



The Usual Place, October 10, 2017,

Public Perception of the University

The Fellows discussed the news and implication of the University being recently ranked as the #2 public university in the world. Immediately, some fellows acknowledged that the better known rankings heavily weigh assets per student and financial assets in their rankings, which color things against public universities in general, and which is why no publics are in the top 20.

Other Fellows wished the public took more stock in more focused rankings such as those for public service or social mobility, where our university does well. They urged that it is important to understand how rankings are constructed and communicate that with others.

Other Fellows noticed that our faculty-student ratio is also significant in dragging down our rankings. Larger classes impact this ratio especially when we don't increase the number of our faculty numbers.

Fellows shared that our Law School ranking drop is largely attributed to the 'perception of subjects' peers' which is weighted heavily for professional school rankings. Some estimated that 40% of the graduate ranking score is based on subjective input from other deans and faculty, and, for Law, judges. Fellows remarked that the Law School had a terrible and avoidable scandal that was poorly handled, and that is one of the main things that impacted that metric. They believe the new dean is right in that the perception can easily change and the rankings can recover.

Some Fellows wondered what objective criteria can be used to evaluate the quality of education at undergraduate and graduate levels? They noted that prospective students are making their decisions based on rankings using these criteria which they don't understand and may not be valid toward their interests at all.

Other Fellows mentioned that these reports miss the amount of support staff which these classes are able to provide. For example, the number of TAs is very high in computer science courses, yet there is only one faculty member on roster. Could these rankings obtain more nuanced measures of student academic support?

Fellows reassured others that in light of recent scandals, last year was our 2nd largest fundraising year ever. Even as issues went on last year prior to our new chancellor, our alumni and donor base continued to be robust, and Fellow Christ's skills will keep that momentum.

Fellows acknowledged that considering the different audiences of the University is very important. They thought that the University has not done a good job of communicating internally to campus members including students, faculty, and staff. Our new Vice Chancellor Diana Harvey will be an asset in this regard. The positive article in the WSJ about our handling of free speech week was a significant signal in the shift of outward perception, Fellows added.

In terms of the larger public reputation of the University, some Fellows remarked that USC and UCLA have fandoms that extend beyond the reach of students and alumni, to community members in the local area. Why doesn't Berkeley have that influence?

Some Fellows thought that the core of the issue is with community and pride. They noted that our environment is more divisive than that of UCLA, for instance, and self-critical. The crisis management for the last couple years with several scandals and issues like housing was framed very negatively without any positive couching. This leads to a lack of pride and community from the external public.

Other Fellows determined that we don't do a good job of instilling Cal spirit to our undergrads. We are not reaching the right people to change that. How do we get people to feel that spirit to change that and get that sense of identity off-campus?

Some Fellows described our unique rift between some of our faculty and our collegiate athletics that does not exist at UCLA. Many Fellows agreed that sports really build community and it helps for faculty to be behind that. However, working with our faculty entails a heavy lift for that change.

Fellows reminded that we made a big stride toward sense of identity by having a unified orientation program this year. They thought that faculty and administration should share information with the Daily Cal and the student body in ways that show we as a campus are united and not simply discrete entities such as students, athletics, faculty, administration, etc.

In the spirit of fostering this greater public fandom and spirit, Fellows noted that it's important to look to peer universities where larger communities are tied with football. We have to find another medium to unify our students other than athletics. Athletics can be one of the unifying objects, but we need to add more to the mix because many students came to Cal for reasons completely other than athletics and spirit. To create a large community we need more diverse sources of community.

