Temporary Meeting Location, October 9th, 2018

Items for the good of the Order:

Some fellows voiced concern over the seeming lack of diversity among the panelists for the upcoming Arleigh Williams Forum. No conclusive solution or course of action was decided upon, but many fellows agreed that this was an issue.

Items for the good of the University:

The Warden introduced the topic of mental health by posing the following questions: what are the "must haves" that should be added to the arsenal of resources? There has been a history of mental health issues facing students and faculty, and the campus recognizes the problem exists; is there a gap that needs to be bridged in our resources? And if so, how can we bridge it?

One fellow sent in some remarks, and said that ironically that when he was at Cal, the majority of the stress didn't come from academics, but from pressures of his social groups and networks when it came to the alcohol culture. He eventually decided the the positives outnumbered the negatives when it came to these groups, and stuck with them despite the stress.

One fellow admits that when he was first moving away from home to campus, it was not easy for him, especially when it came to problems he faced in the dorms. He insisted that there is help on campus for students, but many freshman here for the first time might not really know where to go, or even if they do, it's sometimes hard to utilize all the resources at the Tang Center. He speculated that a lot of people with disabilities may face additional problems with anxiety because they need more help and face more challenges than able-bodied students. He encouraged other fellows to reach out if they experience similar issues, and that no one should have to go through what he went through.

Another fellow proposes we think more critically about other services including the Tang Center, Counseling and Psychological Services (CSP), and Disabled Students Program (DSP). If a student is having a hard time academically, they can get a letter from a counselor or psychologist to get assistance in mental-health related issues.

Another fellow encouraged peers to recognize the crisis on campus regarding mental health and addiction. This fellow proposes the campus needs to increase awareness of things that we don't like to talk about when it comes to these issues; it's very important that all of the staff is properly trained. since there have been numerous recent incidents of staff trying to manage issues like suicide attempts, mental breakdowns, and other serious issues amongst students. The staff, in the opinion of this fellow, should receive more in-depth training, and the campus needs to become more aware of the issues facing students.

Another fellow, who has worked in many spaces where this conversation is relevant, has a few thoughts for the group:

● With regards to sobriety- increasing the number of sober events for those who don't choose to participate in drinking is a smart choice to protect against alienation.

● Addiction is an ADA-recognized illness.

● Screening and early intervention of students- this fellow proposed initial mental health screening before students even arrive on campus. Transitions can be tough, so it's good to make sure students are being routed to the right resources.

● Graduate students- a survey in 2014 and 2015 reported that 64% of Grad students who admit high levels of stress and depression attribute this to job insecurity/scarcity. There's only one person who does writing for students at graduate level, for all 11,000 graduate students! This issues, according to this fellow, should be addressed at campus-wide level. Stress is often viewed through an undergraduate lens- writing is important for graduate students because of grants and other factors that lead directly to jobs.

● Campus resources- there are so many of them! UHS, CPS, DSP… They exist, but the campus does a poor job of getting the word out about them to students. According to this fellow, we should have a series of separate emails which break down all of the resources that are available, to make them more accessible to students. Even in something as simple as DSP, there's a lot of issues with access.

● With regards to stigma and other issues- learning disabilities and mental health issues show up in our population, and it's important to get those individuals help.

● A proposed project: Resource recipe box! Instead of a multitude of separate resources, maybe an option is to create a resources.berkeley.edu website. This would (in theory) describes a stressor or condition, and list all of the resources or programs to cope or deal with those issues. This project is already underway, but it's important to go at this cohesively.

Another fellow admits that when it comes to closing the support gap, he doesn't have any answers. Where exactly is the gap? This is his perspective and ideas: he imagines that funding is part of the problem. Disability is not just limited to what one can see, or how one can move. One of the things regarding funding and mental health services- it's the juxtaposition of what the campus' priorities are. There has not seemingly been a demand for services that support mental health. The priority seems to be behind other issues, but people want to ignore mental health problems or make the whole thing go away. We don't even know what to do. A suggestion: awareness is an issue. We are inundated with anger, rage, frustration, and hate, especially on campus. This fellow imagines that much of that vehemence is based in fear. Fear is a big thing when it comes to mental health- He thinks we should all look for opportunities as individuals to look at ourselves and how we're interacting with others. Are we trying to make a point?

How are we communicating, and how does that affect the general community? Not the large community, we can do two things:

1.   Understand the way we're communicating

2.   When we see anger, hate, fear: don't allow it. Take it on yourself to call it out.

Another fellow reminded us of DSP and issues of access. Recently a link was added to CalCentral making it easier to apply for DSP. Instead of filling out paperwork or going into the DSP office, it's much easier now online- this is a step in the right direction.

