

Order of the Golden Bear



The topic of tonight's discussion concerned free speech at the University.

Although the discussions about free speech at the University began decades before the 1960s, Fellows noted the relevance of this topic during the fiftieth anniversary of the Free Speech Movement and its legacy on the current state of free speech on campus. Fellows who were members of the University community during the Free Speech Movement reflected on its nature at the time. Some Fellows described confusion among the campus community and a lack of unified sentiments at the beginning of the movement. They also suggested that, as the movement progressed, student support of the protests increased and nearly eight hundred students from all over the political spectrum were arrested as part of the Sproul Hall sit-in in 1964. Some Fellows portrayed the University administration's reaction as a protective measure to preserve the University's status in Sacramento and reflected the then-common concept for the proper time, place, and manner to take free political action. Though the legacy of the Free Speech Movement is certainly not a defined idea, some Fellows noted that the support from students during the Free Speech Movement brought normally separate groups together.

The discussion also focused on the current state of free speech at the University. Many Fellows presented how many guest speakers to the campus have been silenced by their opposition or have been dissuaded from visiting the University altogether due to apprehension to managing a hostile crowd. Other Fellows introduced incidents of further vitriol between members of the campus community who disagreed on various political issues. Fellows also introduced the idea that the right of free speech should come with the understanding that one should not silence another's right to do the same, and that such an understanding creates an environment better fit for civil discourse.

Some Fellows presented that free speech could be separated into two schools of thought: legal, which could not be inhibited except by the courts, and cultural. These Fellows stated this cultural concept of free speech is the expectation to consider the consequences of the manner that one presents their political action and its ability to appeal to certain factions. On the other hand, several Fellows also maintained that civility should not just be a word used to put down people who feel more intensely about a particular issue. Some Fellows expressed that the University should not have a say in defining civility between students and student leaders should instead facilitate the dialogue on civility. Other Fellows countered that the University is not simply the administration but is the collection of all associated individuals making decisions in the interest

of what they think is best for the University as a whole. Fellows also proposed that civility cannot be defined individually and is instead the impact between individuals engaged in dialogue.

Several Fellows noted that many disruptive protests after the events of September 11, 2001 have been received as intolerable and have been curtailed accordingly, and suggested there is a delicate balance between exercising one's free speech and interfering another person's ability to exercise their same right. Many Fellows reflected on a core principle of the Free Speech Movement that no one could restrict free speech except for the courts. Other Fellows suggested that respect breeds respect, passion and civility are not mutually exclusive, and used the major social movements and leaders of the twentieth century as examples to bolster those two concepts to drive significant political change. Some Fellows suggested that we have fallen into a problem of voicing frustration and showing passion but not respect in dialogue concerning current University issues, including the appointment of President Napolitano. Other Fellows submitted that the Occupy Cal movement voiced many of the same concerns as the Free Speech Movement while the campus response was quite similar, and posited that the administration in 45 years could denounce current protesters on campus while commemorating the Occupy Cal movement and other cases of civil disobedience that will be safely in the past.