

Order of The Golden Bear

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ESTABLISHED 1900

Temporary Meeting Location February 4, 2020

The meeting was convened at 6:00pm.

Items for the Good of the Order:

The Warden reminds the Fellowship regarding protocols for speaking during meetings, and an Order Council meeting next Tuesday on 2/11.

A fellow remembers a discussion last year on peer to peer teaching. Moffitt Library has plans to expand their existing peer mentoring center. Part of the new fundraising campaign for campus libraries is to fill out rest of Moffitt (the other three floors), and have spaces dedicated to developing peer to peer teaching available for undergraduate use.

A fellow mentions the Warden's challenge in regards to going back to our home at the Usual Place. Fellows or others who feel led to contribute to the Order or the Senior Hall Restoration Program can do so at give.berkeley.edu.

Items for the Good of the University: Wellness

Before the meeting, the Warden prepared the Fellowship for the topic of conversation with some background information:

This topic encompasses physical, mental, and emotional wellness and how the campus may maintain, improve, and/or compromise the wellness of the people who occupy it. Here are some web resources on the topic:

- <https://uhs.berkeley.edu/campus-wellness>
- <https://www.dailycal.org/2017/01/24/mental-health-action-plan-needs-campus-support>
- <https://ga.berkeley.edu/project/wellness/>

And here are some questions to consider:

- *What is the current state of wellness for students, faculty, staff, and any other members of the campus community? Or is wellness dynamic?*
- *What areas of wellness do we need to focus our efforts on in the future?*
- *Is there equity between groups of people and their state of wellness?*
- *What does work-life balance realistically look like for a U.C. Berkeley student?*
- *What are best practices for living a healthy lifestyle while studying and/or working at U.C. Berkeley?*
- *Can all members of the campus community access health care? If not, what needs to change?*

The Warden opened up the meeting with an overview on wellness on this campus, and how many of us have had previous education on how to be physically well, but there may not be as much training about how to also be mentally and emotionally well. This is a large topic, both within and outside of campus. Particularly, with its regard to:

- Work/life balance
- What is unique about being well, specifically on our campus?
- What is current state of wellness for students, faculty, staff, and other members of the campus community? Or is it dynamic- can we even define it as one state?
- Where do we need to focus our wellness efforts in the future?

The Warden then welcomes contributions from the Fellowship.

A fellow shares a perspective about how people with disabilities experience the campus, and about how something as simple as traveling to the dorms can cause wellness issues. The Tang Center is able to help. For some students, moving away from home (regardless of the distance) can be taxing. Even today, there are students on campus that might need help in knowing that there is someone to turn to, when things start to get difficult. It is not shameful to reach out asking for help.

A fellow continues, stressing the importance and hospitableness of the Tang Center. An issue the campus is currently facing is that Tang can quickly become overbooked. Oftentimes there is a waiting period, and this makes students feel like they do not have access to valuable resources. Even though the services are excellent, some students feel alienated to them. Also, the Co-pay system seems to be lagging behind our peers at other universities.

Another fellow agrees, that the Tang Center and its resources can be difficult to navigate. Even with the Disabled Students Program, one needs a referral to access its resources which can make the program inaccessible (particularly with non-visible disabilities). So many great people work in these areas, but there is a lack of resources

and financial support. Student pressure with academics is tremendous, it seems like the Tang Center is underfunded by comparison. There is a lot more to be said on this issue.

Another speaker tries to contextualize the situation. UC Berkeley is not the only campus in the country facing a mental health crisis. As a society, we need to change how we think about and contribute to mental health resources. It is important to find “culturally competent” councilors, who have personally experienced issues that students go through. This is why it sometimes seems hiring takes so long when it comes to councilors.

A fellow considers how we have not expanded our staff in many years, over a decade, and wonders what is preventing growth in mental health resources to match the growth of the campus.

A fellow comments on the usefulness of the [Gold folder](#), and emphasizes that we can all help out our peers in need. It would be hard to hire enough people to help with all our mental health issues on campus. How can we help people develop skills in coping before it becomes a crisis?

A fellow realizes that Alta Bates is planning on closing by 2030. That space will go away for the City of Berkeley, and the campus. People have used this resource to deal with crises, so this is a concerning thing for the city. The Tang Center has been struggling with space issues for a decade, and this fellow is worried for the future.

