Alpha of California, Phi Beta Kappa,
University of California, Berkeley

4333 Dwinelle Hall
University of California, Berkeley 94720-2510

510-642-1912

www.sims.berkeley.edu/~mkduggan/pbk.html

University of California
Berkeley
PHI BETA KAPPA
Alpha of California

University of California
Berkeley

CENTENNIAL
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CENTENNIAL PROGRAMS

Alpha of California
Phi Beta Kappa
University of California, Berkeley

** **

Thursday, 19 November, 4 p.m.
LECTURE
Lipman Room, Barrows Hall
Presiding: Professor Mary Kay Duggan
Introduction: Clark Kerr, President Emeritus,
University of California
Derek Bok, Former President, Harvard University
“What Affirmative Action Can Teach Universities
About How to Improve in the Next Century”

** **

Saturday, 5 December, 6:30 p.m.
Faculty Club, University of California, Berkeley
BANQUET
(no-host bar from 5:30 p.m.)
Presiding: Professor Mary Kay Duggan
Speaker: Dr. Kevin Starr, California, State Librarian and
Chairman of the California Sesquicentennial Celebration
INTRODUCTION

Mary Kay Duggan
President of the Council, Alpha of California

At the founding of Phi Beta Kappa at the University of California in December, 1898, when the university was a single campus in Berkeley, enrollment was about 2400 students, 600 of whom were women. In the following hundred years, eight other campuses have been founded and Phi Beta Kappa chapters have been approved for all except the medical school (see page 44). According to national by-laws, a chapter is allowed to initiate no more than one-tenth of eligible seniors, a number that has risen from a handful in 1898 to the hundreds of 1998. Over the years the programs represent a remarkable record of academic excellence among students who have gone on to state and national government, posts in academia, corporate positions, and leadership in fields such as writing, entertainment, and social service.

To celebrate the centennial of the chapter, members of Alpha of California joined with the alumni of the Northern California Association to organize events for the campus and for the community, and to create this printed testimony. The chapter wishes to thank publicly those on the Berkeley campus who have given their support to the celebration: Graduate Dean Joseph Cerny, Director Randolph Starn of the Townsend Center for the Humanities,
Director Mitchell Breitwieser of the American Cultures Program, and Humanities Dean (Letters and Science) Ralph Hexter. Thanks are due also to the many individuals who have given time or money to the activities of the chapter (see page 45).

The chapter has created a Centennial Lecture at which Professor Derek Bok, former president of Harvard University, delivered an address entitled “What Affirmative Action Can Teach Universities About How to Improve in the Next Century.” Professor Bok’s latest book, The Shape of the River (Princeton University Press, 1998), is a study of the lives of 60,000 students of various races who were admitted by selected colleges in the 1970s and 1980s under affirmative action policies. His talk on November 19, 1998, dealt less with affirmative action arguments than with the way in which we respond to the institutional changes a changing student body brings as we try to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the new century. The Chapter was honored to have former University of California president Clark Kerr introduce Dr. Bok.

Alpha Chapter of California and the alumni of the Northern California Association assembled for a Centennial Banquet on December 5, 1998, at the campus Faculty Club. California State Librarian Kevin Starr’s address focused on the years surrounding the establishment of the chapter in California. Dr. Starr has written prolifically on the history of California, including a volume on Americans and the Californian Dream, 1950-1915 (Oxford University Press, 1973).

In past years notable addresses to the annual initiates have been printed by local chapters. For example, on May 14, 1918, William Kelley Prentice spoke on “Hellenic Standards for the Modern World,” and the address was reprinted both by the campus newspaper and nationally in Representative Phi Beta Kappa Oration in 1927 (New York, Elisha Parmelee Press, pp. 296-311). In this volume we are proud to include last year’s address by Professor Randolph Starn.

Various sections throughout capture some recent history of the

Chapter in permanent, printed form. In an organization made up of volunteers, it is easy to lose sight of the names and events of Chapter history.

In 1997 the chapter initiated a World Wide Web site to provide information to the community about the national honorary society of Phi Beta Kappa and its selection policies. That site has become a valuable place to honor new initiates and scholarship winners. It has also provided a timely place to seek information on the centennial celebration, and should be a source of ongoing information to the readers of this text, as well as a means for them to have direct access to the Council of Alpha of California.
COUNCIL OF ALPHA CHAPTER

1997-1998

President: Professor Mary Kay Duggan (Music)
Vice-President: Professor Emeritus Hugh McLean (Slavic Languages and Literatures)
Secretary: Professor Paula Fass (History)
Treasurer: Professor Emerita Carol D’Onofrio (Public Health)
Members: Professor Richard Calendar (Molecular and Cell Biology)
Professor Donald Friedman (English)
Professor Emeritus Basil Guy (French)
Professor Emeritus Harold Johnston (Chemistry)
Professor Ken Jowitt (Political Science)
Professor Paul Licht (Integrative Biology)
Professor Professor Ron Loewinsohn (English)
Associate Professor Eve Sweetser (Linguistics)
Associate Professor Elaine Tennant (German)
Professor Richard White (Electrical Engineering and Computer Science)

PAST PRESIDENTS, ALPHA CHAPTER

1898-1899 Willard Rising (Chemistry)
1899-1900 Martin Kellogg (Classics)
1900-1902 George Howison (Philosophy)
1902-1905 Irving Stringham (Mathematics)
1905-1907 Percival Lewis (Physics)
1907-1908 Isaac Flagg (Greek)
1908-1909 Alexis Lange (Education)
1909-1911 Mellen Haskell (Mathematics)
1911-1912 Cornelius Bradley (English)
1912-1913 Charles Derleth, Jr. (Civil Engineering)
1913-1914 Leon Richardson (Latin)
1914-1915 George Stratton (Psychology)
1915-1916 Walter Hart (English)
1916-1917 Charles Rieber (Philosophy)
1917-1918 Charles Noble (Mathematics)
1918-1919 George Noyes (Slavic)
1919-1920 Orrin MacMurray (Law)
1920-1921 Ivan Linforth (Greek)
1921-1922 Ira Cross (Economics)
1922-1923 George Adams (Philosophy)
1923-1924 Frank Daniel (Sociology)
1924-1926 Monroe Deutsch (Latin)
1926-1927 Frederick Teggart (Social Institutions)
1927-1928 George Louderback (Geology)
1928-1929 Samuel Holmes (Zoology)
1929-1930 Percival Fay (French)
1930-1931 Elijah Hills (Spanish)
1931-1932 Joel Hildebrand (Chemistry)
1932-1933 John S. P. Tatlock (English)
1933-1934 Max Radin (Law)
1934-1935 Franz Schneider (German)
1935-1936 James Olmstead (Physiology/Anatomy)
1936-1937 Victor Lanzen (Physics)
A BRIEF HISTORY OF PHI BETA KAPPA
AND ALPHA CHAPTER OF CALIFORNIA

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY

Basil Guy, Professor Emeritus

For over two hundred years election to Phi Beta Kappa has meant recognition of intellectual excellence, especially in the liberal arts and sciences. The objectives encouraged by the Society include intellectual honesty, tolerance, and a breadth of interests and understanding—not merely knowledge. Cardinal Newman’s conviction that “the test of education lies not in what a man knows, but in what he is” represents the heart of the matter: the quickening not only of mind, but also of spirit. This is the aim of a liberal education. With faith in the future, as in the past, the liberal arts and sciences continue to be central to a meaningful understanding of the human condition. Phi Beta Kappa is a symbol of that faith.

