

# THE CALIFORNIA TECH



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PASADENA, CALIFORNIA

OCTOBER 6, 2008

## SET, Ready to Go

*Discussing ways to improve student life***By Sarah Marzen**

STAFF WRITER

The Student Experience Trip-goers are back from their 13-day, 8-college tour, and last week they started condensing their newfound knowledge into formal recommendations for improving student life at Caltech.

Funded by a nearly \$25,000 grant from the Moore-Hufstedler Fund, the Student Experience Trip (SET) aimed to understand and improve Caltech's student life by visiting other top-notch colleges nationwide. According to trip-goer Anthony Chong, recommendations will be finalized by the beginning of next term, "after spending hours on end debating the merits of each suggestion."

Discussion topics include everything from plans for a Student Center to the House System to alumni relations. Trip members interviewed were unwilling to comment on the specifics of the discussions, since the SET group hasn't yet reached consensus on anything.

"I can't say we'll agree on everything because this is a very diverse group of students," said Chong. "But there will be enough things we can all agree on that we'll be able to make consensus recommendations."

ASCIT President and trip-goer Caleb Ng expects that some of the smaller suggestions will be implemented before the report is finalized.

**SET- what will it change?**

Some undergraduates are skeptical of how much the SET report will affect student life.

But according to ASCIT President and trip-goer Caleb Ng, SET has the support of high-level Caltech administrators and Caltech trustees, pointing out that the trip wouldn't have been funded otherwise. Ng also said that the East Coast trustees, after meeting with trip-goers, "all sent emails to President Chameau about being glad that the trip was

happening."

"I think there will be no problem with implementation," said Ng. "Of course not everything will be accepted verbatim."

A similar trip focused on improving the House system occurred back in 1967. Its recommendations led to carpeting in the Houses, and may have led to Caltech becoming co-ed more quickly. According to Craig Montououri, Caltech alum and author of the SET MHF proposal, the 1967 trip-goers "kept the House system from being abandoned during this period."

Still, some undergraduates wonder how much information could be gleaned from short, one-day visits.

Chong and Ng both say that the extensive background research done on colleges by Trip staff allowed trip-goers to ask directed questions to administrators. According to Chong, the administrators' answers were open and frank.

"We reached a stage where additional time [at each college] might not have netted extra gain," said Chong.

There was even some skepticism among those involved with planning SET regarding how smoothly the trip would run. "There were concerns about logistics," said Ng. "SET was entirely student-run and most of us had no experience planning this sort of thing."

There were no apparent logistical problems. Trip-goers stayed with friends of various Caltech undergraduates or in housing set by administrators, and travelled in various ways.

The eleven trip-goers—Black, Ricketts President Cliff Chang, Edward Chen, Chong, Paul Fleiner, Sarvesh Garimella, Abhi Gulati, Ryan Lanman, Maral Mazrooei, Ng, and Liuyi Pei—span six of the eight Houses, representing all but Dabney House and Fleming House. They were chosen last year by either ASCIT interview or student body election.

## Caltech Security gets Earthquake-Proofed

**By Daniel Thai**

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Gregg Henderson, Chief of Security at Caltech, recently instituted an Urban Search and Rescue program at Caltech.

He stated that although Caltech's buildings are overbuilt, we cannot expect help from Pasadena Fire and Police, as Caltech is likely to be one of the few places left standing.

Furthermore, he pointed to the "Great California Shakeout," a disaster-preparation program where institutions determine the likely impact of a 7.8 Magnitude earthquake traveling north along the San Andreas fault.

Currently, there are 3 Urban Search and Rescue teams active, and Henderson hopes to have a total of 5 teams ready by November.

Tech vs. LaVerne

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Palin vs. Biden  
Scientists avoid God

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Fireworks explode over Beckman Auditorium on September 27th, closing Prefrosh Weekend and signalling the start of Rotation 2008.  
Photo by Jonathan Tsai

## Caltech Crime Rates Above Pasadena's and on the Rise

**By Daniel Thai**

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

In 2007, according to the recently released Annual Security Report, Caltech had 73 burglaries, an increase of 12 percent from the previous year, while Pasadena had a 7.5 percent decrease in burglaries from the previous year. Simultaneously, the number of Pasadena officers increased by one officer in a force of 368.

Gregg Henderson, Caltech Chief of Security, stated that the vast majority of crimes are committed by students from off campus, noting that not everyone "was here to smell the roses." Most thefts, including the recent thefts of electronic equipment from the Houses, are opportunistic

in other words, committed with little or no premeditation.

According to Henderson, the rise in crime in 2007 could be partially due to the activity of a professional burglary ring that operated all over, including in Pasadena, Burbank, and Monrovia. The thieves were apprehended in February 2007 by Caltech Security.

When asked if crime rates for 2008 would decrease as a result, Henderson said he hoped that next year would be like 2005, when only 32 burglaries were committed..