A fellow stresses the importance and existence of other programs that are not directly linked to Counseling and Psychological Services. The Recreational Sports Facility has great opportunities, like yoga, swimming, and meditation. We should do a better job of advertising these classes, as they are alternative options for students struggling.

A fellow comments on funding for the Tang Center- the Center is funded by student fees, specifically a wellness referendum. Improving resources there is not a question of campus funding, because it is not strictly a campus-funded operation. There are student fees that go to Tang Center, but these funds also go to other places on campus. Unless students or the University are willing to heighten those fees, we may not get the growth we need. The RSF is the most used undergraduate facility on this campus, by far. One of the reasons students decided to build it was because of incredible stress, so that students would have a physical outlet for relief. Another resources includes the fabulous art studio as well, and this fellow would like to see an attempt to make it part of mental health initiatives. The studio is remarkably engaging and relaxing for students who need something tangible to cope with the stressors of student life.

One fellow comments on the importance of a holistic approach to mental health. Other schools have implemented a combination of rec sports and health services, without

differentiating between working out and mental health. Different models exist that we can look to in order to tackle mental health.

A fellow continues the thought of a previous speaker, about working with one's hands. This fellow knows a student who went to Cal Poly, and had access to studios where they could do pottery, as well as make baseball bats and surfboards. This fellow does not know if we have these types of opportunities anymore, but it is something that we should consider bringing back.

A fellow values these destressing activities. Whatever it is, having something to dedicate time towards for enjoyment is important. The fellow also remarks that students coming from high school today are more unprepared to deal with stressors at Cal. There has been a turn toward more project and group-based work. When you come to Cal, there is hardly any direct support group; lots of your homework is assigned on individual bases, and learning is self-motivated. Primary and secondary education, it seems, are gearing up in a different direction. When students come to Cal, they are going to get lost, because stress from projects which are individual-heavy is hard to deal with. Coping with the fact that one is no longer necessarily the smartest person in the room is hard for some students. In summary, a lot of high school students do not have coping mechanisms developed, and are ill-equipped to deal with stress. The University might want to either change its focus or communicate better with secondary education. The fellow also proposes a possible cause for heightened stress and modern mental health crises: students are more worried about their grades today, because of economic implications. Now, graduate degrees are oftentimes necessary for jobs, and the difference between a 3.4 and 3.8 (for example) is more significant than in the past.

Another fellow adds a dimension to the conversation. So far, the Order has discussed what it means to be personally well. However, we are now a campus of 41,000 students. What is the impact of this many students on frontline staff? Students are experiencing compromised wellness, with no additional resources. These staff have not been able to execute what they have been trained to do, causing immense pressure. As we go about interacting with each other on campus, this fellow encourages us to consider how our interactions with other people affects their wellness, in addition to thinking about how to make ourselves well. Whatever the struggle might be, our approach will affect others' wellness. Each of us as a leader on the campus can be interactive, focusing on our impacts on others.

A fellow remarks that there are additional areas of wellness that help students "upstream" of danger or a breaking point. Two of the top cases of student stress are academics and financial aid. Surrounding academic stress, we should consider our academic policies, including resources provided and excused absences allowed. We have no bereavement policies, or exceptions for student parents, illness, or mental health struggles. Financial aid, basic needs, and mental health are all connected. Many students' primary stressors are finance. In addition, the discrimination and harassment

that frequently pop up on our campus are detrimental. We should work on finding restorative ways to respond to that.

Another fellow builds on the previous speaker. In 2015, graduates students were surveyed on their wellbeing and happiness, which has since provided information that can be extrapolated across campus. The study found ten areas which need consideration: career prospects, overall health, living conditions, academic engagement, social support, financial confidence, academic programs / prep, sleep, feeling valued and included, and the student-advisor relationship. How can we make students feel more socially included? How can we begin immediately improving the campus while more financially-taxing initiatives form over time?

A fellow acknowledges that a general sense of frustration is that while we do have resources, campus culture inhibits their use. There is a lot of guilt pushed on students who spend time doing anything but studying. Plenty of people would love to go to yoga or counseling at Tang, but Berkeley culture creates a circular problem. This is a larger issue, of adjusting campus climate. Also, this fellow is interested in pursuing innovative ways to address mental health. Could we implement ways to text a mental health counselor, or talk to them on phone?

A fellow remarks on the importance on getting resources to students. The fellow asserts that during Golden Bear Orientation, one of first conversations had is about taking time for oneself. Academics do not solely define you as a person. Trying to alter this climate is among the first thing students are exposed to when they arrive, which will hopefully alleviate issues for students down the line.

