Caltech Y Records

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2014
Descriptive Summary
Title: Caltech Y Records
Dates: 1922-1991
Collection Number: 10209-MS
Creator/Collector: Erwin, Charlotte; Simms, Anne; King, Ryann.
Extent: 6 linear feet
Repository: California Institute of Technology
Pasadena, California 91125
Abstract: The collection is largely formed by correspondence, documents of the Caltech Y’s activities beginning in the 1920s and by photos, audios and videos.
Language of Material: English
Access
The collection is open for research. Researchers must apply in writing for access.
Preferred Citation
Caltech Y Records. California Institute of Technology
Acquisition Information
The materials comprising the Caltech Y Records were transferred to the Caltech Archives from the Y office by the director, Athena Castro, in July and October 2002.
Biography/Administrative History
The Caltech Y was founded on the Caltech campus (then the Throop College of Technology) in 1916 as a branch of the national YMCA. From the start, the students chose to de-emphasize the religious aspect of the Y in favor of social services. Originally, Bible classes were held weekly, and religious leaders have been routinely invited to the campus to speak. But the focus of the organization over time has been to provide social programs for the campus and for community outreach. In 1924 an advisory board and a director, Charles Schweiso, Jr., were appointed. Schweiso provided individual counseling to students. Services for freshmen were instituted, notably the little t (a handbook for freshmen) and Freshman Camp. Students participated in the annual regional YMCA conference at Asilomar, in Pacific Grove, California. The post-World War II era brought change to the campus. Lee A. DuBridge succeeded Robert A. Millikan as Caltech’s new president, and Wesley Hershey was hired as the Y’s executive secretary (director) in 1946. Under Hershey’s leadership, the Y expanded its programs, bolstered by a major bequest from Millikan’s estate (Millikan died in 1953). The Friends of the Y was established in 1961 to provide continuing financial and programmatic support. The 1960s brought political and social tumult to the nation and to Caltech. The Y served as a focus for discussion and action on racial issues and the Vietnam War. The well-regarded Leaders of America program brought prominent visitors to campus to speak formally and informally to students and other members of the community. In 1970, undergraduate women were admitted to Caltech. New social programs were instituted, some based around the idea of encounter groups. The issue of drugs on campus was widely discussed. Also during the 1970s, the Y chose to separate from the national YMCA—its members and constituencies were no longer exclusively male or even Christian. Wesley Hershey retired in 1974. He was succeeded by Walter Meader (1974-1982), Huston Horn (1982-1987), followed by Ken McGuire and Paul Gibson. The Y’s first woman director, Lucy Guernsey, began her tenure in 1989. She was succeeded by Sue Borrego in 1992, who was followed by Athena Castro, beginning in 2000.
Scope and Content of Collection
The records of the Caltech Y are organized in five series: correspondence and documents, photos, transcripts of talks, audio-visual, and oversize photos and scrapbooks. The correspondence section is notable for inclusion of letters with prominent figures who visited the campus under the Y’s auspices, for example Martin Luther King, Jr., J. Robert Oppenheimer, Margaret Mead, and Barry Goldwater. Photographs are a large and important part of the collection. They document the Y’s activities in a comprehensive fashion, beginning in the 1920s. Audio tapes, and a small number of transcripts, videos, and reel-to-reel tapes form series III-IV. The audio tapes record a wide variety of activities, from formal talks, to conferences, to musical events. The last series, oversize, accommodates scrapbooks, albums, and wide-angle photos, now rolled. RELATED COLLECTIONS: Historical Files, Caltech Y folder. Wesley Hershey Oral History, 1979.
Indexing Terms
Kennedy, John F.
King, Martin Luther, Jr
Nixon, Richard M.
Oppenheimer, J. Robert

Container List