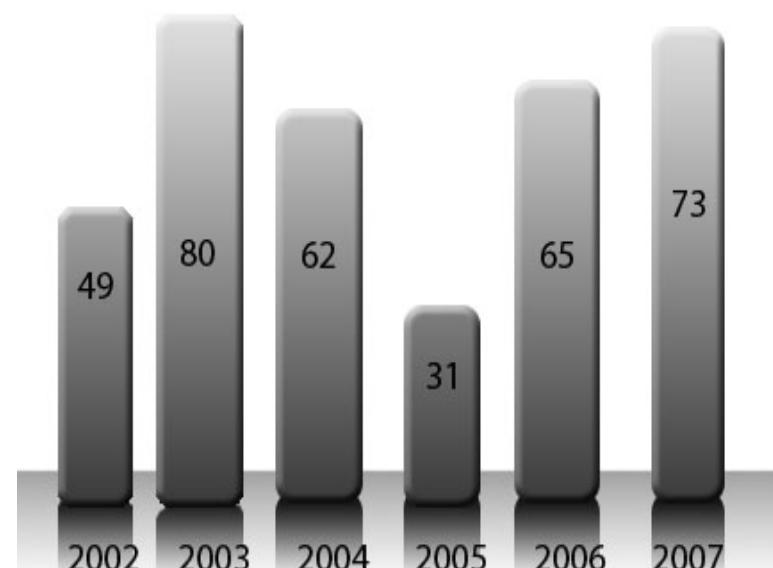
Caltech Security has run through numerous changes in the past few years. Particularly in 2005, Henderson worked to expand the electronic "card-swipe" lock system and to install addi-

tional closed-circuit television cameras. In 2007, he developed a reporting program whereby security officers would report possible security breaches, such as open doors, to building coordinators. Henderson stated that he would like the entire campus to be covered under this program.

Although a number of programs have been instituted, Caltech continues to be a target of thefts. In 2008, there were copper and brass thefts from buildings around Caltech, and bike thefts continue to be a problem. On May 19th, Security sent out an email telling residents to secure their belongings in response to "suspect(s) [who] specifically target laptops and computer hardware that are left unattended in offices."

In a quick comparison, MIT had a 22 percent decrease in its crime rate, and Cambridge had a 3.2 percent decrease in burglaries compared to the previous year. Both Caltech and MIT decreased their total security personnel between 2006 and 2007 by one officer.

During 2007, Caltech had 12.1 burglaries per thousand people, while MIT had 9.2 burglaries per thousand people. However, Cambridge is a higher burglary area than Pasadena, with a per capita burglary rate in Cambridge of 6.65 burglaries per thousand people, and a per capita burglary rate in Pasadena of 5.6 burglaries per thousand people. Therefore, Caltech's burglary rate was more than double that of Pasadena during 2007.



The number of burglaries per year at Caltech has varied over the years; 2007 has seen one of the highest numbers since 2002.

# OPINION

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## McCain v. Obama, from the right

By Wesley Yu  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

In the first of the 2008 Presidential debates, both Senators John McCain and Barack Obama tried to stick to traditional roles and well-worn campaign lines, but were forced to make some revealing statements about fundamental differences. The debate, which focused on foreign policy, national security, and the financial crisis, was a test for both candidates: the rookie Obama had to show that he belongs in this race, and the senior McCain had to put distance between himself and President Bush.

The first issue of the night was the recently proposed \$700 billion bailout plan. Jim Lehrer, the moderator, asked the candidates where they stood on the plan. Obama called the recent crisis "the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression" and McCain in an attitude of one-upmanship called it "the worst crisis in our history." But neither candidate proceeded to answer the question. Obama explained that neither candidate has seen the full text of the legislation.

Obama proceeded to blame the financial debacle on the Bush administration and scored points on his programs for the middle class and a "tax cut for 95% of working American families." McCain's positions on finance were weak, mostly concentrating on the need for bipartisanship, smaller government, and cuts on pork barrel spending. McCain also attacked Obama's middle class programs, which he said would cost another \$800 billion. McCain was put on the defensive on this issue, and Obama was able to make the better impression.

From a scientific standpoint, the most interesting comment of the debate may have been the response of Obama to Lehrer's question on what would get cut

### On the Issues

Financial Crisis: Tie (advantage Obama)  
Balancing the Budget: McCain  
Foreign Policy/Security: McCain  
Overall Winner: Sen. John McCain

first to balance the budget. McCain immediately answered that he would cut ethanol subsidies and go after pork barrel spending. Those two things obviously don't solve the budget problem, but were a safe neutral answer for McCain. Obama avoided the question several times, but finally said that alternative energy research would be delayed. This could be concerning because it undermines Obama's comments that global warming is a "primary concern" and creates doubt about Obama's commitment to science funding in general.

The final issue was foreign policy. This area has always been viewed as McCain's strongpoint and Obama's weakness, but Obama was able to close that gap in this debate. Coming out strong on Russia, Iran, Afghanistan, and North Korea, Obama showed that

he had a handle on the issues. The one mistake he made was in admitting some unfamiliarity by deferring to his more experienced running mate Sen. Joseph Biden. McCain made a good effort to focus, not on the mistakes of the past made by the Bush administration, but on the future decisions to be made in Iraq. This strategy was a solid defense against Obama's effort to associate McCain with Bush. McCain got flustered a little bit when Obama quoted Kissinger, which led to a heated debate on whether the future President should meet with other nations without preconditions. Fact checking showed that Obama made a false characterization of Kissinger's statement; point McCain.