Phi Beta Kappa, National Honor Society

Phi Beta Kappa was founded on December 5, 1776, at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia. At the time of its inception, Freemasonry, was flourishing. This fraternal order preached a secular religion based on the rationalism of the Enlightenment and enjoined benevolence, obedience, and symbolic

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1 Compiled from the Society handbooks of 1947 and 1994. For portraits of significant people mentioned here, see the plates in this volume.
paradox that ran counter to its eighteenth-century origins. Nevertheless, the founders of Phi Beta Kappa adapted to their needs many of the symbols and attitudes said to characterize the widespread, but largely unfamiliar, Masonic movement. Such ignorance was to spark envy and resentment of both organizations.

Phi Beta Kappa was the first Society in America to have a Greek-letter name, and in its initial period, introduced the essential characteristics of such societies — an oath of secrecy, mottoes in Greek and Latin, a code of laws, a ritual of initiation, a seal, a special handclasp, and a badge or key. The badge adopted at the first meeting was a silver medal with Phi Beta Kappa, the initials of the Greek motto, Philosophia Biou Kupneretes (Love of Wisdom the Guide of Life), engraved on the obverse, with a pointing finger and three stars to symbolize the aspirations of the youthful members for their Society — friendship, morality, and learning. On the reverse were the letters S.P. representing the Latin Societas Philosophiae. Later, a stem was attached to the medal, converting it into a watch key. The original symbols have been kept virtually unchanged on the gold key of today, except for the addition of the date of the founding of the Society under the letters S.P. of the reverse, and above, the member’s name, institution, and year of initiation. The key has become one of the nation’s most celebrated emblems, a mark of distinction recognized by members and non-members alike. Its heyday was in the era of men’s three-piece suits, when a Phi Beta Kappa key would add a touch of gold to a watch chain.

There were also regular meetings at which attention was given to literary exercises, especially to composition and debate. According to the original records, preserved at the College of William and Mary and printed at Williamsburg in 1896, the first members debated such topics as “The cause and origins of society,” “Whether a wise state has any interest nearer to heart than the education of its youth,” “Whether anything is more dangerous to civil liberty in a free state than a standing army in time of peace,” and “Whether theatrical exhibitions are advantageous to states, or the contrary.” Fraternal sentiments were fostered by the Society, while occasional gatherings and anniversaries were celebrated in the Apollo Room of the Raleigh Tavern, as they are once more since the College of William and Mary recreated the room in Phi Beta Kappa Hall on the Williamsburg campus. A memorial tablet in the Apollo Room records the names of the founding officers and members, with the statement that “All were sons of Virginia, except Elisha Parmelee, of Connecticut.”

Foremost among the founders were John Heath, president, and William Short, who devised the plan to expand by granting charters. They and many others soon distinguished themselves in public life. More than one-fourth served in the American Revolution, and nearly one third later became members of the Virginia legislature; a number were influential in bringing about the ratification by Virginia of the proposed Constitution of the United States; some were elected to the Continental Congress and later, to the Congress of the United States; one was the first clerk of the House of Representatives and also librarian of Congress; and two were judges of the highest court of Virginia, while two became United States Senators. For many years, two others were members of the Supreme Court of the United States (Bushrod Washington and Chief Justice John Marshall).

The original Society had an active life of only four years that ended on January 6, 1781, when the approach of the British army under Lord Cornwallis forced the College to close its doors. Alpha Chapter at William and Mary was revived in 1851, but became inactive again during the Civil War and remained so until reorganized in 1893. In the initial period, however, there were seventy-seven meetings, fifty men were admitted to membership, and charters were granted to two new chapters which would

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2 There exists an alternate interpretation, viz., “Salus Patriae (The Hope of the Nation)."
thenceforth be recognized by letters of the Greek alphabet, awarded according to the order of founding, followed by the name of the state in which located, e.g. Alpha of California (at the University of California, Berkeley).

The faith of these early members, and of others like them, in the permanence and future greatness of their Society is shown by the preparation of charters for branches at Harvard and Yale. The documents were entrusted to Elisha Parmelee, who, on returning to New England in 1780, delivered them to groups at New Haven and Cambridge. Thus were established the Alpha of Connecticut at Yale on November 13, 1780, and the Alpha of Massachusetts at Harvard on September 5, 1781. Both charters are preserved — the one at Harvard with its original ribbons, described in the minutes of 1782 as “pink and sky-blue,” colors still used by the Society. The chapter at Harvard has had an uninterrupted existence, while the one at Yale was inactive from 1871 to 1884. These two bodies largely determined the character of Phi Beta Kappa and shaped its policy in establishing other chapters.

The essential qualities of the Virginia brotherhood have been preserved, with some changes in procedure to suit local conditions. Shortly before the close of the college year, the members selected from the Junior Class a small group of leading students who would, in the following year, constitute “the immediate Society.” Thus, at Harvard in 1782, faculty and students were invited to a celebration of the first anniversary of the chapter, which was fittingly observed. The custom so inaugurated has led to many significant contributions to American literature, not least Emerson’s 1837 address at Harvard. Entitled “The American Scholar,” it has been called “our intellectual Declaration of Independence.” In that oration, Emerson claimed that “Life is our Dictionary,” and continued with the now famous statement that has become a watchword for Phi Beta Kappa, “The Scholar is that [person] who must take up... all the ability of the time, all the contributions of the past, all the hopes of the future [and] must be an University of Knowledges.... This confidence in the unsearched might of [humankind] belongs, by all motives, by all prophecy, by all preparation, to the American Scholar.”

In the first years also, a few men from earlier classes were elected to Alumni membership; and, beginning at Yale in 1790 and at Harvard in 1813, still others were elected to Honorary membership. Very soon the members who were no longer in college came to outnumber the undergraduates or “immediate” members and, by their interest, assured the continuation of the Society while adding to its prestige.

