today. The tradition of student self-governance has not been defined by Caltech administrators asking students for input but by students taking primary responsibility for running the athletics program, punishing cheaters, publishing a newspaper, or placing freshmen in Houses. Student self-governance may be more precisely defined as both the privilege of fair representation in matters of shared concern and the responsibility for creating and enforcing rules governing conduct.

This decline in responsibility is correlated with a decline in honor code compliance, rising concern with regulation of House activities, and other disturbing trends of present-day undergraduate life at Caltech. However, these trends are not yet cause for alarm and may simply be the inevitable consequences of a rapidly changing outside world. An increasingly litigious society and changing expectations of college life have forced Caltech's idealistic self-governance to face reality. Caltech went through comparable changes during the 1940's and 50's because of the GI Bill and again in the 1960's and 70's as campuses around the country went through major upheaval.

During each of those earlier periods, reforms in student governance responded to changing student concerns and reversed downturns in the honor system. There are also many signs at the present time that the future will bring reforms in many facets of undergraduate life. At the time of this report's completion, Caltech's first full-time Vice-President for Student Affairs is settling into her office, reform-minded ASCIT officers have just endured the most competitive elections in history, and a very ambitious student-faculty conference has the entire campus talking about improving the curriculum. The coming years should bring some major changes in undergraduate student governance; if historical trends hold true, these reforms should serve to strengthen the honor system, expand the student government, and reaffirm the tradition of student self-governance that is as old as Caltech itself.