

# Order of The Golden Bear

ΔΙΩΚΩ

ESTABLISHED 1900

## **Virtual Meeting September 29, 2020**

The meeting was convened at 6:00 pm.

### **Items for the Good of the Order:**

The Warden reviewed updated protocols for this semester's meetings due to these unique circumstances.

The Warden reminds fellows of the upcoming Arleigh Williams Forum on October 16<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

### **Items for the Good of the University: Health at Cal: COVID-19**

Prior to the meeting, the Warden prepared a set of questions and resources for the Fellowship to inform our conversation of the topic:

*On the topic of Health at Cal: COVID-19, Here are some questions to consider regarding COVID-19 and the University:*

- How has COVID-19 impacted the learning environment? In what ways can we improve virtual classes and online resources to better meet the need of students?
- How can the University, faculty, and students create community outside of classes?
- What are the needs of faculty during this time, and what has to be done in order to achieve these?
- Are there ways to provide students with the mental, physical, and social aspects of College in a virtual world?
- What responsibility does the University have to keeping the City and residents of Berkeley safe? How can we continue to improve safety both on and off campus?
- COVID-19 has created a financial burden for the University and its surrounding communities. What will be the impact if staff furloughs occur in the spring, especially for those who work in student and departmental support services?

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Here are links to a few interesting resources on COVID-19 at the University:

- <https://uhs.berkeley.edu/coronavirus/health-information>
- <https://uhs.berkeley.edu/coronavirus/student-mental-health>
- <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-coronavirus-pandemic-is-making-college-students-question-the-price-of-their-education-11598619781>

After a brief introduction from the Warden, the floor was open for the Fellowship to converse:

- A Fellow brings up that COVID has created a divide between faculty and students, since there is no in person interaction; The fellow also mentions that each class is uniquely affected depending on how the faculty member was running courses before
  - The Fellow notes that Professors are also struggling with engaging with students as they would in the live lectures, as they are not as able to read the body language of the students
- A Fellow notes the difficulty to maintain focus during larger lectures, when everyone has their cameras off, it is easier to drift away
  - The Fellow adds that it is easier to maintain focus during interactive parts of discussions - Breakout Rooms/Student-to-Student interactions
- A Fellow notes that both students and faculty should update expectations due to the unprecedented times that we are all dealing with
  - This Fellow notes that there are many other factors going on that may affect how a Student may learn
  - Both groups need to be flexible in updating their expectations
  - Learn how to best learn with the current situation we are in
  - Be creative in ways to prioritize the important aspects of learning
- A Fellow mentions that as a former lecturer, they enjoyed having a live, large in-person class since it would lead to conversations and enlightening interactions
  - The Fellow brings up the idea of how students can also learn best from each other, not just from a lecturer
  - Beyond the normal time for the lectures/small sections
- A Fellow mentions that as STEM major, labs are extremely complex and do not carry well over the virtual environment

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- There are certain experiences that students go through while doing labs
- Losing out on an integral part of their education
- Professors/University should re-evaluate expectations to reduce stress on students
- These are not normal times, yet some professors are carrying on as though it were normal
- A Fellow notes that in one of their courses on campus, students have been very patient and gracious while going through their course
  - The Fellow notes that without being surrounded by other students in person, they may tend to become more lax and fall behind
  - But this is due to the remote environment, primarily
  - Students are trying to make the best of this course
  - The Fellow notes that their department brought up the idea of asking questions to stimulate conversation (open ended questions to engage students)
  - The Fellow notes that since we will be starting the next semester with remote learning, Faculty would appreciate more support in how to best utilize Zoom/Kaltura/BCourses to improve the quality of remote learning for the students
- A Fellow poses the question of how to best build community on campus while lacking possible in-person opportunities which in the past have been hugely beneficial
  - Question: What are Clubs/ASUC doing to engage with students to foster community during this remote time?
- A Fellow notes that although they have graduated, students are currently missing out on a lot of the spontaneous moments that they would experience if they were going through their lives while on campus
  - Might conclude that there is no way to recreate these small moments of spontaneity
  - Wonder if there is some way to recreate these moments, or ultimately decide if these things just cannot be recreated
- A Fellow mentions that this time of Remote Learning is not normal FOR US, because there are places in the past that have offered remote learning for the entirety of a degree

