AMERICAN UNIVERSITIES

Who Next at Caltech?

from our Special Correspondent

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THE search for a new president of the California Institute of Technology, occasioned by the impending retirement of Dr Lee DuBridge, is also turning out to be a search for a new academic policy. It seems now to be agreed among the faculty that the institute must broaden the base of its operations, and in particular must find ways of developing a more balanced programme of instruction in the humanities and the social sciences. This, no doubt, is why the institute makes no secret of its regret that it has not been possible to recruit as president Mr John Gardner, who retired from his post as Secretary of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare a year ago, and seems to have declined several similar invitations from different universities since he first declared his intention to devote himself to urban problems. There is no doubt that Mr Gardner would have been able to foster a rapid yet respectable development of the curriculum outside the fields of science and technology in which Caltech is now pre-eminent. It remains to be seen whether fallout from government service after the election on November 5 will provide the candidate for which the institute is looking. Dr Donald Hornig, the President's Science Adviser, will no doubt be on the market in the New Year and is an obvious although an improbable candidate.

The imbalance between the humanities and the sciences is not the only way in which the institute is distinguished from other universities. Women, for example, make up only a tiny proportion of the 200 or so undergraduates admitted each year, and although it seems to be agreed that something should be done to put this right, it is not yet clear whether this will be done by denying places to qualified male undergraduates or by increasing the size of the intake and thus diluting the teaching effort which the institute is proud to lavish on its undergraduates. The ratio of staff to students is another distinctive—and enviable—characteristic of the institute. Roughly 200 of the 600 members of the faculty are established teachers (as distinct from post-doctoral fellows and the like), but graduate students barely outnumber undergraduates at about 700. The faculty seems united in the view that there should be no substantial increase of the number of undergraduates in the fields of study now being followed on the grounds that any substantial increase would diminish the individual attention given to the teaching of undergraduates.

The cost of the changes which may come with the appointment of the new president is unlikely seriously to impede his ambitions. Already one of the most well-heeled of institutions, the institute has recently embarked on a campaign to raise a further \$85 million which will bring its endowment to rather more than \$200 million. Even if this appeal does not succeed, however, there should be enough slack in the budget to support quite considerable innovations. In 1967 the institute consumed only \$3.7 million from the total of \$7.1 million interest from its investments—the rest went to swell the investment portfolio. It is true, of course, that federal agencies may contribute less towards the cost of research than has been the

custom in the past few years—in 1966–67, no less than \$13 million, or roughly half the operating budget, came from this source. (The management fee for undertaking responsibility for the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, paid by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, accounts merely for about ten per cent of federal support for research at the institute.) Already there has been some restraint—some members of the faculty, for example, take the line that visiting research fellows must bring their own money with them. Because of its great prestige, the institute is better placed than other institutions to ensure that it comes near the front of the queue for federal research money. Indeed, Caltech can fairly claim that many of its traditional public services are not properly paid for as things are—for example, the work which the institute does to keep track of seismic activity in California, involving the maintenance of a network of seventeen seismic stations and a central laboratory, is at present paid for out of the ordinary academic budget. In circumstances like these, finding money for the plans will be less difficult than finding people to carry them out.

SOCIOLOGY

Ways to Prevent Suicide

EACH day, on average, about a thousand people in the world take their own lives and at least eight times this number attempt to do so, according to a report by the World Health Organization (Prevention of Suicide, WHO, 8s, \$1.25). In most European countries and North America, suicide ranks among the first five to ten causes of death.

The burden of the WHO report is that some suicides could be prevented, partly because certain classes of potential suicides can be identified by their situation or profession and partly because many suicides in fact give prior warning of their intention. Improved collection of statistics and more knowledge about suicide among doctors, nurses and the public at large would better the chances of recognizing and helping such people.

Table 1. SUICIDE RATES (YEARLY AVERAGE FOR 1961–63) PER 100,000 OF POPULATION

Hungary	33.9	Australia	19.6
Finland	29.0	USA	15.6
Austria	28.3	England and Wales	15.1
Czechoslovakia	28.2	New Zealand	13.0
Japan	24.7	Poland	12.8
Denmark	24.2	Scotland	11.1
West Germany	24.1	Canada	11.7
Switzerland	23.3	Israel (Jewish population)	10.4
Sweden	21.7	Netherlands	9.1
France	20.7	Italy	1.1

Many of those who commit suicide give warning, either by word or deed, of their intention. Indeed, in the opinion of some investigators, warning is almost always given. But such danger signs are frequently unnoticed or ignored. Kessel, for example, has found that 34 per cent of 511 cases of self-poisoning had given warning of their intention and of these warnings 62 per cent had been noted but not acted upon. Some surveys have shown that more than half the persons committing suicide had seen a doctor within three months of the