Fifty years after the Society’s first expansion, only four additional chapters had been founded: Alpha of New Hampshire at Dartmouth in 1787; Alpha of New York at Union in 1817; Alpha of Maine at Bowdoin in 1825; and Alpha of Rhode Island at Brown in 1830. In each case, the new charters were granted by the concurrent action of the Alphas already founded. Fifteen additional chapters were established in the succeeding thirty years. By 1883, twenty-five chapters had been chartered, although not all were active, and about 14,000 persons had been elected to membership.

Three important changes marked the first century of Phi Beta Kappa’s history. The anti-Masonic agitation of the 1820s led, at Dartmouth, Harvard, and Yale, to much discussion of the Society’s oath. In 1831, the Alpha at Harvard, under the leadership of Edward Everett, Joseph Storey, and John Quincy Adams, removed the requirement for secrecy. Although most of the other chapters retained the formal obligation for some years, the action by the chapter at Harvard undoubtedly saved the Society from further hostile criticism, as well as from rivalry with other fraternal orders making their appearance at about the same time. With the organization of the United Chapters in 1883, the last vestiges of secrecy disappeared.

A second change was more fundamental. Originally Phi Beta Kappa had been a society of congenial spirits, similar to the modern fraternity or sorority in its basis for membership and to a debating, or literary, club in the character of its meetings. As time
passed, it tended to become more and more an Honor Society, serving to recognize and foster excellence in humanistic learning at the undergraduate level.

The third important development extended the privilege of admission to women. The Alpha of Vermont at the University of Vermont, finding in 1875 that two women had met all scholastic requirements, proceeded to admit them to full membership. The following year, four women were elected by the Gamma of Connecticut at Wesleyan. Although this step, taken when Phi Beta Kappa was reaching its centenary, was regarded in some quarters as revolutionary, it aroused no formal protest. A few years later, when a general constitution and by-laws were adopted by the United Chapters for new foundations, the right of women to membership was accepted without question. Chapters previously founded were allowed to maintain the terms of their original charter, though all have since rescinded this article.

In 1881 there were only twenty active chapters—all, with the exception of three in Ohio, situated to the east of the Alleghenies and north of the Mason-Dixon line. At the celebration of the centennial of the Alpha of Massachusetts at Harvard in June of 1881 to which other chapters had been invited to send representatives, a proposal was made by a delegate from the Zeta of New York at Hobart, to effect a closer union. After due consideration then, and in subsequent meetings, a constitution was prepared, adopted and ratified. On September 5, 1883, the National Council of the United Chapters of Phi Beta Kappa held its first meeting. Since then, the United Chapters has held a council every three years. All chapters are entitled to send representatives to these meetings in order to consider matters of policy and applications from institutions desiring to establish chapters; only a handful are usually approved. A revision of the constitution in 1937 strengthened this union, at the same time safeguarding the rights and liberties of the individual chapters.

In the years since, the number of chapters has increased from 25 to more than 242; the membership from 14,000 to more than 500,000. In 1990, when the first general catalogue was prepared, the living membership was 10,500, today it is more than 400,000.

Alpha of California, University of California, Berkeley

In the spring of 1898, at the urging of Martin Kellogg, then president of the University of California, several members of the Berkeley faculty who had been initiated elsewhere into Phi Beta Kappa petitioned the National Council for the establishment of a chapter at the University. In response, a charter was granted on September 7, 1898, and Alpha of California was organized at Berkeley on December 14, 1898. The founding members, all professors at the University, were, in the order of their signatures on the document (along with their specialty and affiliation): Martin Kellogg (Classics, Yale), Irving Stringham (Mathematics, Harvard), Willard Rising (Chemistry, Hamilton), George Howison (Philosophy, Marietta), Carl Plehn (Economics, Brown), Mellen Haskell (Mathematics, Harvard), Kendrick Babcock (History/Political Science, University of Minnesota), Joseph Rockwell (Classical Archaeology, Wesleyan), Isaac Flagg (Greek, Harvard), E. Percival Lewis (Physics, Johns Hopkins), William Setchell (Botany, Yale), and Herbert Nutting (Latin, Yale).

After the necessary consultation and election to candidacy, ten Seniors (Class of 1899) and nine Juniors (Class of 1900) were initiated on May 16, 1899, with Professor Willard Rising as president. The first initiates were David Curtis, Ralph Daniels, Arthur Ellis, Thomas Elston, Victor Henderson, 3 Compiled from Chapter publications, The Phi Beta Kappa Society: Alpha of California, 1910 and 1917, and the Chapter archives, on deposit at the Bancroft Library, UCB. Thanks are owed to the University Archivist, William Roberts, for his inestimable help.
Agnes Roxbury Jewett, Roy Nye, Harry Overstreet, Harold Symmes, and Elsie Wartenweiler from the Class of 1899: while from the Class of 1900 there were Frank Aitken, Gertrude Allen, Adeline Croyland, Rene Hutchinson, Ivan Linforth, James Mortimer, Willard Parsons, Harrison Robinson, and Alfred Skaife. Clothilde Grunsky, initiated in 1914, received the University Medal (see photograph). The address was given by Professor George Howison who spoke on “Philosophy, the Guide of Life,” while the poet, Professor Charles Mills Gayley, read an original composition entitled “The Chosen of the Lord.” The latter role derived from previous programs at Harvard and other chapters, where there was frequently a Phi Beta Kappa “poet.”

High seriousness and poetic diction were not always respected in these exercises. Witness this sample from a lengthy “song” composed for the annual meeting of Phi Beta Kappa at Harvard in 1840 by William Bigelow, of the class of 1794, to the tune of “Auld Lang Syne”:

Let true Philosophy our light,
Our trust and pilot be,
Directing still our course aright
O’er life’s dark sea.
Our worthy deeds may others see
On History’s pages shine
When these our days shall numbered be
With auld lang syne.

Chorus: With auld lang syne, my friends,
With auld lang syne,
When these our days shall numbered be
With auld lang syne.

Unfortunately (and contrary to the liquid inspiration which is supposed to improve these “songs”) the genre, as practiced by later “poets,” has not improved, as may be seen in the following rhymes adapted from the efforts of the Sather Professor at Berkeley on the occasion of a Phi Beta Kappa meeting in 1964 (tune unknown):

Last—and least—fill a glass
To one who won’t pass
Even a baskerty mickey
With questions not sticky,
Who’ll ne’er be Phi Bete,
Nor carry the weight
Of a gold key, nor will his pate
Become bald from studying late.
Our Ludwig⁴ stands out from the mass,
So all hail! and drink up, lad and lass!

This tradition has fallen into abeyance at Berkeley. Sic transit!

At the first initiation, Professor Gayley was granted Honorary Membership, along with Professor Horace Davis, a former President of the University.