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- This Fellow mentions that the crux of this problem is that it is not normal for us
- We need to be understanding and need to be stronger as a community
- This same Fellow suggests that pinging friends that you have not seen in a long time might be a way to help make things feel slightly more normal
- Another Fellow mentions that they have had Zoom Office Hours which have been successful, says they have had extended conversations with Students
  - Try to give it a more personal sense with the students
  - Try to simulate a live classroom as much as possible
- A Fellow brings up that the idea of recreating the classroom might be unattainable, so we should try to find a new way to learn effectively, since these are unprecedented times
  - Create projects and assignments which are engaging to students and get them connected outside of the lecture time
- A Fellow poses the question of what the accommodations are for students with disabilities
- A Fellow mentions that previous conversations had been about what's the best we can do until we return to normal, but we should also realize that remote learning might be a new normal in the sense that these problems will carry on throughout the future
  - Commend Faculty and Staff who have found temporary beneficial solutions to Remote Learning, but what can we do to help make things better for the future for all
- A Fellow brought up the idea of \*if things do get better\* potentially having some in-person/on-campus events for the good of the students
  - Suggestions are something, but the university should follow through with their words
  - Find creative ways to help people living in the Berkeley area feel like it is worth it to be around
  - This fellow also mentioned that Office Hours are going well over Zoom, but brought up that Professors should try to be more available outside the minimum required hours
  - The Fellow mentions that a lot of students are feeling financial burdens (just as the country is), but they recognize that the University is also experiencing financial problems

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- Adjust the requirements for Discussion sections, since international students may not be able to attend these sections at reasonable times
- A Fellow brought up that overall balance is not really present during these COVID-19 Times
  - A Fellow mentioned that the Campus needs to find ways to decrease Zoom fatigue while not compacting everything into working hours
  - Set stricter etiquette rules to be followed to make working from home easier for students/faculty/administrators
- A Fellow mentioned that although it is easier to go from meeting to meeting since they don't have to walk from building to building on campus, there is no longer a reasonable break between back-to-back meetings
  - Ability to attend lectures/seminars in passing time
  - Idea to make a centralized database/calendar for seminars/workshops/lectures that are available to the entire Berkeley community
    - Expand the breadth and experience of all students
  - Some wide-reaching issues affecting many in the community are student loans/cost of attending university
- A Fellow reiterates again that the Campus should find ways to increase the sense of communities
  - The Fellow also mentions that paying full tuition/fees for services you are not able to access is similar to the furloughs which have happened on campus in the past (Receiving less pay while being expected to perform the same amount of work)
  - Posed Rhetorical Question: What are we going to give up/stop doing/which services to cut to reduce fees to students
- A Fellow brings up that there hasn't been a noticeable effort from the campus to have a coalescent event at which the broader campus community is engaged
  - The Fellow notes that it is very difficult for campus administrators to figure out how to minimize the lingering effects of the pandemic when we return to campus
  - There exists a set of circumstances which will not erase the costs which burden the campus currently

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- A Fellow responds to a previously posed question that there does not seem to be information available about how the campus is dealing with helping communities of Cal students, particularly marginalized communities
- A Fellow notes that we need to consider how to best support the mental health of students and faculty while implementing solutions for these current times
- A Fellow brings up some examples of what the campus has been doing to help students who have been hit particularly hard by the pandemic:
  - The university library is digitizing all teaching material so that all students can access materials through a reserve rather than purchasing course materials
  - From the day the campus moved online, the Student Technology Equity Program is pushing out as many laptops/hotspots on loan for students who are in need
  - Campus is raising a lot of money from donors for the specific cause of equipping students with the necessary learning tools for remote learning
  - Campus is offering housing for students who do not have a plausible learning environment at home
  - Campus is looking for ways to help with mental health of students
  - University currently sitting at a \$340M loss since March, but what money is available is heavily directed towards students, specifically with those who are marginalized
  - There exists a sense of compassion and empathy from university officials for those who are in need and struggling through these times
- A Fellow commented that an issue that could hinder the ability to return to campus involves vaccines and pre-existing conditions (for both students AND staff)
- A Fellow responded to a question about what student groups are doing during this time, they noted that it is hard for students to find a space for them to engage in specific activities, as well as sitting through more zoom meetings could hurt students more than help them

The meeting closed with song and was adjourned at 7:06 pm.

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