In summary, Obama achieved his goal of proving that he belongs in this race, also focusing on the mistakes of the Bush administration and by association, McCain. McCain hammered home his foreign policy experience and his ability to lead from day one, while repeatedly stating that Obama "does not understand" and has "dangerous ideas" on foreign policy.

As for appearance and etiquette, Obama did a better job of looking into the camera and engaging the audience but seemed to be overly aggressive in cutting off and interrupting McCain. McCain looked at Jim Lehrer, the moderator too much, but told illustrative stories that struck an emotional cord and emphasized his long record and extensive experience. Both candidates aggressively attacked the others position, but the zinger of the night was McCain's comment that "Obama refuses to admit being wrong about the Iraq surge" and is as inflexible as the current administration. For a Democrat, being likened to President Bush is one hell of an insult.

## McCain v. Obama, from the left

By Christian Giset  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Senator John McCain of Arizona and Senator Barack Obama of Illinois had a first presidential debate which was anything but spectacular. Neither McCain nor Obama had any blow out moments as they bickered about the same things they had been bickering about before hand. However, Obama had a stronger stance on the issues.

The first question in the debate concerned the financial "crisis." McCain did not actually respond to the actual question. McCain simply said that he hoped that the bailout would pass, then side-tracked the question. Obama reminded us that he had warned the Senate two years back that the lack of regulation over the lending would lead to financial problems in the future, which is exactly what happened. Obama supported the bailout, but only with appropriate regulation. A recent theme in the Obama campaign has been that McCain is a deregulator, although deregulation got us in this financial trouble-- and McCain played right into that.

Ironically, McCain repeatedly complimented the typical American worker, yet his policies do not help them. As Obama brought up more than once in the debate, McCain supports approximately \$400 billion tax cuts to large corporations, yet not a single penny goes to the middle and lower classes. How can one rightfully talk about the greatness of the American worker, yet support giving the benefits to the employers and not the employees? McCain argued that if business taxes are too high, then companies will go to other countries to open up businesses. McCain quotes Ireland as having a 24% tax difference, so he believes that companies will want to open up in places like that. There is of course a great flaw with the typical Republican

attitude, and Obama pointed out that because of loopholes in the tax code, which of course McCain supports, American businesses effectively have one of the lowest tax rates in the world.

With foreign policy, the debate became quite dull. Even though this was supposed to be McCain's strength, this section went no where. To sum up the hour of which they were talking about foreign policy, Obama believes that our troops should be in Afghanistan because that is where the terrorists are, while McCain believes we should finish our work in Iraq. I was in no way impressed by McCain arguing that we should be in Iraq because if we left we would be cowards and that our work would be in vain. That logic is along the lines of someone at a poker table saying that the money they lost would be in vain if they did not press to win.

Obama had the stronger case, though I believe he could have made it stronger to the point of actually winning the debate. An example is when McCain kept on complaining that Obama's plans would cost \$800 billion. This would have been the perfect opportunity to bring up that McCain's plan will cost much more than his. It is this issue in particular that changed me from being a Republican. Republicans believe that there should be less government oversight, yet spend far more than Democrats do. While Obama's plan over the next ten years will raise the national debt by \$1-2 trillion, McCain's will raise it \$5 trillion.

The presidential debate was a tie and this is not very good for McCain. If McCain wants a shot at the presidency, he needs to make some game changers, and a tying debate is not game changing. The way the news described the \$700 billion bailout was that every American could instead buy two thousand apple pies. For the election, it is the third quarter and Obama is up 23-10.

## From the President's Desk...

By Caleb Ng  
COLUMNIST

Welcome back to another academic year!

Over the summer, ASCIT has been working hard on a number of projects, highlighted by the Student Experience Trip.

Our most important summer undertaking, though, was the Student Experience Trip (SET). Eleven undergraduates traveled to eight east coast colleges and universities over the course of two weeks. Every member of the SET Team agrees that what we observed and learned will be extremely valuable to improving the Caltech student experience.

So what exactly did we learn? To highlight just one item, we learned that Caltech's student health insurance is peerless. Our current plan affords students as much physical and mental care as needed. As a result, the strictest

student confidentiality is maintained, and no one is forced to decline care for financial or family reasons.

Hopefully, you have found your copy of the all-new little t, which was released last week to rave reviews. And for those who haven't checked all summer, you might notice some changes in Donut's look and feel. This will continue throughout the year as we work to make it your one-stop web portal.

We have also continued to work to allocate and furnish the SAC. As you may know, a great deal of student space was lost in the process of the recent renovations.

However, you will be pleased to know that there are a number of rooms available by online reservation on Donut: study spaces, music rooms, and a movie screening room. There is also an as yet unfurnished dark room; if you have any expertise in this area, please let us know.

We have also been looking for

ways to connect you to Pasadena, the greater Los Angeles area, and California as a whole. In particular, we have been looking to bring ZipCar to campus. Looking further into the future, check out the California High Speed Rail Initiative.

Finally, the Executive Committee has started its self-critical evaluation of the goals and structure of ASCIT to allow us to better serve and represent the undergraduate student body.