Another fellow recommends animals as a way to destress. Engineering Student Services has a Destress with Dogs event during RRR week, where therapy dogs are available to students. The fellow wonders how can we include the positive impacts of animals?

A fellow did a project about examining stress, where research looked at effective mechanisms for dealing with individual stress. The top two findings are: practically solving problem at hand, and a reappraisal of issue. The third significant finding is a social network. One area that we can think about improvement in mental health as a campus is mentorship, which is underutilized on campus. The fellow speaks about structural ways to interact with those who have been through one's path. Without these structural relationships, it is hard for individuals to seek out help.

A fellow builds on a previous speaker regarding a mentorship program with the Cal Alumni Association, called the Berkeley Career Network. Mentorship is one of initiatives that this program touches on. It's for students and alumni to connect, and is a great idea to create more mentorship programs.

A fellow emphasizes starting freshmen off on good note. A lot of starter classes are considered “weeders,” where students are forced to sink or swim. We should be looking to change this, maybe through the Student Learning Center or direct upper classmen mentorship. Specifically starting freshmen off with classes that are meant to discourage them is hurtful, this fellow claims. The campus should look to reevaluate and redefine these courses as learning experiences rather than hurdles to overleap.

A fellow builds off the previous speaker, bringing a transfer student perspective to the conversation. In Community College, the staff actually want you to be there, and root for your success. Seeing what underclassmen have to go through in “weeder” classes is baffling to this fellow. What if we had multiple different versions of introductory chemistry, for example, to take the stress off of students? GSIs are overworked as it is, but having instructors who actually care about what students are doing is important.

Another fellow touches on campus culture and mentorship. Online, Berkeley ranks first among colleges for depressed students. Our campus culture is extremely toxic. This fellow observes everyone walking alone on campus, fixated on their phones. Intro Computer Science classes have almost a thousand students, and can come to feel really impersonal. At Brown and MIT, freshman year classes are all P/NP, so students can go outside their comfort zone and take hard classes right off the bat. This fellow thinks we should incorporate some elements to relieve student academic stress.

A fellow thinks that the atmosphere is sad on this campus, simply in terms of walking around and interacting with peers. Simply saying “hello” to people makes a huge difference. The fellow also supports making a “dream statement” as an inspirational tactic. Even if a goal might seem impossible, the fellow supports repetition of goals until they come true.

A fellow follows previous speakers, mentioning that how well students are doing in classes is a major contributor to student health. Many students come from high school, and are not used to getting grades consistently below A’s (or even getting over 50%). There is a lot of stress associated with this transition. It would also be helpful, this fellow feels, if professors were a little more clear on where students stand in the class throughout the semester.

A fellow makes comments about the competitive environment at Berkeley. There is a very prevalent work hard / play hard mentality. Students are used to going to the library to cram for hours, then hitting frat row to party and binge drink. These practices are really unsafe, and students put themselves in risky situations. There are many extremes on our campus, and not a lot of mediation.

Another fellow mentions certain expectations imposed on students, many of which can come from outside sources (professors, friends, etc.), but others of which can come from oneself. For this fellow, a big source of stress is how they internalize societal expectations. If we can change expectations the we have for ourselves and for others,

we can use this to relieve stress as a community. This should not be confused with lowering expectations in a way where we will not succeed, but rather giving each other grace.

A fellow talks about all the cultural impressions made when one steps on campus, including pressures from professors and friends. There is a lot of work around wellness on this campus, but not all of it is clear. We should adopt more comprehensive strategies, like teaching professors how to explain grading, and better access to advisors. We should also seek out larger campus strategies, like potentially appointing a position to tackle mental health issues. This would require a strong leadership statement and strategic plan.

A fellow notes that this problem is not unique to this generation. Even 50 years ago, similar problems were happening on our campus. Expectations from family, critical sense of self, and pressures to be a high performer have existed for some time. When this fellow first got to Cal, they noted how high-achieving all their classmates were. But, the fellow stresses that times outside the classroom are what really make a lasting impact. It is important to take time to recharge; we all have to take breaks.

