

March 15, 2022 Meeting Minutes

Topic: Cal's Impact Locally and Globally

Meeting Called to Order: 6:01 PM

Items for the Good of the Order:

- A Fellow reminds the Fellowship that the Order's Song, the Golden Bear, is meant to be an uplifting song, not a funeral dirge
- The Warden reviews the protocols of discussion for all the Fellows in the Rooms
- The Warden reminds the Fellowship that Order Council Meetings happen in the Off-Tuesdays throughout the semester, but since next week is Spring Break, there is no Order Council Meeting
- The Warden emphasizes the three charges of the Order: Frankness, Tolerance, and Confidentiality

Items for the Good of the University: The Experiences of Non-tenured Faculty, Staff, and Professors

The Warden opens the floor with anecdotes and reviews some questions sent out to the Fellowship prior to the meeting.

On the Topic of: The Experiences of Non-tenured Faculty, Staff, and Professors

- A Fellow begins the discussion with their experiences as a Teaching Assistant (Reader/UGSI) and their experiences with the professors at the time (1970s)
 - This Fellow mentions that the guidance they were given was to be available to the students and be present for their questions after class
 - The Professor this Fellow was a TA for encouraged TAs to be creative with their lesson plans and the sections that they were teaching
- A Fellow continues with two points:
 - From the student's perspective: It is not immediately obvious to students whether their teacher is a tenured faculty member or a non-tenured lecturer
 - Some professors/lecturers make this well-known to their students, but most do not
 - Students are not always aware of the differences between tenured faculty and non-tenured lecturers
 - This Fellow talks about a recent Town Hall with the Statistics Department:

- Students had mentioned the need for quality control in regard to course offerings and how different professors/lecturers could affect the experiences of students
- A Fellow discusses their experiences in an Astronomy Breadth with dual-lectures
 - This Fellow mentions that the experiences with each professor was day and night, one was extremely engaging and the other was focused on just lecturing
 - This Fellow also mentions that depending on who have as a professor/lecturer, the lectures, homeworks, projects, and exams could be vastly different from other professors/lecturers
 - Dramatic Shifts depending on who is teaching
- A Fellow, a Junior, discusses two life changing courses, both of which were taught by lecturers
 - One of the lecturers was part of the group that organized the potential strike and rally for supporting Lectures
 - Students can tell very easily that Lecturers give the best experiences, but they are faced with the least amount of Job Security and lacking fair compensation
- A Fellow discusses the difference between our views of the campus as an Institution and Community
 - There are two entities in this discussion: Institution and Community
 - This Fellow emphasizes that there is no industry standard for many aspects of this issue
 - The Community perception might very well differ from the Institutional perception depending on the issue or day
- A Fellow talks about their experiences as a Grad Student, Admin, and Lecturer at Berkeley
 - This Fellow mentions that the higher levels of Professorship are very gated at Berkeley
 - If you think that it was hard to get into Cal, try becoming a professor here
 - This Fellow discusses how that even though you are supposed to be a world-renowned expert in your field, they have only been reviewed once in 27 years as a lecturer
 - If our professors are the top of their field, how do you get someone to review them? (i.e., no one would know more than them)
 - The experiences will be different at schools that don't have the same academic caché as Berkeley
 - This Fellow comments that the rhetoric being used is "just a lecturer", but this is harmful rhetoric
 - Most of the time, students will not know much about the professor unless they look at RateMyProfessor or word of mouth