Want to learn more about anything mentioned above? Want to get involved or make your voice heard? Contact any ASCIT officer or SET Team member.

[pres@donut.caltech.edu](mailto:pres@donut.caltech.edu)



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# Palin v. Biden, from the right

**By Wesley Yu**  
STAFF WRITER

It was a walkover, a blowout, a knockdown win for Senator Joseph Biden in the only 2008 Vice Presidential debate last Thursday.

On every issue ranging from faltering home prices to nuclear proliferation to the war in Iraq, Senator Biden took the unprecedented step in this election season of making his stance clear. In doing so, he made the choice for voters simple and obvious—a ticket that thinks versus a ticket that doesn't.

Throughout the night, Biden delivered short, declarative statements aimed at drawing a stark contrast between the logic of his positions and the unnerving lack thereof from Governor Sarah Palin. He set the stage by stating that "facts matter," and proceeded to cite statistical evidence and voting records that backed his arguments. Biden talked about supporting a democratic government in Pakistan, ending the Iraq

war in 16 months, making sure that the middle class American can pay health insurance, and re-establishing the

United States as a global leader through diplomatic, not military, action. But he wasn't a liberal stock character either; Biden supported going after Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, establishing a no-fly zone over Sudan, imposing effective

sanctions on Iran, and backing Israel in the Middle East. These positions made sense. Whether or not you agree with them, Biden's ideas are based on real facts and solid reasoning.

Palin, on the other hand, said nothing of substance. Asked by Gwen Ifil about bringing bipartisanship to Washington, she cited her "diverse family," whatever

that means. While Biden talked about "establishing schools in the Middle East to compete with the

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ahs," Palin gave a shout-out to the third g r a d -  
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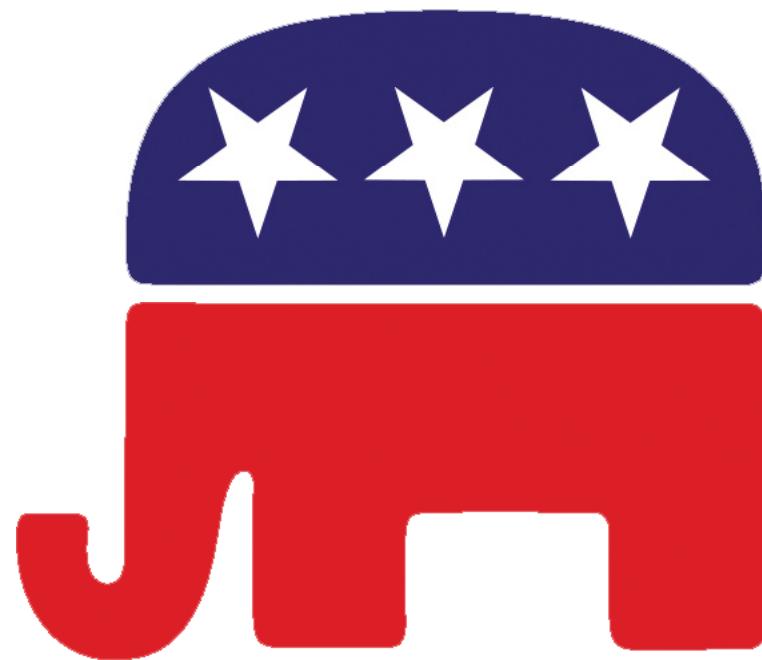
lack of knowledge and experience painfully clear. Finally, I'd like to extend a challenge: if you think Palin did well last Thursday,

please write back; I'd love to hear the latest news from Lala Land.

**On the Issues**  
Economy: Biden  
Iraq War: Biden  
Foreign Policy: Biden  
Energy: Palin  
Education: Biden  
Healthcare: Biden  
Overall Winner: Biden

outsider image Palin summed up her lack of political understanding by saying "I don't know Senate talk."

Analysts after the debate commented that Biden was "uncharacteristically restrained" because he didn't attack Palin's numerous weaknesses. In my opinion, he didn't have to. By leaving the obvious unsaid, Biden made Palin's



# Palin v. Biden, from the left

**By Evans Boney**  
STAFF WRITER

Well, we can talk about it a lot, but I think this debate will be forgotten in a month. It was a decent showing by both candidates, pretty much a tie, so nobody will

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ed McCain and George Bush. Did we learn anything new? Yeah, but who cares that it came up during a debate? It may as well have been on a campaign ad. But, since it's

right after the debate, we may as well talk about the new things we learned:

**1. Sarah Palin wants to be a VP dictator.** What in the world was she thinking on this? Not only does she espouse Cheney's ridiculous assertion that he is

her a veto? Give her 5 votes?

**2. Sarah Palin says "nuclear".** My count had it 5 "nuclear" to 2 hard fought "nuclear"s. Somebody got a 29 on their test.

**3. Joe Biden has a nice house.** And talked about it for a bit too long. I was surprised at his emotional appeal when talking about his son, it seemed very genuine.

**4. Sarah Palin wants to talk about energy.** Not healthcare, not financial rescue plans, not gay marriage, energy. Somehow she managed to turn every question for 30 straight minutes into a lecture on energy.