Distinguished speakers have continued to be a hallmark of these ceremonies. Although frequently selected from the faculty and administration at Berkeley, there has been no discrimination against outsiders. The speakers have represented a wide range and distinction of talent, as in the following brief enumeration:

1907—The universality of progress (George A. Gates, Pomona);
1911—The spirit of learning (Woodrow Wilson, Princeton);
1917—The price of peace (David Starr Jordan, Stanford/World Peace Congress);

⁴I.e., an easy course
⁵I.e., the dog that roamed the campus in the 60s and for whom the fountain in Sproul Plaza is named.
1924 — The perspective of the humanities (James Laird, UCB);
1925 — New light on light (Robert A. Milliken, UCLA);
1932 — Meaning in the arts (Cyril Bailey, Oxford);
1935 — Intellectuals and propaganda (Harold Lasswell, Chicago);
1938 — The retreat of the humanities (Louis B. Wright, Folger Library);
1942 — War and democracy (Thomas Mann, novelist);
1946 — Scholarship and scholasticism (John Condiffe, UCB);
1996 — Individualism (Ken Jowitt, UCB);
1998 — Excellence (Randolph Starn, UCB).

In addition, the Chapter has, from time to time, sponsored Phi Beta Kappa Lectures on the campus, most notably Professor John Searle (Philosophy) in 1986. In this same spirit, and in honor of the Chapter’s centennial, Derek Bok, former President of Harvard, will deliver a public lecture on affirmative action in the university of the future in November, 1998.

The Chapter is governed by an Executive Council drawn from the faculty who are members of the Society, whether initiated at Berkeley or at other chapters. Because of the date of the charter, the Chapter has been allowed a certain freedom of operation in the conduct of business. Members are elected by the Chapter or Executive Council from candidates for undergraduate degrees in the liberal arts and sciences. One does not “apply” for membership. For example, the selection process usually begins early in each academic year when transcripts are reviewed and voted on by the Council, following National Society policy. The Council is also responsible for the criteria of selection: an outstanding GPA and a “spread” of courses in the candidate’s program of study, divided between the humanities and science. In the early years of the chapter’s history, the required GPA was 2.3 or higher, but with the passing of time it has now reached 3.8 or higher, though it may vary, as the Council deems appropriate. As more “scientific” fields of endeavor have been introduced into the curriculum, the number of eligible science majors has grown, although all candidates must still present a balanced program of courses outside their field of specialization. Additionally, Senior nominees must have completed 60 units in residence, and Juniors 45. By statute of the National Society, the Chapter initiates no more than ten percent of the graduating Seniors in any one year, and, by Chapter tradition, no more than twenty Juniors are admitted annually. In the last resort, however, “the election of candidates turns upon the judgment expressed by members of the faculty”, as we read in the minutes of a Council meeting from 1926.

A telling demonstration of the accuracy of this statement may be noted in an incident from the time of the Second World War. In 1942 the name of a Japanese national, pursuing his studies with great distinction, was submitted for vetting to the Dean of Students (as was then the case for all candidates) and was rejected. Nonetheless the Council declared its independence and proceeded with the election, even though the student had meanwhile been interned as an enemy alien. He ultimately went on to a very distinguished career at the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton.

Meetings in the 1920s saw considerable discussion about the admission of Alumni and Honorary members. Among those elected to Honorary membership were Horatio Stebbins (Regent, 1900), John Muir (naturalist, 1907), Josiah Royce (philosopher, 1908), G. B. Bradley (critic, 1910), Lincoln Steffens (journalist, 1911), Don McLaughlin (mining engineer, 1914), Mortimer Adler (psychologist, 1931), Alexander Meiklejohn (educator, 1933), Louis Adamic (novelist, 1935), John Masefield (poet, 1935), Earl Warren (Chief Justice, U.S. Supreme Court, 1952), Arturo Torres-Rioseco (professor and critic, 1963), and Joseph Cerny (professor and dean, 1986). The Council has stressed that intellectual achievement or distinction should bear more weight in these matters than success in business or social prominence, with the added proviso that Alumni should be elected only from
added proviso that Alumni should be elected only from distinguished members of classes who graduated ten or more years earlier, with no more than three such elections in any one year. As a result of these discussions, chapter by-laws were revised in 1934 and again in 1949.

Happily, the status of women has never been in doubt, and the chapter has admitted them from the very first election (as have also been representatives of diverse races, faiths and nationalities). Women have always been active in the work of the Council, including, in the recent past, three Presidents: Catherine Quire (1946-48), Jeanette Richardson (1975-79), and the present occupant of this important position, Mary Kay Duggan (1996-).

Under the aegis of Professor Richardson, the life of the Chapter was reinvigorated with the establishment of an endowment fund, along with an annual competition for graduate scholarships. Thanks to the generosity of Chapter members who have responded to an annual letter of appeal from the Council, the fund has grown from modest beginnings and now provides for as many six scholarships a year. These awards are intended for a select few graduate students, members of the Society—though not necessarily of the Chapter in the last year of writing the doctoral dissertation who have exhausted funding from other sources. In 1998 the amount for each of six was $3,400. The recipients were:

Sylvia Brandt, Economics. “Market Incentives versus Command and Control for Environmental Regulation.”

Jason Bridges, Philosophy. Dissertation on a response to skepticism, an explanation for the fact that we have beliefs at all.

Jeff Porter Fort, Comparative Literature. “Towards an Ethics of the Voice: The Imperative to Write in Kafka, Blanchot, and Becket.”

Julie Goldberg, Psychology. Dissertation on why individuals take risks with their health, with the ultimate purpose being the re-


Margaret Perrow, Education. “Learning in Transition: Out of School and Unemployed Youth in South Africa.”

The amount awarded ($3,400) was selected to be in keeping with the stipends for similar awards made by the Northern California Alumni Association. In 1998, in competition with applicants from ten university chapters in the northern part of the state, Berkeley Ph.D. candidates won six grants:

Faith P. Barratt, Comparative Literature. Dissertation on theological and ethical questions in Emily Dickinson’s poems.

Karen D. Chapple, Urban Planning. “Paths to Employment: the Role of Social Networks in the Job Search for Poor Urban Women.”


Laurie Schaffner, Sociology. Dissertation on female juvenile delinquency.

Awardees are feted at a dinner with the Executive Council and the Alumni Association and are honored at the initiation. Both programs, usually announced in early February, have proved
their work before entering on a career.

Among other matters of organizational concern have been the establishment on campus of a Chapter office (at present in room 4333 Dwinelle Hall) and hiring a part-time recording secretary. A recurrent problem has been procuring Phi Beta Kappa keys for those lost or mislaid (or never purchased) as the case may be. At one time members were required to pay chapter dues (never more than $1.00), but this no longer obtains. On the other hand, by virtue of the different sets of by-laws, the Council has frequently debated policies to be followed in any given year.