- A Fellow highlights the disconnect between readers/lecturers and the general grading procedures (who grades what?)
 - This Fellow states that we need to go to the level of understanding we had at the beginning of the Pandemic, where everyone was much more understanding given the circumstances
 - The expectations and levels of understanding vary depending on the department
 - We need to be more unified as a campus across all departments
 - There is no easy solution to an issue that is so deeply embedded within in the foundations of Berkeley's system
- A Fellow provides some anecdotes to try and discuss what is going well:
 - This Fellow discusses the incentives that different positions have at various levels
 - Some staff have multiple income streams
 - Some staff teach for fun whereas some staff teach out of necessity
- A Fellow discusses their experiences as a Student:
 - This Fellow highlights the degrees of separation between all students in the current moment
 - This Fellow discusses how many students they know who are going through serious bouts of mental health struggles
- A Fellow discusses their experiences with a seminar:
 - This Lecturer of this course is acting as an informal thesis advisor (since lecturers are not allowed to be thesis advisors)
 - The Lecturer guides students to other tenured faculty to be thesis advisors
 - Lecturers take on a load of extra work, even when they are not able to fully be credited in an official setting
- A Fellow poses two questions regarding the process for obtaining tenure:
 - What is the faculty experience of understanding the various levels of incentives depending on the department
 - Are individual departments incentivizing research over providing a quality course offering?
 - Breakdown of professors/lecturers revising their course content based on what the department requests and based on what they want to teach
- A Fellow mentions that being an expert in your field does not automatically make someone a great teacher
 - Many professors cannot even teach effectively to their peers, so how are we expecting undergraduates to understand and learn if they are not able to teach effectively
- A Fellow adds in some information about Lecturers in this conversation:
 - There is a spectrum of lecturer positions in the UC System
 - There are lecturers with job security (LWSOE)

- There are lecturers who are here every semester, who teach a full course load every year
- There are Ad Hoc lecturers - they are not here full time, hired/fired at the will of the University (usually to fill spots whenever a professor/lecturer is not available)
- For the lecturers who do not have tenure or are not permanent University employees, these lecturers can come and go for good/bad reasons:
 - The particular course they are teaching is not needed every term (possibly only one offering per academic calendar) (boutique classes)
 - Lecturers may be hired/fired for political reasons (not getting along in their department, quality of their teaching)
- A Fellow adds into the conversation with their experiences as someone who has gone through this process for tenure
 - This Fellow mentions that lecturers were some of the people who made them fall in love with their work and department
 - This Fellow returned to Berkeley for their Post Doc, was full time staff and Lecturer
 - This Fellow's initial placement was a lecturer co-instructing with a tenured faculty
 - This Fellow had become a lecturer for a class that they had taken 10 years prior as an undergraduate
 - There are various ways you can describe the spectrum of lecturers
 - This Fellow would have loved to remain longer, but there are many factors which inhibited this (high cost of living in the Bay Area, many iterations of applications resulting in undue hardship)
 - Many administrative burdens in the process - This Lecturer was not even notified that their class was not listed on the roster for this semester until their students could not find it listed
 - Despite this Fellow's qualifications as a verified expert in their field, they feel that there needs to be a more human-based approach to this process
- A Fellow mentions that Lecturers do not feel equal support from the university as the university gives to Tenured faculty
 - How many bright minds are we losing out on by not providing better incentives and an equitable environment
- A Fellow responds to a previous speaker's question about course curriculum:
 - The Core Curriculum is created by the department
 - Boutique curriculum is based on who is around to teach and what the current needs are
 - There are many reasons why courses are established and maintained

- The Bay Area is a really hard place to live - The University is trying to balance the Tenured Faculty and Lecturers/Adjunct Faculty
- The recently revised contract with Lecturers might have the opportunity to take sabbatical leave to perform research
- This Fellow mentions that although they were offered a tenured position at Duke, they chose to stay here
 - This Fellow asked Berkeley for the same position, but they were rejected
- It is a very complex balance to maintain the high quality of education at the University with the limited resources the University has to fairly compensate all Faculty
- A Fellow mentions that professors have been giving warnings about pursuing a PhD
 - This is a common sentiment elsewhere, with many people choosing to leave academia because of the current environment
- A Fellow adds on to their previous point:
 - Although we think of the “community” as just the campus community, we must turn to the larger community that we are apart of
 - From this Fellow’s perspective, there are a list of courses that you have to take when you come to Cal, but the quality of those courses/how much they are going to help you in the future is serendipity
 - We do not think about the serendipitous nature of the undergraduate experience at Berkeley
- A Fellow recalls the ills of resources such as “RateMyProfessor” and other types of resources shift towards a response bias (more negative than positive)
 - In the College of Letters and Science, this Fellow was told to stay away from Advisors
 - Quality Control in regard to standardizing course experiences could definitely help with these issues
 - This Fellow mentions that their significant other is a teacher at a charter school, and they are observed very frequently (sometimes, multiple times per week)
 - If we want to maintain the competitive spirit of being the #1 University in the US, why don’t we want reviews/observations to be told what we are doing well?
 - We are competing with private institutions who have more resources, how is this going to affect us in the long term
- A Fellow is concerned with the price of housing and the inability of faculty members to raise a family in this environment
 - There are grad students and faculty who are unhoused and living in their cars, and that is unacceptable for our University
 - The University needs to do more to make sure that everyone in the community has a roof over their heads

