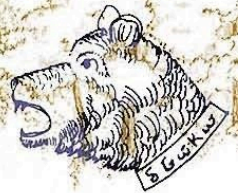


Order of the Golden Bear



The topic of tonight's discussion concerned the state of dialogue and civil discourse at the University, between students, alumni, administration, faculty, and other communities.

Fellows quickly pointed out the topical nature of this discussion given the recent visit of the President of the University to the campus, and some Fellows expressed disappointment that a real chance at honest conversation was used instead for political action. Fellows urged listeners to remember that productive conversation only happens when both parties consent to rules of civil engagement. Other requirements of such dialogue and engagement, Fellows suggested, include active listening among participants, not viewing adversaries as enemies, facilitating conversation based on respect, and suspending one's initial disbelief in order to fairly consider other views.

Other Fellows pointed out this incident as a symptom of the current lack of a debate space on campus, and a need for teaching the basics of productive dialogue. Along these lines Fellows commented that often people want to be heard but don't necessarily want to hear others. Fellows brought up an ASUC Senate meeting this year rife with division and contention, advocating for a need for more positive interactions for collaboration between communities and organizations.

In searching for where at the University civil discourse does exist, many Fellows cited the Order as a relevant example. Fellows cited the Order's tradition, connectedness, and mutually acknowledged rules for dialogue as creating a space for respect and understanding that is more difficult to find outside of our discussions. Other Fellows followed by commenting that another difference between our discussions and others outside is that outside there is a lack of safe dialogue space because people are not allowed to converse as equals as they are here.

Examples of discourse across communities outside of the Order were cited by some Fellows at this time, including the Great Debate between the Berkeley College Republicans and the Cal Berkeley Democrats, and a Berkeley United Event, sponsored by many different political, religious, and other identity-related organizations. The success of such events was attributed to the presence of a respected and skilled moderator, initial, civil speakers to set the tone and expectation for productive dialogue.

In terms of expanding the presence of productive dialogue at the University, the Order was brought up again, in terms of the Fellows that are not attending discussions. It was brought up that less than half of the Fellows initiated in the past year have seen a discussion following their ceremony. Fellows were encouraged to consider the upcoming nominations and elections this semester in light of this discussion, to nominate Californians not simply to perpetuate the Order itself, but to expand the breadth of perspectives and voices in discussion, and by doing so, expand the reach and experience of our civil dialogue to even more organizations and communities at the University.

As the discussion progressed, several Fellows brought up the idea that the civil discourse which exists in the Order must somehow be brought to the general campus community. Some Fellows were quick to point out the infrastructure of the Order as fundamental to creating such a respectful space, and thus claimed that such a creation would be very difficult to replicate in the public arena. Other Fellows, while not necessarily disagreeing with the observation, suggested instead that what can be more easily accomplished would be for the Fellows of the Order, each as constituents of one, to take the qualities of our forum out into the public. Taking our qualities of trust, respect, safety, process, desire to engage, civility, and power balance, as leader and facilitators, to our own communities and other arenas of engagement, would provide a great service in improving the understanding and skills necessary to accomplish productive dialogue across the University.