Another fellow commented on the availability of training to staff. He mentioned that there is a lot of training available to advisors and staff when it comes to mental health. There's also the Gold Folder- access to issues to be aware of and how to spot issues of concern. Look at the Dean of Students website for more information. He thinks we as a campus try very hard with the rigorous training, but he thinks it's a challenge to put training into practice. The Center for Support and Interaction (previously Case Management) are people who intervene in serious situations. There's definitely room for more resources, but he agrees that there's a stigma when it comes to accessing those resources that are already in place.

A different fellow wants to echo the previous fellow about the resources in student affairs. The UC system is trying to make this issue a priority, by raising the ratio of counselors at campuses. It's not good enough to make students wait two weeks to see a counselor. In terms of residency issues, there is a chain of command and safety nets to catch residents' issues and pass them up the ladder so that they can be handled properly. Cultural sensitivity among counselors is important- we as a campus need to equip students appropriately. It's hard to attract counselors who have cultural sensitivities. It's a challenge that many folks are facing across the country.

Another fellow shared his own thoughts and experiences. Regarding the drinking culture, as someone who doesn't drink, he was surprised that he was accepted even

though he was in communities that "praised" drinking. He knows that this experience is not the same for everyone, but he wanted to draw attention to the changing culture. About the resources already discussed, he thinks CPS is doing a good job of keeping their resources up to date and ready, but he thinks the stigma is the main problem. Friends of his have brushed off the thought of going to the Tang Center in a moment of crisis, just because of how it would appear to others. This fellow is concerned that if everyone suddenly did try to use those services, would we have the capacity to handle all the demand? Another issue is there is not enough talking about mental health. Something interesting he's noticed is that students tend to joke about and make light of mental health. The meme page is very well known around the country, and there is a dark sense of humor there about mental health. Maybe people aren't handling the issue the right way. Do GSI's have enough resources to support their students? This fellow also mentioned that some professors may not be taking DSP accommodations seriously. Sometimes students have to jump through so many hoops to get the help they need. Professors should update their mentality about the importance of these issues.

Another fellow told a personal story. Fear is also prevalent among the people providing the health services. We need to be aware of our friends providing the services as well as those receiving them. A few things make him anxious, in terms of how to address this topic. This is NOT a statement about the professionals who do evaluations or intake:

1.   One person's aggravation is another person's burden. People react to the same circumstances differently.

2.   He really thinks that today's campus world is very in tune with the community around us. In his day, many things were provided by the University. Nowadays, after one year, you move off campus and you have to deal with city difficulties. The same goes for mental health. People move away from campus and they take their mental health issues with them.

Another fellow has some additional comments:

1.   We don't have this conversation that often, as an undergraduate. Males in particular are even less likely to discuss this.

2.   Early intervention services is an idea he supports. His stress level was the greatest when he was a freshman. First generation students have additional burdens, such as bills and missing deadlines. Attracting students to mental health services right off the bat might alleviate their fear.

3.   Stigma has been brought up a lot- and that's an important factor. But why is mental health hyper-stigmatized here at Cal? A guess this fellow has: in this environment, we are taught to be the best. Students should be essentially flawless, in how they tackle academics, extracurricular, and work life after college. Everyone has faults, regardless is you're at the #1 public University. This can push students away from resources that are critical. This fellow proposes that the hyper-competitiveness of Cal creates mental health issues for students.

4.   There is a financial hurdle in getting robust counseling services. Cal's pay for counselors is not competitive, making it difficult to attract the right professionals. We definitely need a financial injection into our counseling services, on the state and campus-wide levels.

5.   A lot of stress does come from academics, but it can also come with stress had to do more with financial stuff. That stress was really destructive for him, and it is a reality for a lot of Cal students.

Another fellow provides a larger view of the issue: this is one of the great problems facing our culture and world, and it gone untreated, it will be part of our downfall. At a conference this fellow recently attended, a speaker shared that the human race is on track to become extinct in ~70 years. What part of that is mental health? There are of course conspiracies about how drug companies create these diseases… But what about something as simple as parking spaces? Who gets them on campus? Nobel laureates only? Who gets celebrated at football games? Just the grand champions? We award excellence here at Berkeley. What people are the most celebrated here and why? During his career in the Engineering department, was this fellow ever asked about how he was feeling or how he was doing? What use is it to have money or prestige, while lacking healthiness and happiness? Cancer and suicide rates are still big numbers. He doesn't think his effort would be best placed toward coming up with new resources, but changing the context around mental health, changing the culture to making health and happiness a priority on campus. What would it be like if Berkeley could say it had the happiest and healthiest students in the world? If he could go back, and choose a university based on health and happiness, he sees the Berkeley didn't always support him in that regard.

