



The Usual Place, November 10th, 2015

The topic for tonight's discussion was Diversity and Community.

Fellows discussed “diversity” and “community” and how the two concepts co-exist on campus. Fellows also discussed how they could enhance these aspects of campus life to be inclusive while maintaining a positive campus climate.

A number of Fellows elaborated on the meaning of the word “diversity” during the conversation. Some Fellows noted that diversity was most often expressed in the small student groups that appear on campus. One Fellow challenged what they perceived to be “skin deep” characterizations of diversity and suggested that people should consider other aspects of a student's background when thinking about the diversity. A couple of Fellows responded saying that diversity really is about socioeconomic status and race. These Fellows cautioned against the assumption that privileging diversity of intellectual interest or experience yields the same meaningful representation of perspective that is achieved by race and class based considerations.

Some Fellows discussed issues the campus is currently facing with regards to diversity. One Fellow noted that while the smaller clubs are able to represent the diversity of the campus well, the lack of interaction between groups limits exposure, making it difficult for students to benefit from that diversity. Many Fellows reflected on how their choice to seek solace in smaller groups prevented them from branching out and experiencing the diversity of the campus. These Fellows argued the importance of small groups, but they suggested that students and administrators still need to find ways to make sure that students are exposed to other students that are not a part of their smaller interest specific groups.

A few Fellows claimed that a failure to properly educate students about diversity could lead to problems with the campus climate. One Fellow noted that the lack of African American students on campus has led to a lack of exposure, sensitivity, and knowledge for students who grow up in predominantly white spaces that jeopardize the climate. Another Fellow noted that failure to achieve a critical mass of marginalized students puts pressure on those students to speak on issues of race, even when they don't feel comfortable doing so. Another Fellow claimed that the campus has yet to respond to the campus climate survey in a meaningful way; this Fellow argued

more insidious issues of inclusion like micro-aggressions have to be looked at as opposed to overt racism.

A number of Fellows brought issues of diversity facing other universities in national news into the conversation. One Fellow brought up the debate that took place at Yale and questioned whether or not it is appropriate for faculty to be involved in these types of conversations on campus. They noted that the authority carried by faculty members could obstruct the free flow of ideas in an inappropriate way. Another Fellow noted that the situation at Yale prompts us to reflect on how to make sure that our actions are culturally appropriate and inoffensive. Other Fellows referenced the protests at Mizzou and reminded the fellowship of the importance of allowing people of different backgrounds to have a meaningful voice in conversations concerning diversity and community.

Fellows proposed solutions to remedy problems brought up in the conversation. Many Fellows suggested that education could help with issues of diversity facing the campus. Some Fellows suggested that there should be cultural competency trainings. Other Fellows suggested that cross-cultural dialogues could be helpful if they utilize peer pedagogies. A number of Fellows saw CalSo as a potential site for these dialogues while others argued that there should be mandatory courses for freshmen that include both competency trainings and cross-cultural dialogues.

Aside from proposing structural changes to the student experience, Fellows also noted that fostering a sense of community should be fun for students as well. One Fellow suggested that students host more collaborative cross cultural and cross organizational events. Another Fellow discussed making a video entitled “We Are Family at Cal” that helped to foster a sense of community. Fellows claimed that issues concerning diversity have to be addressed by students in addition to the administration. While it is important to institute mandatory trainings, most change will come from individual initiatives to enhance the sense of community at Cal.