

Student Director Randy Cantz's Democracy Camp Journal (March 23-26, 2020)



Randy Cantz is a senior at UC Berkeley pursuing a degree in History and a minor in Public Policy. He is focused on gaining critical insights into the measures necessary to institute salient and long-lasting policies at state and national levels. An active member of his school's community, Randy is President of Phi Alpha Theta, UC Berkeley's history honor society, a Senior Associate for the Chief Legal Officer in the ASUC's Office of Legal Affairs, and Advocacy Director of Berkeley Hillel's Challah for Hunger chapter. Randy's goal is to ultimately pursue a career centered on social advocacy, focusing specifically on the way in which technology shapes law, democracy, and social memory.

Monday, March 23, 2020

- **Lisa García Bedolla, Vice Provost for Graduate Studies & Dean of the Graduate Division**

Lisa Garcia Bedolla's insight into public service careers was incredibly inspiring and moving. Dr. Bedolla was the child of Cuban refugees, who grounded her in a rigorous education, and was encouraged by a Latina professor to pursue a PhD, and in doing so, to give back to her community. Dr. Bedolla ultimately earned a PhD in Political Science from Yale University and has worked with students individually as a faculty member to advocate for philanthropy and the common good. Now Vice Provost of Graduate Studies at UC Berkeley, Dr. Bedolla is excited to make systemic changes as an administrator, and I'm thoroughly impressed by her commitment to social justice, advocacy, and early commitment to education.

During Democracy Camp, Dr. Bedolla discussed a plethora of diverse topics, ranging from grad student strikes, relational organizing—shifting power through advocacy—and the power of data and technology in mobilizing voters via her signature Integrated Voter Engagement system. Dr. Bedolla also discussed grades and graduate school (ultimately reiterating the administration's message that students should take a deep breath and keep spring semester 2020 grades P/NP due to the coronavirus pandemic). She also stated that when writing graduate school applications, students should make sure to answer three essential questions: “why this program, why you, why now?”

Overall, I thought the advice Dr. Bedolla provided—from graduate school, her own history, and her handling of the school's many crises—as well as her insight into graduate school admissions was incredibly useful to the Fellows and reminded me of the necessity of activism, public service, and advocacy to ensure a thriving democracy.

- **Campus Resource Panel with Christine Trost, Executive Director of IGS & Director of the Robert T. Matsui Center for Politics & Public Service, and Ashley Kelley, Program Manager UC Berkeley Public Service Center**

During the Campus Resources Panel, Christine Trost and Ashley Kelley described various programs offered through the IGS and the Career Center that would be helpful to students, ranging from the Matsui Washington Fellowship, Alternative Breaks, and Cal in Sac, to Cal in the Capital, the ACES program, and the BUILD program. Trost and Kelley both explained how we could become involved in these programs, engage in advocacy, and give back to the Berkeley community and beyond. I was immensely impressed by the abundance of organizations available to students who want to become leaders and changemakers.

- **Imposter Syndrome with Alexandria Wright, Director of External Programming at the Institute of Governmental Studies**

Alexandria Wright's imposter syndrome workshop was a fascinating way to gain insight into a problem all too many students, particularly minorities, endure by illuminating how the concept of imposter syndrome is largely culturally driven. Defined as "a fear of being exposed as less capable or not belonging or capable," imposter syndrome has the potential to reduce confidence and stymie students' overall educational potential. Indeed, one could ostensibly be both confident in their innate abilities and still experience imposter syndrome. Thus, we engaged in activities to systematically dismantle imposter syndrome by spending time with our values and giving or receiving a compliment. I found these exercises incredibly liberating and found it unifying to see how many students agreed with me. We also engaged in a writing exercise which forced us to introspect and apply the lessons we were learning. Ultimately, by recognizing our values and remembering that imposter syndrome is situational and cultural, we can reclaim our sense of confidence in educational institutions and achieve our potential.

- **Resumé and Review Workshop with Sonia Moctezuma, Program Manager for the Institute of Governmental Studies**

Sonia Moctezuma's resumé and review workshop was really helpful for students interested in knowing how to properly write a cover letter, resumé, and engage in an interview. I was particularly impressed by the fact that Sonia showed us her own resumé as a reference and encouraged us to use a similar format. In addition, Sonia implored us to do research on the people we are interviewing with, making sure to casually bring up similarities between yourself and the interviewer in the interview. Overall, the resumé and review workshop helped address common misconceptions surrounding cover letters, resúmes, and interviews and seemed to be a massive help for all of the students.