The Chapter is entitled by the National Society to send two delegates to the triennial conventions of the United Chapters where, besides questions of policy, the admission of new chapters is debated. In this connection, the Berkeley Chapter was the sponsor in 1930 of the Eta of California at UCLA (initially known simply as “the Los Angeles section of the Alpha Chapter of California”). Previously (and subsequently) the same role was played by the Chapter in the establishment of the Delta of California at Occidental College in 1926, the Alpha of Idaho at the University of Idaho in 1926, the Zeta of California at Mills College in 1929, the Epsilon of California at USC in 1929, the Alpha of Arizona at the University of Arizona in 1932, and the Beta of Oregon at Reed College in 1938. (Interestingly, the Chapter was not a sponsor for the Beta of California at Stanford University in 1904.) Since 1938, national policy regarding the admission of new chapters has changed. In this and similar matters debated at triennial conventions, the delegates from Berkeley have sometimes been admonished to oppose changes that might come before the general assembly, as related in the minutes of 1935.

In the inter-war years, the Chapter offered a wide variety of activities for student members. Social gatherings included brown-bag lunches (sometimes with faculty members giving informal talks about their specialties), discussion groups, picnics, movie outings, and such gatherings as conformed to the statement by the
CHAPTER FOUNDERS
U.C. 1898

Kendric C. Babcock
History & Political Science

Washington Irving Stringham
Mathematics

George Holmes Howison
Philosophy

Herbert C. Nutting
Latin

William Bradley Rising
Chemistry

Martin Kellogg
U.C. President 1890-99
Latin

Carl Copping Plehn
Economics

Mellon Woodman Haskell
Mathematics

E. Percival Lewis
Physics

William A. Setchell
Botany
Council in 1931 that their purpose should be "to awaken or intensify the intellectual life of the campus and perpetuate it beyond the undergraduate years by the establishment of an esprit de corps that maintains scholarly excellence; the activities thus extend to many more than just the members of the Society, though Phi Beta Kappa should take the lead in their organization." This challenge has been taken seriously at Berkeley where a number of honor societies devoted to special disciplines or groups were formed under Chapter sponsorship, most notably The Order of the Golden Bear (for men) and Prytanean (for women), both in 1900; these groups have pre-empted some of the Chapter's social functions. Additionally, student members of the Chapter have served as guides for campus visitors, whether the visit was sponsored by the Chapter or not, whether the visitor spoke to the Chapter or not. In the past a group of Phi Beta Kappa members, organized in 1925 as "Seal Bearers," attempted to facilitate the relations of high school honor societies with the campus by identifying and advising entering honor students, acting as assistants to faculty advisers, establishing an Honor Society Council (1946) and an honor students' room. Initiates from the 40's and 50's will remember the Phi Beta Kappa room in California Hall. These activities of the Chapter offer a nice complement to the original guiding tenet of the Society: the recognition of intellectual excellence in the liberal arts and sciences.

World War II proved a veritable watershed for the Chapter, as

Admonitions of another nature were apparently sometimes necessary. In 1931 the student president, Jack Curtis, felt obliged to speak personally to "the more raucous members of the group, asking them to restrain themselves in public. Some aspersions have been cast on the behavior of members of Phi Beta Kappa which is derogatory to the dignity of the chapter. It was pointed out that neither 30 Wheeler nor the General Reading Room in the Library are the proper places for animated personal discussion." (Minutes, Student Council Meeting 2/13/31, Phi Beta Kappa Archives, Folder 1:11.)
well as for the Society and for society at large. During the war over half the members of Alpha Chapter served in the military. But with a return to peace, the number of eligible candidates for membership in the Chapter increased enormously. Because of the GI Bill, hordes of serious, mature student-veterans returned to the campus. Older, and frequently married (sometimes with young families), their determination to complete their education and to succeed before entering the workaday world was a crucial factor in Chapter expansion. As elsewhere, their numbers were exponential, swamping those other candidates for admission to the Society who had not been to the war. And their motivation was paramount in upping the Grade Point Average and making the competition ever more keen while the criteria became more stringent. The effect of these people on the Chapter remains.

The following table lists the numbers elected to membership in recent years, with the names of honorary members:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>New Members</th>
<th>Honorary Members</th>
<th>Names of Honorary Members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>365</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>343</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Harry E. Peters, Jr., M.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>272</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>343</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Cyril Birch, Oriental Langs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>354</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1990</td>
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<td>1991</td>
<td>407</td>
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<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>421</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>449</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Anthony Long, Classics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1994 411 1  Joseph Cerny, Graduate Div.
1995 336 1  Chang-lin Tien, Chancellor
1996 338 1  Ken Jowitt, Political Science
1997 284
1998 273

If the Chapter no longer submits the names of candidates for membership to the Dean of Students for vetting, the four yearly assemblies of the pre-war Chapter have nonetheless been reduced progressively from two to one today. As at many other chapters throughout the country, the initiation used to be accompanied by dinner at a local hotel or restaurant, the cost ranging from sixty cents to one dollar twenty; as may be surmised from these figures, the dinner was abandoned after World War II, when the rise in prices put such festivities beyond the reach of many students.

What has been accomplished in the past one hundred years of the existence of Alpha Chapter at Berkeley is but an earnest that the trust placed in us to recognize academic excellence will not be misplaced and that the next century will see us continue to grow, seizing the opportunities that lie ahead. Our role is to insure that the fulfillment of such promise will continue unabated and successful. To paraphrase an earlier address to new members by one of the national presidents, "The honor that has been conferred on us is not the only honor by which we hope to be remembered."
REMINISCENCES BY INITIATES, ALPHA CHAPTER

Dr. Gordon Repp, 1949

In the fall of 1946 I entered the University after being discharged from the Navy, where I was an electronics technician. That fall there were about 25,000 students, far more than at any time before. Most of the returning WWII veterans were bent on getting an education, financed by the GI Bill. The campus was overcrowded, registration was in a circus tent, and the registration lines were blocks long.

At the end of my first semester my grades were good enough to join Tower and Flame, the lower-division honor society. I was not very active, but I discovered that this organization shared two rooms with Honor Students, the upper-division society, and Phi Beta Kappa. These rooms were in the southwest corner of the basement of California Hall. The smaller of the two was the office. The three organizations hired a secretary/chaperone to keep track of the organizations' records and to keep an eye on the students. The large room was a club room. It was a place where members could relax between classes, study, or tutor other students who came by for help. It had lockers for members, a ping-pong table, and other tables. One could usually find a variety of games, including chess, bridge, pinochle and go. During finals the game of choice was hearts.