**5. Sarah Palin supported a windfall profits tax.** May not be news to some, but I think we'll hear a bit more from the Obama campaign about this (on their ads). That's a "fundamental difference" between Palin and McCain.

**6. Nobody has any promises they'd be willing to break.** Joe deflected this into a pro-

Obama speech and Palin... talked about energy. Wow, I guess we'll call this part of the debate the commercials.

**7. Sarah Palin supports gays,**

**just not gay marriage.** But she didn't want to talk about it. Seriously, she just stopped talking about it.

**8. "Past is Prologue".** A good stinger by Biden, who was a good campaign ad about McCain's support of Bush.

**9. Sarah Palin doesn't need to know what caused global warming.** But she knows how to stop it. Oh... right, you're the one from the oil and gas regulators who wants to drill in ANWR.

**10. Three weeks in Iraq costs more than we've spent in Afghanistan so far.** Another good line we're sure to hear in campaign commercials for weeks to come.

**11. Sarah Palin thinks John McCain is the man we need to leave.** I mean lead, oops Freudian slip.

**12. John McCain would tell you a lot of good things about Joe Biden.** Hopefully he does, because Joe thinks they're bffs.

**13. Joe Biden goes to Home Depot a lot.** Maybe it's just me, but I thought that made him sound funny. Well... I guess he does have a nice house ...

**14. Joe Biden was joking about not being Vice President.** Take you a month to get that one America? Palin, just having gotten the joke, thought it was lame. We at home thought it... never existed.

**15. Alaska state government sponsors terror.** Well, they support companies in Sudan. And Palin brought that up to show how great she is? Because she's going to stop funding Sudan? Wow.

**16. Biggest non-stump speech word used by either candidate:** Aggrandize Score Joe Biden, we spelling bee nerds like people that know words.

**17. John McCain is widely known as a pro-regulation guy in Washington** Except not about financial issues of course... about tobacco. Right, everyone is against tobacco companies killing people and lying about it. Some people have been against greed on Wall Street since before last week. Some people weren't in the Keating 5, themselves a prime example of corruption in the banking industry. But, run of the mill pseudo-truth from the McCain camp.

So it's certainly the most interesting night in politics in a while, but really, it was just a really long campaign ad.

# WORD FROM THE IHC

Dear Fellow Members of the Caltech Community,

The House System is often listed among students' top reasons for enjoying their time at Caltech and indeed for their decision to attend in the first place. To this end, it is our aim and goal to preserve not only the system itself but also the personalities and atmospheres of our eight individual houses, in which so many students have and will continue to find comfort and camaraderie. Furthermore, it is our desire that we should oversee a body of students which respects its individual members, their di-

verse backgrounds, and the common properties within which they reside and study. However, it does on occasion become the case that facets of our house cultures will push the bounds of socially accepted behavior and become a disconcerting misrepresentation of Caltech's overall standards. We now recognize that this was the case during last week's house skits, several of which contained material, either implied or explicit, that several individuals found offensive, obscene, or else lacking in sensitivity, especially in consideration of the fact that the location and presentation created

a situation in which those who took issue with the program could not easily excuse themselves. As such, we would like to offer our apologies to those members of the community, as well as the community at large, for any offense that was taken. Furthermore, we recognize that portions of this presentation showed a lack of foresight with respect to the proper use of the auditorium that fortunately did not result in any lasting damage. To this end, we now wish to express the opinion that these skits should not occur in the same fashion in the future, to be replaced by some other

more appropriate introduction to the Rotation process. It can not be emphasized enough that this is not an attempt to stifle the creative or original expressions of the house cultures, but rather an attempt at making some distinction between those situations in which this important aspect of student life should be celebrated and those in which the students ought to do well by the community at large. It is our hope that those aforementioned individuals can accept this apology in stride and that the house system will in the future be seen more for its successes and contributions to our

community than for its occasional mistakes and intemperance.

On Behalf of The Interhouse Committee,

Respectfully Submitted,  
Christopher Watson  
Chairman

## Where to eat?

ARE YOU WONDERING WHICH RESTAURANTS TO TRY OUT AROUND CALTECH?  
HERE'S A RECAP OF PREVIOUS FOOD REVIEWS FROM DANNAH ALMASCO AND ANDREW FREDDO.

### PLACE TO TAKE A DATE...

#### *The CrepeVine*

Location: 36 West Colorado on Mills Place between Colorado and Green Street.

Tucked away down an alleyway in Old Town, this Parisian bistro has an intimate setting with wine bar and live music. The menu includes tantalizing appetizers, both savory and sweet crepes, and much more. Besides, who could say no to a nutella & banana crepe?

### PLACE TO GO IF YOU HAVE A BIG APPETITE...

#### *Porto Alegre*

Location: Paseo Colorado

All-you-can-eat Brazilian Barbecue. Make sure you're starving before heading to Porto Alegre. In addition to a fully stocked salad bar (plenty more than just salads), servers roam the restaurant with tri-tip steak and filet mignon on swords. Did I mention this was an all-you-can-eat steakhouse? High quality food, amazing service and chic atmosphere come with an expensive bill starting at \$30 a person.