Tuesday, March 24, 2020

- **James Araby Executive Director, United Food and Commercial Workers Union Western States Council**

I was very impressed by James Araby's passion for empowering working people to have a voice in their jobs through his work at various unions advocating on behalf of working people. Araby outlined the three fundamentals of every union contractor: protecting the health and safety of workers, ensuring as much equitable sharing as possible in every contract, and protecting the voice of workers in any dispute. I also was impressed by the tactics Araby employed to motivate workers towards action in spite of the complexity of their lives. Overall, while Araby stressed negotiations can get tough and that humility is an especially important tactic in negotiations, I was most impressed by his incredible knowledge of the union landscape and his message of activism and inspiration for the Fellows.

- **Community Organization Panel (Elizabeth Wells, Chelsea Lopez, Jonathan Stein, Laneisha Butler)**

During the Community Organization Panel, I was inspired by Jonathan Stein's desire to build the country's first truly multilingual democracy at Asian Americans Advancing Justice, Elizabeth Wells's advocacy at Planned Parenthood, and Laneisha Butler's work as a Youth Organizer at Oakland Rising. Critically, all speakers touched upon the vital role of democratic participation and voice—ensuring that all people in the U.S. have the opportunity to BE the people making the changes in the world and empower ordinary, everyday people by levelling the playing field. Graduate school, particularly law school, was also discussed, where Jonathan encouraged us to determine our “fit” with various schools to ensure we can become the next generation of leaders. Another excellent recommendation Jonathan made was to email a handful of student groups that appeal to us and listen to what students have to say. If the students don't get back to you or if the answers seem inauthentic, this will be an important data point for determining “fit”. Overall, I believe the Community Organization Panel was a fantastic opportunity for students to learn about pressing issues afflicting the country as well as graduate school and networking—skills that grow ever more important in our increasingly socially networked world.

- **Libby Schaaf, Mayor of Oakland**

Mayor Libby Schaaf was one of the highlights of Democracy Camp, in my opinion. Her depiction of Oakland as a community with deep values of inclusive, working class authenticity and her recognition that local government is closest to the people, since cities are the centers of leadership and change, deeply inspired me to engage more meaningfully in local government. Plus, as the Mayor noted, working in local government makes you “low enough to the ground to know people whose lives you're impacting.” Schaaf described Oakland as a city of artists, edgy

energy, social justice—the birthplace of the Black Panthers—with a progressive value set that is part of her DNA. Importantly, Mayor Shaaf made clear to us that career trajectories are bumpy, not straight and she helped us to envision a job profile composed of issues, skills, and work environments where we would ideally work. Ultimately, she decided to run for mayor because she believed we were at a moment in time in which we could improve the quality of democracy by utilizing digital technologies, such as Code for America, as a digital bridge—an authentic way of bringing people into government. Overall, I saw Mayor Schaaf as an inspiring, empowering, and incredibly thoughtful leader in the midst of this moment of global crisis—an intelligent, inspiring leader that we desperately need.

- **Career Exploration with Jeremy Brooks, Assistant Director for L&S at UC Berkeley Career Center**

Career Exploration with Jeremy Brooks delved into the ways in which students could align their interests and priorities into a job. Given the coronavirus pandemic, students were notably concerned that their summer internships were likely going to be cancelled, but Jeremy reassured us that companies were still hiring and encouraged us to reach out to recruiters by offering to help their team in any capacity. I am impressed by the resilience and flexibility of the career center—as well as students, teachers, and employers—across this country during these unprecedented times and appreciated Jeremy’s optimism and candor about the future.

Wednesday, March 25, 2020

- **Assemblymember Monique Limón, 37th District of the California State Assembly**

The daughter of immigrants and the first in her family to attend college, Assemblymember Monique Limón was the first woman of color to represent Ventura and Santa Barbara Counties. I was particularly impressed by Assemblymember Limón’s commitment to ensuring that legislation is more diverse and reflective of the state, such as her focus on championing early childhood education, paid family leave, and childcare. I also was moved by her efforts to expand access to local politics via her involvement on nonprofit boards and through her advocacy as a trailblazer in her own right. Overall, I believe Fellows were inspired by Assemblymember Limón’s story and her tireless advocacy for progressive causes.

- **Alumni in the Capitol (Sara Bachez, Assistant Executive Director, Government Relations for California Association of School Business Officials and M. David Ruff, Chief Consultant for the Assembly Committee on Revenue and Taxation, California State Assembly)**

Sara Bachez and M. David Ruff were both invaluable in providing insight into how life on Capitol Hill and in nonprofits work on a day-to-day basis. Sara, who works as the Assistant Executive Director of Government Relations for the California Association of School Business Officials in Sacramento, described how office culture in Sacramento was familial in nature, but that ultimately leaving the California state capitol for a nonprofit was daunting yet rewarding. Bachez reiterated her experience was so rewarding because she was personally impressed by how passionate and friendly people are to step up and help.