In my sophomore year I started attending a few of the Tower and Flame activities and met Nancy Marsh, the Activities Chairman of Tower and Flame. The next year was my junior year and I joined the Honor Students Society and became active. I also became aware of Phi Beta Kappa as I met many student members who were part of the Cal Hall Group, as those belonging to the three organizations were called. At the end of the year I was surprised by being elected to Phi Beta Kappa.

The people of the Cal Hall Group were very interesting. There was a range of ages and backgrounds. The ages ranged from the Tower and Flame freshmen just out of High School to the Phi Beta Kappa graduate students (most of the PBK members were graduate students) who had spent several years in one of the services during WWII. Many of the veterans were the first of their families to attend college, an opportunity made possible by the GI Bill. There were many more men than women, and a large portion of the men were several years older than the women. As one person assessed the group: "This is a group largely of introverts turned extrovert within the group."

In addition to sharing space, the three organizations conducted many activities together and some separately. In these activities one organization would often take the lead, and members of the others were invited to assist. Some of the activities were picnics, beach parties, ski trips, ice skating, dances, political discussions, and lectures by faculty members at Senior Women's Hall. Honor Students always gave a reception for President Sproul to which all the faculty was invited. Phi Beta Kappa always made arrangements for a block of season tickets for its members at the San Francisco Symphony.

In 1948 Henry Wallace, who had been Roosevelt's vice-president, mounted a third-party campaign for President. He was very popular among the students and wanted to speak on campus, but the request was denied; so he spoke at the West Gate. Honor Students decided to sponsor a debate in Wheeler Hall on the election issues. After the Wallace affair we had a very difficult time getting the meeting approved. It was finally approved after the administration was assured that all sides would be equally represented.
My senior year was extremely busy. I was very active in both Honor Students and Phi Beta Kappa. In fact, I was vice-president of Honor Students the fall semester and president in the spring. The first big activity in the fall was a joint ‘get-acquainted’ picnic in Tilden Park. The Tower and Flame activities chairman was to take the lead, and I, as vice-president of Honor Students, was responsible for organizing our assistance. All three organizations had publicized the event. The day before the picnic the activities chairman was called home for an emergency. She asked Nancy Marsh, who had just returned from a year at a midwestern college, to take over. The site had been reserved, but that was all. Nancy lived at home; so that evening several of us gathered at her house and made a hundred pounds of potato salad. The next day we were short of hot dog buns as there was a bakery strike. Nancy and I spent most of the day driving from store to store looking for the buns and then taking them to Tilden, and then going for more. That evening, after a tiring day, we went to a movie — our first date.

That year I participated in the PBK Symphony season program with Nancy as my guest. Cal played in the Rose Bowl on January 1, 1949 and 1950. On both occasions a large contingent from Cal went south. We stayed at the home of one of the members. The men slept on the living room floor and the women in the bedrooms. (Times have changed.) Nancy and I announced our engagement at the 1950 affair. In the summer of 1950 there were nine marriages between members of the Cal Hall Group. Nancy and I were the ninth.

That fall I became a graduate student and remained very active in PBK until I completed my degree in April of 1955. During this whole period PBK was organized into two councils: the Student Council and the Executive Council. The Student Council was elected by the student members and was responsible for organizing student activities. The Executive Council was elected by the PBK faculty members, except for three student members. The President of the Student Council was one of these, and the other two were members elected by the students. The Executive Council took care of the business of the chapter, especially electing and initiating new members. I served on the Student Council during my time as a graduate student and was president in the spring of 1951, which made me eligible to serve on the Executive Council. I remained as an elected student member of the Executive Council until I left the Berkeley Campus in 1955.

A couple of incidents occurred which caused some friction between the two Councils. The Student Council decided to enter a float in the Homecoming parade. It turned out to be an old WWII jeep with one of the older veteran members sitting on the back dressed in a tuxedo with a drink in his hand. A sign on the jeep said “Phi Beta Kappa 3.0.” (In those days the top grade-point average was 3.0.) The Executive Council members were not happy.

The other incident involved a Student Council election. Most of the members elected to the Student Council were active in the Cal Hall Group. One member had a falling out with the group; so he decided to form his own group and take over the Student Council. The animosity grew. The Executive Council ended up supervising the election and moderating the situation after the election. The Cal Hall Group won the election.

During my time on the Executive Council the “Year of the Oath” occurred. The McCarthy era hysteria caused the legislature to pass a law requiring all public employees to sign a loyalty oath as a condition of employment. A number of professors refused to sign as a matter of principle, so they were removed from the payroll. Most other professors contributed to a fund for their support. Professor Edward Schafer of the Oriental Languages Department was one of the holdouts and also a member of the PBK Executive Council. We had many lively discussions on the oath and its effects when we should have been taking care of PBK business.

In those days the Davis campus was primarily an agricultural college: they could not qualify for a PBK chapter. They did have students who would qualify for PBK, so we would elect them into
the Berkeley chapter. Executive Council members would go to Davis and conduct a small initiation ceremony that was quite a contrast to the large Berkeley ceremony.

My qualifying exam for the Ph.D. happened to be scheduled the same afternoon as an Executive Council meeting. One of the professors of the Executive Council was also on my committee. About three quarters of the way through the exam he whispered to the chairman and departed. As one might expect, I was late arriving at the Executive Council meeting. When I arrived I was immediately congratulated on passing. The professor said he had voted for my passing and had informed the other Council members that I would be late but that I was sure to pass.

In the early 1950's the University moved the Cal Hall Group to one of the temporary buildings. After that, the Group never seemed quite the same.

Now half a century later the Student Council has disappeared, but the Cal Hall Group still survives. It is not made up of current students but of those same students from half a century ago. We usually get together about once a year for a potluck dinner. By the way, Nancy and I celebrated our forty-eighth anniversary this summer.

Professor Ron Loewinsohn, 1967 (English)

At the time 1967 was a momentous year for me: in the first month of the year my son was born, and in the last month I turned thirty. In between I graduated from UC Berkeley and began graduate studies at Harvard, my bookbag bulging with fellowships. To me that year, excellence meant being elected to Phi Beta Kappa, a validation that was purely personal. I needed to prove myself, and I had done it, I thought. (To a lot of other, younger men who graduated with me from Berkeley that year, academic excellence meant a low lottery number in the draft, since their draft eligibility was directly tied to the GPA.)

In May of 1967 graduating seniors, along with a few juniors, were inducted into Phi Beta Kappa at a ceremony in Pauley Ballroom that was preceded by a dinner and speeches, one by Professor Carl Schorske, and one each by the junior and senior speakers. I'd been chosen as the senior speaker, and I was torn that evening between prideful celebration of the honor being bestowed on me and some resentment that the evening's festivities were interrupting my work on my senior honors thesis, which was due the next day. When I was done speechifying and being honored, I would have to go home and wrap up my claims on Melville's borrowings from Greek tragedy. I would have to produce a clean typescript of it.