### PLACE FOR A SWEET TREAT...

#### *21 Choices*

Location: Corner of Colorado & Delacey in Old Town

Visit their website at [www.21choices.com](http://www.21choices.com) to see their 6 flavors of frozen yogurt of the day; the wait in line may be long, but the friendly service and unlimited combinations of flavors and toppings at 21 choices is unbeatable.

### PLACE FOR A NICE, INEXPENSIVE MEAL...

#### *Hanabi*

Location: Under Trader Joe's on Lake

Head to Hanabi for an authentic and cheap Japanese meal (sushi and bento boxes included!). Lunch combos start at \$7.99 and there is a 10% discount for Caltech students. Make sure to save room for dessert, and try the tempura ice cream!

### PLACE FOR GOOD & SIMPLE EATS...

#### *Pie and Burger*

Location: Heading West on California Blvd. towards Lake

The closest thing to a diner around Caltech, Pie & Burger serves up a relatively simplistic menu (like hot dogs and burgers) at a pretty pricey penny, but the pies are well worth it.

### PLACE TO HIT THE BOOKS AND CAFFEINATE...

#### *Metropolitan Café*

Location: Across the street from Target on Colorado

The Metropolitan Café is crowded with people working on their laptops at all times of the day. I guess the combination of caffeine and free wireless serves for an idealistic study hot-spot. Not a place to meet up for a coffee with a friend, it is very quiet with a studious atmosphere, unachievable at the corner Starbucks.

DANNAH ALMASCO IS A REVIEWER FOR THE CALIFORNIA TECH.

## “Save Me, Science!”

## ... a report on the Origins Conference.

“Ah, the origin of the universe,” I imagine physicist Leonard Susskind sighing from the stage of Beckman Auditorium. “Boy, does that ever take me back.”

An hour later, Paul Davies intoned for the third time, “as Lenny already mentioned...” before explaining again that the universe is in fact quite old, and did or did not, perhaps, depending on your point of view and interpretation of various fine intricacies some small subset of specialists may or may not understand, come from somewhere.

The third physicist to speak, Caltech’s own Sean Carroll, probably couldn’t even tell who to credit before making a point. Was it “as Paul already mentioned,” or “as Lenny alluded,” or “as Paul said that Lenny previously indicated that I might say when it was my turn, about the point Paul made clarifying Lenny’s tangent on my thesis...”

Perhaps you see the difficulty, at something like the Origins conference, in keeping your physicists apart. When it comes to speculating on genesis, they appear to be bosons, all more than willing to think the same, low-energy thought.

Michael Shermer, director of the Skeptic Society, brought a host of eminent scientists to Caltech last Saturday to speak before a lay audience. Ostensibly, their goal was to collectively meditate on whether “science makes belief in God obsolete.”

The scientists involved were as nonplussed by the imponderability of this question as any other reasonable person would be, and proceeded to talk about their research, instead.

Cristof Koch, Caltech’s colorful neuroscience professor, shocked his audience by explaining that, as a scientist, he thinks consciousness comes from somewhere. He tries to find out where by looking very closely.

For example, in occasional unfortunate instances, it’s medically necessary to stick all sorts of wires in epileptic people’s brains. As long as you’re doing that, you might as well mess around with some science.

It turns out that each concept you can consciously identify, such as “redness”, “pain”, and “Halle Berry-ness”, corresponds somewhere in your brain to the binary activity

of a neuron. If you are seeing Halle Berry, the neuron fires. If you aren’t, it doesn’t.

Sounds simple, right? That’s because it’s from a talk designed for simple people. Consciousness is complicated, comes in varying degrees, and is notoriously slippy to analyze. But Koch doesn’t think the study of consciousness involves theology.

Do Susskind, Davies, and Carroll think that God can help explain the origin of the universe? No. If you stretch, it’s a slightly-fuzzy no. But still no.

Does David Prothero, Caltech/Occidental-affiliated expert on the fossil evidence of evolution, think religious considerations aid our understanding of the origin of life, or the Cambrian proliferation of life? Emphatic no.

But frankly, they just don’t seem that worried about it. They were brought in to talk about God. But except for Prothero, whose science is the target of a vigorous attack from certain flavors of Christianity, the speakers at the Origins conference confined their theological ruminations to a couple of bullet points on their final “in conclusion...” slide.

Sean Carroll excitedly delved into Boltzmann’s hypothesis that the universe’s low-entropy past is a statistical blip in an infinite history, then excoriated the idea and presented a new model of baby universes pinching off and “never writing home to their parents.”

Susskind compared the finely-tuned nature of physical constants to the finely-tuned sequence of a human genome to illustrate his idea of how string theory might explain the state of the universe.

Prothero described lab experiments in creating the chemistry of life. Davies speculated on the meta-laws constraining choices among logically-consistent universes. Koch told me I would forget the color of his orange shirt, and that this was based on science.

So imagine that. You work so hard to bring a bunch of great scientists together to have a discussion about some sort of general silliness mankind spends its time fretting over, but they ignore the bait and discuss their scientific passions instead.

Well, newly-minted frosh, welcome to Caltech.

—Mark Eichenlaub is a writer for the California Tech.