- A Fellow mentions that various departments have various issues that do not have a standardized response/solution
 - The University needs to gain a better understanding of the various issues that press each department and how to address them
 - This Fellow mentions that after leaving Cal, they have the opportunity to bring new amazing people to Cal
 - People can be those cross-pollinators for Campus to guide the bright minds here
 - Whatever we can do to make the administrative process easier would greatly benefit everyone involved in this situation
- A Fellow mentions that there were no internet boards giving warnings about professors during their time at Cal
 - There are positives and negatives with these types of boards
 - This Fellow continues on with anecdotes about two professors from their past
 - A Professor (from the UK) that they had in the past had some trouble adapting to the US education system, and that affected student's views towards this professor
- A Fellow, currently a GSI, mentions that students' experiences are greatly affected by the relationship between professors and the GSIs
 - If there is a positive dynamic between the two groups, then that could lead to a better experience for students
 - A Fellow mentions that Tenured Professors are notoriously difficult to remove
 - If Tenured, they have to do something egregious or pay them out
 - If you want to increase diversity in the department, you either have to have a long-term plan or bring in lecturers
 - There are a set number of professor spots, and you have to wait for them to either retire or take a better offer from another University
 - Lecturers → More Diversity in Departments
 - This is not a Berkeley Specific issue, this is very much a higher education/academia issue
 - Nowadays, if you get a higher education degree, you are simply trying to live
 - Clash between Academia and Industry → you need to go through academia to get out in the field nowadays
- A Fellow presents their thoughts after the discussion thus far:
 - For many of the senior Fellows in the room, it was most likely easier to live near campus as a faculty member in previous generations
 - Faculty might not have the opportunity to stick around after the school day ends because many faculty members will have an hour long commute
 - Part of the reason why tenure is hard to control → The people who have tenure are the ones controlling it (gatekeeping)

- If we think of the Order as a Think Tank, can we think about changing the expectations of Faculty and how they teach the undergraduates
- The Campus is very large now in every aspect and it really has not adjusted to this size
- This Fellow, a public school teacher, mentions that there are standards that teachers have to follow and are evaluated every two years
- Many CSUs in the Bay Area were initially designed as teaching institutions, maybe we can have a connection with these schools and help faculty understand how to more effectively teach
- A Fellow wonders if the issue is the system being broken, but not being broke enough to need fixing
 - Are we content enough with what we are getting out of the system?
 - It's tough to be a Berkeley Student or Lecturer, and you have to feel that sometimes you have to put up with this
 - Pedro Noguera: The Last Lecture Series
 - Left Berkeley for Harvard and is now the Dean of the School of Education at USC
- A Fellow mentions that we have done a great job today as an observing body
 - For a more solution-based discussion, there are two levers: salary and system
 - Can we adjust the salaries of non-tenured faculty? What are the various factors that go into this?
 - Can the Order help with re-evaluating the broken systems and lack of human-design?
- A Fellow mentions that Berkeley is not alone in this situation
 - The Fellow mentions that their daughter was in a class at UCLA that revealed that an issue is the quality of teaching and not the difficulty of the material
 - Not questioning quality, we are questioning the practice
- A Fellow brings up that All Faculty members should be able to teach effectively for any of the lower div classes in their department
 - Forcing Professors who have tenure to teach a class that they don't want to teach can have harmful consequences for the Students since the Professor won't face any consequences
- A Fellow gives some more context for Pedro Noguera:
 - Noguera was a member of the ASUC Student Government, and he led the Anti-Apartheid movements and discussions with Campus Admin to divest from South Africa
 - This Fellow also mentions that students are more likely to speak up and review a class/professor if the experience was negative, not so eager to jump into the review if the class was positive

- There is no standard platform for which all Faculty is evaluated on an even field (possible future campus solution?)
- A Fellow closes the discussion with another possible solution:
 - What if the Community had housing for 4-years provided for Faculty/Lecturers/Grad Students? Can the University work with homeowners/local governments to figure out a solution?

Adjourned at: 7:32 PM