I decided to tell the gathering of honorees about my favorite chapter in Moby-Dick, "Stowing Down and Clearing Up," which seemed particularly appropriate. This passage begins by reminding us of the three look-outs perched on the Pequod's mast-heads, ready to sing out "Thr she blows!" at the first sign of a whale. At that cry the men run to lower the boats, which they then row laboriously the five miles or so to the whale.

There they have to struggle with the whale and kill it, and after that they have to row the five miles or so back to the ship, only now they're exhausted. And they're hauling a ten-ton whale. Getting back to the ship, they strip the blubber from the whale and boil it down into oil, making a greasy, sooty mess of themselves and the entire ship. Once the oil is sealed in casks, the men scrub down the ship, and once the craft is spic and span, they wash their clothes and bath themselves. And then, just as a given sailor is climbing back up on deck, still pink from his bath, buttoning the last button of his gleaming, just-washed shirt, one of the sailors on the mast-heads cries, "Thr she blows!" And the whole process begins again.

For Melville the chapter dramatized the Sisyphean curse of labor: just as Sisyphus believes he has completed his task, he has
to start again at the beginning. At the time, faced with the pressures of school, work, and family, I agreed with Melville. But now I've come about to a very different view: the excellence honored by Phi Beta Kappa that evening has no ending. Everyone in Pauley Ballroom that evening was going home to work. The keys we got that night would be used not to close or lock the doors on any achieved excellence that could be put away in mothballs but to open doors to new tasks and challenges, new definitions of excellence.

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION,
PHI BETA KAPPA

Robert S. Baronian, President

The Phi Beta Kappa Northern California Association was founded on July 25, 1951. It developed from the Santa Clara Valley Association, which was chartered in 1946 as the Gamma association of California. The Association serves members who have been elected to Phi Beta Kappa from all over the United States and are now residing in Northern California. It is separate from, but chartered by, the National Phi Beta Kappa Society, which has its headquarters in Washington, D.C. Our membership is approaching 2,000 and is still growing.

At first the Association's support of scholarship entailed awarding certificates of excellence to outstanding high school students and plaques to their high schools. Later a revolving loan fund was set up for deserving university students. Finally the loans were replaced by scholarships (grants) to university graduate students and Teaching Excellence awards to outstanding university teachers.

Membership in the Association transforms the Phi Beta Kappa key into something much more than a symbol of a past award. It opens the door to an organization which now, as at the time of its founding, fosters the encouragement of excellence in scholarship and teaching. It provides intellectual stimulation for its members by sponsoring numerous events, speakers, and activities, all of which are intended to raise money for scholarship but at the same time are delightful social gatherings.

Recently these have included visits to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and to the Benicia Capital and Historical
Museum, a Discovery Voyage to the Marine Institute, a walking tour of Palo Alto, a Petaluma River boat trip, an Audubon Canyon Ranch visit, and our annual retreat to Asilomar, which this year had “The Year 2000” as its theme. Last year’s theme at Asilomar was author John Steinbeck. With its reputation for stimulating the mind and freeing the spirit, the retreat has grown in attendance each year.

We have recently organized a “young Phi Betes” group directed towards securing the interest and participation of members in their thirties and younger.

Finally, when asked for assistance, we are prepared to provide whatever help we can to Phi Beta Kappa chapters in Northern California colleges and universities.

We are especially pleased with the success of our scholarship and Teaching Excellence programs. In 1998 the Association awarded $3,400 scholarships to each of fifteen graduate students, and Teaching Excellence awards of $500 each to outstanding faculty, a total commitment of $53,000. Faculty and students are all from Northern California colleges and universities with chapters of Phi Beta Kappa. In the last seven years, we have awarded nearly $250,000 to eighty-one superb graduate students and $8,000 in Teaching Excellence awards to sixteen dedicated teachers. This constitutes a significant contribution to higher education in our region. While funding for these awards comes primarily from membership dues, which are $25 a year, income from Association programs has also provided funding for nearly two scholarships annually.

This is a completely volunteer organization with no paid employees, so administrative costs are negligible. We are blessed with dedicated, capable volunteers who give freely of their time and talents to steer up toward the stars, dedicating us to the pursuit of knowledge and encouraging and supporting excellence in learning and teaching.

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1998-1999

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IS EXCELLENCE DANGEROUS?

Professor Randolph Starn (History)

Alpha Chapter Initiation Address
23 April 1998

I'm sure that the question in my title will not seem very dangerous. We know—don't we?—that excellence threatens incompetence, shakes up routines, looks down on business-as-usual and rowing whatever boat "gently down" whatever stream. Excellence means, surely, the fast lane, the extra effort, the exceptional achievement. I can assure you that the concentration of excellence in this room is quite scary for me. Of course excellence is dangerous. Question answered, end of talk.

If I stopped here, this might be the one initiation speech in your life you would remember. I certainly don't remember a word from occasions like this. The problem is that if I have already answered the question correctly, we wouldn't be here in the first place. You are being honored, rewarded, and prized for your excellence. This is not what we usually do to dangerous people. Besides, aren't all right-thinking people and institutions looking for excellence these days? So we are told, but once again the obvious answer gets complicated; for example, when excellence turns out to mean downsizing, the bottom line of profit, and competitive advantage, so that the cheapest or the most ruthless may be the most excellent.

So, the easy answers turn out to be murky—par for the professorial course. I want to follow some of the complications through in the next fifteen minutes or so; first, because the question of excellence in the university is critical just now—not for the first time of course—and second, because the one absolute requirement of talks like this is that they be mercifully brief.

In one long-standing tradition excellence is a target rather than a goal for thinking about the good life. Myths and stories across cultures are littered with figures who crashed and burned in insisting on being the best—literally so in Greek myth of Daedalus, the Greek engineer who designed wings of wax for his son Icarus and sent him flying up to Apollo, god of the sun. The story of Adam and Eve is, among other things, a tale of a happy couple who got into trouble only when tempted to press beyond what they were capable of—I think of them as the first over-achievers. It was the Devil's undoing that he couldn't stand out among the angels without challenging God, that he wanted "to excel even in His sight." In this tradition it's not the hard-chargers who are supposed to inherit the earth but the humble and the meek.