TRADING PRESENTS THE CALTECH &amp; HARVEY MUDD

# CHALLENGE

## OCTOBER 11, 2008

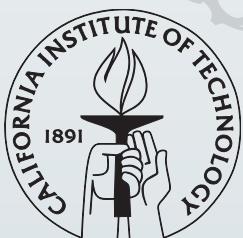


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Photos courtesy of Mandy Gamble

### Caltech Welcomes a New Hen Slayer!

**By Mandy Gamble**  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Friday, October 3rd  
Caltech Freshman, Sam Barnett (Highland Park, IL), earned his first college win this weekend at the Fall ITA Regionals in Claremont, CA. Barnett dismissed the Pomona-Pitzer Sagehen, Ramsey Bernard (Steamboat Springs, CO), 6-3, 7-6 in a hard fought battle. Barnett came from behind in the second set to clinch the match and is in line

to replace Caltech Alum, John Howard, as the new Hen slayer. Later in the day, Barnett teamed up with Sophomore, Wesley Yu (Irvine, CA), in doubles competition. The Caltech team fell 8-3 to Starr and Wu, the sixth seeded team from Claremont-Mudd-Scripps, despite some aggressive volleying and rock solid returning.

### ITA Scholar Athlete Wins.

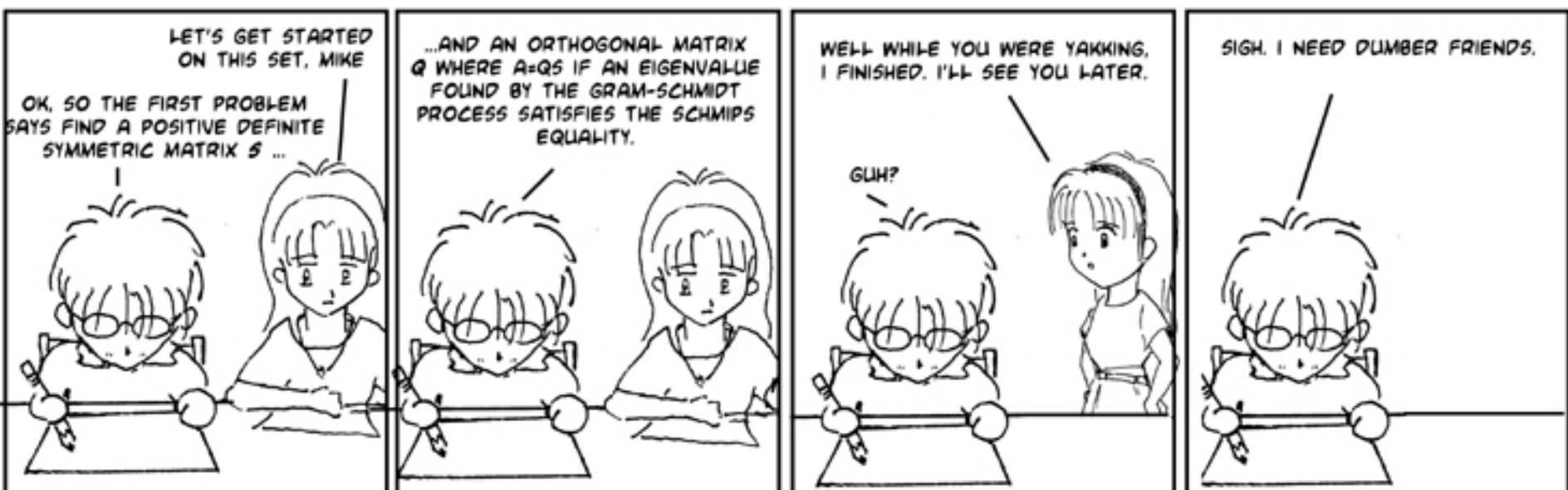
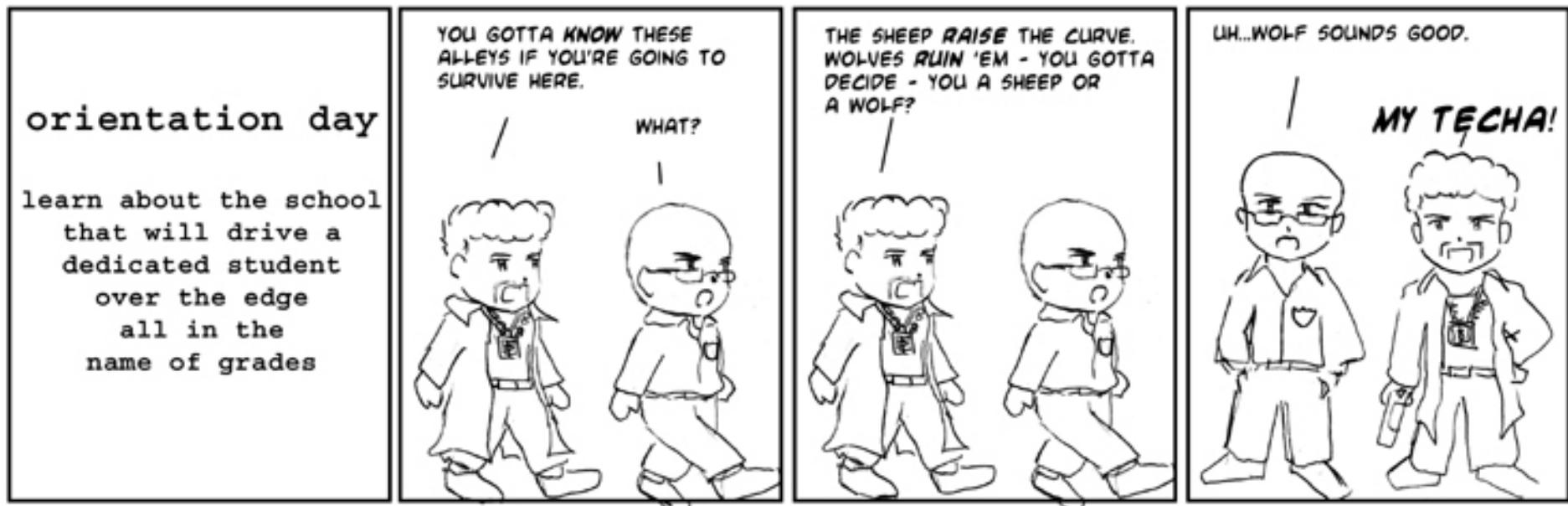
Friday, October 3rd  
Caltech Sophomore, Wesley Yu