A fellow returns to faculty, and their impact on student health. Faculty are a resource that the campus does not effectively utilize. There is little preparation for faculty on how to properly engage with students. A substantial number of faculty are lecturers, with a focus on teaching. When students come to this fellow's office hours, the first thing they do is ask about them. Even after midterms, they try to post the rubric and examples of the best work to solidify what expectations are. Faculty can even do things as simple as making their reader or bcourses coherent. None of this is discussed with faculty on a broad base.

A fellow agrees, saying there is a lot faculty can do to facilitate mental health culture. When this fellow tried to implement measure to include sexual and mental health resources on course syllabi, they were immediately got shot down, even though these resources could be really helpful to students.

This fellow took one of the largest classes at Cal, CS61B. Even though it was large, there were resources to help this fellow succeed. There were a lot of things this class did right, with evaluating exam performance, broadening their support network, and excellent access to course expectations.

Another fellow notices that students deal with mental illness before they arrive at Cal, but don't have space to deal with it. One thing to keep in mind about the Tang Center and other resources, is that students do not know to even reach out because they have always been told to just deal with being unwell. Students are afraid to even use the Tang Center because of implications and pressures from parents. Letting students know that those resources are actually available to use is essential.

A fellow mentions University Health Service's [Recalibrate](#) website, and how useful it can be.

A fellow has been disappointed by the guilt experienced by doing non-academic activities, because of all the heightened emphasis on academics in Berkeley. One of the ways UCLA deals with this is by creating a list of various things to do as an undergraduate. If one submits pictures of them doing those things, they wear a medal at graduation. This initiative is a great way to encourage students to take time to fully experience the campus, even the non-academic side.

A fellow speaks to those who feel guilty about not studying, and instead participating in campus groups or activities. This fellow encourages us to remember that there are great things to be learned through those activities that can be used for personal development and professional life.

The Warden asks about the role of community in our wellness? The Warden remarks about the importance of taking time to hang out with friends, as well as eating and exercising with others. Community can actually be seen as a form of wellness. What about equity (and inequities) among different communities when addressing wellness?

A fellow suggests that taking time off, not dedicated to work, is essential. This allows one to remove themselves from work, and find a niche in a community that does not revolve around academics or career opportunities.

A fellow really interested in college football comments on the usefulness of Cal Athletics' recent "Earn It" marketing. While attending sporting events has been misconstrued by this fellow as "wasting time" or "unproductive" in the past, this marketing allows this fellow to feel like they have earned a break in the rigors of studying. This fellow spoke with a student from University of Florida, who would go to games there and the campus was completely shut down. Would we consider closing down the libraries one day a week, to subtly push students to pursue something outside work? What about something less extreme, but to the same effect?

A fellow feels that community is everything, and forms one's entire experience. The people you take multiple classes with, or see every few weeks, or eat dinner with. However, so many folks on this campus do not see the same people every day, which makes it really hard to make friends and find community through inconsistent lives. From semester to semester, one forms and breaks bonds with other students. It really is a fallacy that more time studying will make grades better. At their core, clubs (though they take up time) help you form community, which is just as important as studying to success.

Continuing on previous fellows, this fellow was a tour guide, and would stress to incoming students that there is a community here on the campus (no matter where you

come from). This sense of community is the only reason this fellow is even comfortable talking to the Fellowship. They even planned classes around their community.

While community can be beneficial, it can also be toxic, one fellow remarks. How one measures oneself against one's peers can be damaging. We should reframe our mind to be the best we can be, without comparing ourselves to peers or focusing on what other people think about our own progress. This can lead to toxicity, when people are worried about being judged, or not being good enough. The fellow encourages others to find interdisciplinary communities, where not everyone is focusing on grades for a class.

A fellow thinks that one community that has inequitable access is ROTC. Students in ROTC cannot have any records that state mental health struggles. The government uses scare tactics, which compound stigmas from the community. People spew nasty slurs at students in uniform on our campus, and can even be physically violent. This is an unacceptable attitude for students to hold toward their peers, and can negatively impact mental health.

A fellow brings up the prevalence of imposter syndrome, and many students who were the top of their class in high school struggle with that coming into Cal. In graduate school training, this fellow experienced a lot of help in this area. However, this fellow hopes that this help makes it to undergraduate orientation. Hopefully GBO has been amended to include these valuable lessons.

A fellow remarks about how the Fellowship can act as a place of community. The Order can provide a safe place to voice concerns and get help.

The meeting closed with song, and was adjourned promptly at 7:29 pm.

Meeting minutes taken and compiled by the Chronicler for the Order.