Another speaker comments that the amount of stress we are carrying is influenced directly by different identities that we hold ourselves or seem to hold. There are fundamentally different ways to experience things depending on identities you hold. A trauma-informed approach might be the key to changing this culture. Instead of "Great, you have all the highest honors!" we should also ask "Are you sleeping enough?" There has been a 300% increase in tuition since the 19990s, and money plays a huge role in mental health. So how do we make sure that someone who leaves Berkeley is better than the person that came in? There is a huge move in psychological services program to reach more people, even getting people to the first level, and maybe that's something we can look at. There are other ways that we can accomplish this, feeling comfortable asking and answering "how are you?" Graduate students weren't even comfortable waiting in a waiting room with their students. Some professional students are only here for one year, but they're under just as much stress. We have to recognize them as well. Also, when it comes to funding psych services, that money is coming from student fees (The wellness fund). The institution should be providing this for us. This self-taxation is exacerbating the mental health burden.

Another fellow brings up another factor of stress: parents. To a lot of folks, utilizing resources isn't just up to students, but is also depends on their parents' expectations. Can the University provide more awareness or openness to parents? Fostering better student health and happiness depends on this. Helping facilitate this conversation with parents may be really beneficial to helping students find the right resources. "This is what successful people do" is a notion driven into students by their parents. A lot of hard-headed people need to hear that this isn't a "one size fits all" system.

Another fellow commends the wellness fund, as it's better that we have it than not. Sports culture is another rough area of this conversation to push through, because it's difficult to introduce healthy mental health habits into the culture. Though it's getting better, we still have a long way to go. It's such a key part of how student athletes grow up, but it needs to be more of a prevalent conversation in sports surrounding mental health.

Another fellow asks why Cal is hypercompetitive? "Survive, not thrive" is a common theme in Berkeley, because the name "Berkeley" carries a lot of weight. If you succeed here, it will set you up to succeed later in life. This part of our culture plays into the academic side of stressors, and the community that you come from plays a large role in deciding what one's perception of mental health is. When people are experiencing these issues and can't turn to their family for support, that's really hard habit to break, especially in a new environment. That goes back to changing culture- a tough culture, but definitely one that needs to be addressed.

Another fellow wonders how effective the roles of RA's are for the health of freshman. There are two mandated check-ins with RA's during the first six weeks. We have to make sure these conversations aren't shallow. With a lot of issues with mental health, a lot of services that were provided seem to be very surface-level.

Another fellow reiterates that even if you're secure in your job, but aren't healthy/happy, or if your co-workers aren't healthy/happy, that makes a huge difference. There is a huge need to look at the environment around us. Cal is a leader in advancing society- we need to look after not only the mental health of our own communities, but that of our whole society. How do we take care of each other when we go from Cal to the real world, a really scary place! With regard to parents: this issue fits in. You can't just "make it work" without realizing the consequences/ effects on our family. How are family relations affecting students, and what is our ability to impact that environment? Some parents say downright embarrassing or traumatizing things in front of their students. We have to get students, parents, and administrators in the same room to have more conversations about parents collectively as an entity and parents individually. We need to be part of the conversation about how to be a parent of a Cal student, without the clichés: "oh, it's a pressured environment, but we have services…" There ought to be more services synthesizing student and parent partnerships. We would learn a lot from this, and so would the people in that conversation.

Another fellow readdresses the topic of sports, and the issues there. One football player who graduated from Cal in the early 2000s (and wrote a book) had mental health issues while here at Cal. These services are necessary. The Gold Folder- anxiety and other problems like this are disabilities. Do students know this? Maybe we should get the news out about this. There should be more information about services that are available, especially about things that people don't consider service-worthy.

Abortion, for example, is a physical issue that has long-lasting mental issues attached to it. We need to insure that those women have help that they need after the fact. With regards to the "Me too" era, there has been an increase in women who are reporting. But that too has lasting impacts. The five or six free counseling sessions from the University: those aren't enough. It takes two or three appointments before you find someone who's the right fit for you. That doesn't work for everyone. If you don't have friends, Cal might be perceived as an unfriendly place for people. We need something not only to allow people to go to Tang, but to connect individuals in unconventional ways.

Another fellow presented different experiences. What if we had someone who was trained or even just volunteered who sat on Sproul in a booth to just listen to people who need to talk to somebody? At another university, there is a portion of time at the counseling office that is reserved for walk-ins. Also, have we thought about pushing deadlines back from midnight to things like 5PM, to avoid pressuring students into unhealthy habits?

The last comment made regarded staff. They serve students in many ways, but they also have their own issues to deal with things. The environment for staff has been more stressful in the last months/years. There are lots of vacancies, so staff are doing more work. There are resources for staff, but they aren't as prevalent. This is an area that is also really stigmatized. Supervisors may not get as much training as counselors or trained professionals. Just be aware that staff are a part of the community. Stress and angst can be contagious, but so can happiness.