(Irvine, CA), started the season with a terrific 6-4, 6-2 win over Leland Buttle (Surfside, CA), from Chapman University at the Fall ITA Regionals in Claremont, CA. Yu, who was nominated as an ITA Scholar Athlete, returned to the Beaver squad with a more consistent ground game and increased fitness, which helped him bait the Chapman Panther into a patient strategic match. In the second round Yu faced the fourteenth seed, Mike Reading, from the University of Redlands and fell 6-1, 6-0.

## Comics

Crippling Depression courtesy of Tim Wan, Mike Yeh, Ben Lee

### Blast from the past: First week back at Tech



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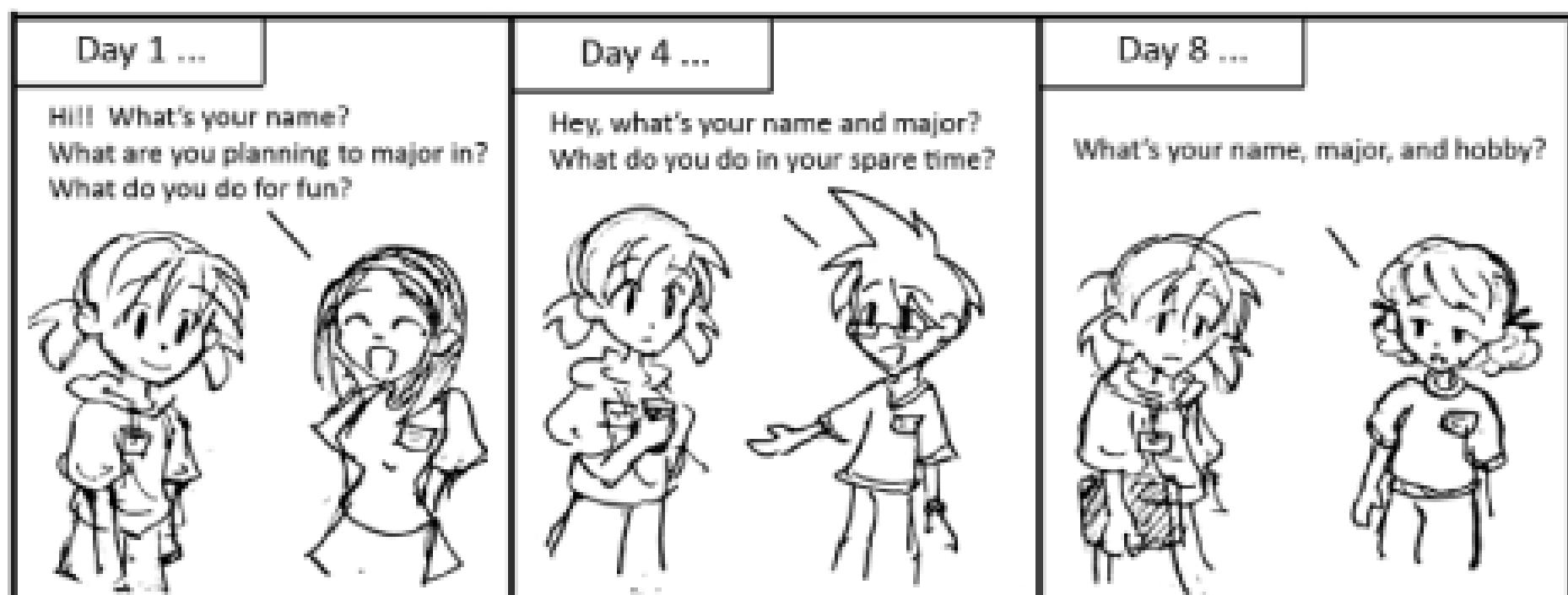
**First round interviews will be at Caltech on October 28, 2008.**

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## Comics

Rotation by Anonymous



Like to write?  
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Join the Tech every Monday and Friday next term at Broad Cafe from 12-1 PM.

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