M. David Ruff, the Chief Consultant for the Assembly Committee on Revenue and Taxation, similarly shared how his own passion for politics and public service began as a child and naturally grew into his work as a tax attorney. Ruff implored students to have the courage to check-in with themselves. He made clear that by realigning work with his innate interests and values, he was ultimately contributing to something more meaningful. Both Bachez and Ruff reiterated their passion for politics and the importance of humility, collaboration, and listening skills in the current job market. Sara in particular affirmed the critical importance of education as a public good that we need to make a concerted effort to protect. Ultimately, both recommended that students cultivate a strong support network and develop a strong mission and purpose.

- **John Pérez, Chair of the UC Board of Regents**

While a bit intimidating at times, our experience with Regent John Pérez was littered with insights on life and success in local government. As the first gay person of color in the state legislature, Regent Pérez was animated by local fights over redistricting, national organizing, and federal funding mechanisms before he started college. Indeed, Regent Pérez stated that he became so involved in campaigns that by the time he was a freshman at Cal he fell into the labor movement. Regent Pérez described his prolific history of legislative accomplishment, ranging from creating Covered California to expanding electoral access and participation by making it easier to vote by mail. However, the Regent also expressed his disdain for the COLA strikes, stating he was “offended” by them because they were illegal, pointing out that students are self-selecting to break their union contract as stated in article 19 in which a union has an affirmative role to stop the strike. Ultimately, the Regent’s resilience in the face of adversity—whether confronting challenges in passing bills or working on the board as a minority—make clear that challenges can provide an opportunity for personal growth and change.

Thursday, March 26, 2020

- **Meeting with IGS Co-Directors Eric Schickler and G. Cristina Mora**

I thought the IGS Directors Eric Schickler and Cristina Mora were both very candid about their experience growing up and their advice regarding graduate school. Cristina made clear she

wanted to use her position as Co-Director of IGS as well as her role as a professor in Sociology to shift the way we think about race, immigration, and identity, particularly in helping communities outside the academy. Eric, who studies American institutions, political parties, and racial realignment described one of his overarching goals as deploying the various resources of the IGS to benefit nontraditional students and help them explore local government. Regarding graduate school, both highlighted the importance of letters of recommendation, office hours, and taking a gap year to gain perspective. Ultimately, they both highlighted the importance of uplifting a new generation of leaders through the various IGS programs, and I was very impressed by their vision.

- **Eunice Lee, Co-Legal Director at the Center for Gender and Refugee Studies**

Another highlight of Democracy Camp was having the incredible opportunity to talk with and learn from Eunice Lee. Eunice is an extraordinarily brilliant legal scholar and an immigrants' rights litigator who offered a wealth of knowledge about law school and our careers going forward. Eunice fell into the human rights field early in college after pursuing a social justice-oriented internship with Amnesty International and eventually chose to go straight to law school at Yale after her undergraduate studies at Stanford. During our conversation, she encouraged students to work backwards from their interests and to get experience pouring over documents and researching cases, since that's what attorneys spend most of their time doing. She also reiterated that the most fulfilling part of her job as a litigator is not only winning cases, but also seeing real, systemic changes from working on behalf of real people. I was incredibly impressed with Eunice's thoughtfulness and her commitment to immigrant rights and advocacy. Students in Democracy Camp interested in pursuing a career in law were certainly very curious to hear her advice and insight regarding law school as well as to learn about the way in which lawyers impact regular people's lives and effect societal change.

- **Philanthropy Panel (Raquiba LaBrie, Program Director, Education Equity at the Evelyn & Walter Haas, Jr. Fund, and Elizabeth Warner, Managing Director & Chief Development Officer at Ploughshares Fund)**

Lastly, Raquiba LaBrie and Elizabeth Warner both shared valuable insights for students interested in public service. Raquiba, who works as the Program Director of Education Equity at the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund, encouraged students to dream, set goals, and check in on those goals; to be the architect of the future; and to volunteer as a means of distinguishing yourself. Raquiba also encouraged students to blog, put their voice out there, and network via informational interviews. Elizabeth, the Managing Director and Chief Development Officer of Ploughshares Fund, underscored how important it is for students to speak with people, network, and get to know who they are while also being passionate about and intellectually stimulated by the work.

I found their advice, particularly about putting your voice out there and sharing your ideas with others, very useful to embracing a more open, collaborative ethos integral to personal and societal transformation. I believe all of the students not only benefited from hearing both Raquiba and Elizabeth speak on the Philanthropy panel, but also emerged empowered to take on a life of public service.