As for excellence in knowledge, a whole line of very wise people have observed that the best knowledge is knowing how much you don't know. Some of the great sages of India and China knew this. Socrates says something like the following, according to one of his best students: "I am not trying to show you that what I believe is true and what you maintain is false. All I am going to do is to investigate with you how either position is related to a number of other things, so that you can see for yourself what commitments you are making if you accept the truth of your premises. I can't make you decision for you because I don't know, I only inquire." Here, in the sixteenth century, is the Renaissance scholar and teacher Erasmus of Rotterdam praising folly rather than knowledge: "Knowledge of the sciences, say our solemnly learned professors, is the attribute and excellence of man; using the sciences as tools, he makes up in his powers for what nature withheld from him. As if this had the least semblance of truth—that nature, which expended so much exact care upon gnats, and upon herbs and flowers, should have fallen asleep over the making of man! If anything, the sciences
are so far from furthering human happiness that they actually hinder it by dividing up learning whereby no one branch of knowledge understands another, or when their knowledge aids us to destroy and pollute nature and ourselves... Let us rather, then, praise folly who aided in part by ignorance, sometimes by forgetfulness of evil, sometimes by hope of good, sprinkling in a few honeyed delights at certain seasons, makes bearable painful and messy birth, certain death, and undoubted troubles in between...."

I'm happy to report that there is at least as much foolishness as excellence in the earlier history of Phi Beta Kappa. It was founded at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia, in 1776 by a fifteen-year old student and three of his friends who probably had nothing much better to do. Despite the high-minded Greek initials, Phi Beta Kappa (Love of Wisdom, Guide of Life) was a fraternity for socializing and public speaking, not a scholarly honor society. It had its secret handshake and student elections to membership; its members thought the faculty were insufferably dull, and the faculty worried about too many parties and too few principles. Until the 1850s there were no exams or grades, teaching centered on dreaded recitations from memory, primarily in Greek and Latin, and students' absences from daily chapel were just as likely be noted as their studies. Phi Beta Kappa talked about modern literature because the professors thought it too frivolous for the classroom and organized debates around hot issues such as, in 1840, Ought a National University be established? (answered affirmative); Are the intellectual capacities of females equal to those of the male? (answered negative). The society certainly took its good cheer seriously. "It is my earnest wish," a disgruntled observer wrote in 1841, "yet to witness a single Phi Beta Kappa dinner, at which there shall be no unnatural excitement from loose talk and alcoholic liquors but rather a feast of reason and flow of soul."

Academic excellence as the most important criterion for Phi Beta Kappa came later, and only at some cost. Opening up the college curriculum to many majors and electives late in the nineteenth century increased student options at the expense of a sense of community and student independence. The organization of Phi Beta Kappa grew less personal and more bureaucratic and grade driven. Excellence became accounting. A report from 1879 may sound familiar: "the proceedings of the society were stiff and formal, and lacked vitality; although the elections were eagerly sought after by college students, it was as a measure of their rank...; usually these formalities at commencement time are the only signs of life the old fraternity exhibits."

Following an American tradition with a rich vocabulary—eggheads, nerds, and geeks—membership in Phi Beta Kappa came to be seen as harmful to social life and even dangerous to one's health. In 1935 a University of Michigan psychologist concluded, but only after a year's research, that "the Common Belief that Phi Beta Kappa men in our colleges are generally social bores has no basis in fact." Being dull was not the worst thing. A medical researcher wrote in 1936 that "the scholastic record [is so high] among patients with hyperthyroidism, and so many individuals of Phi Beta Kappa are to be found among them, that although hyperthyroidism may appear years after graduation, in a certain sense, we may say that even Phi Beta Kappa is a disease."

When that great American seer after truth George Plimpton wrote a book called *The X Factor: a Quest for Excellence*, he did not interview any members of Phi Beta Kappa, so far as I know. He certainly didn't talk to any academics. The book grew out of his losing a game of horseshoes with then-president George Bush, who had, he decided (wrongly as it turned out) the winner's touch, the X factor. Plimpton's subjects were sports superstars, corporate executives, politicians, and an X-factored cemetery-plot salesman from Flint, Michigan, who told him for a rematch with George Bush to take a horse, topple the animal, and wrench its shoes off in front of the
president. Champions were single-minded, bent on winning, never quit. In the immortal words of Coach Vince Lombardi, “Winning is not the most important thing; it is the only thing.”

If you check Yahoo for “excellence” on the Internet, you will get, as of yesterday, 700 entries, including excellence in sports and business, but also in practically everything else—luxury automobiles, coelacanth fishes, human teeth, religious computer software, and, coming on very strong, excellence in schools and universities. To prove that this is not just an American phenomenon, in just two pages of advertisements for academic positions in the London Times Higher Education Supplement the universities of Hull, Edinburgh, London, Paisley, Newcastle, and Oxford describe themselves as “promoting,” “dedicated” or “committed” to excellence; and just to show that excellence-speak is happening close to home, our alma mater’s website features a hotlink to “partnership in excellence.” We have a comic spectacle, then, of universities everywhere distinguishing themselves with the same logo and proclaiming that they are good at being best.

By now I hope you will grant that what’s said to be excellent in the university often isn’t. I would even argue that the mantra of excellence is actually a battle cry against the university, and perhaps more dangerous than noisy charges and counter charges over Political Correctness, Multiculturalism, and Ivory Towers that pass for serious discussion of the state of the academy. Those debates have the character of ritual morality plays in which the characters and the plots are well known in advance. Participants play their parts like seasoned actors when the curtain goes up; audiences look on—less and less, I think—to confirm their biases with nods or hisses. Meanwhile life and real politics go on elsewhere, even on most campuses.

The call to excellence is particularly insidious because it seems on the face of it to be free of ideology, to be objective and fair, to demand accountability and reward quality. Let me take a test case. In one of the most insightful of recent books on the state of the university Bill Readings reports that the Cornell University Parking Services received an award not so long ago for “excellence in parking.” This turned out to mean that Parking Services had dramatically restricted motor vehicle access, not, as it might have meant, that they had made people’s lives easier and more efficient by increasing parking. If you think this example has nothing to do with universities, I remind you of Clark Kerr’s definition of the Berkeley faculty as “a group of entrepreneurs united by a parking grievance.” But the point is that excellence has no content of its own and can work equally well on either side of the issue of what constitutes “excellence in parking.” It lumps together different things—parking services, teaching, research grants—to be measured by what seems to be a common currency, so that institutions, departments, disciplines, or individuals can be compared set in competition with each other. With excellence, seemingly a criterion of quality, we find ourselves heavily invested in a world of quantities.

This is not to say that measuring excellence is bound to be unscrupulous. The rating systems are worked out with great care. When I’m told on the application forms that plague academic life that “excellence in scholarship is the major criterion employed in the evaluation procedure,” I take this to mean that the selection committee is not going to reveal its criteria in judging applications. But rankings of universities usually refer quite scrupulously to measurements in terms of grades and test scores of incoming students, GPAs earned at college, graduation rates, student-teacher ratios, number of PhDs on the faculty, awards won and grants received, operating budgets and endowments, library holdings, and “reputation,” usually according to polls of senior administrators. The results of one survey arrived at a “measure of excellence” by combining the figures at a ratio of 20 per cent for students, 18 per cent for class size, 20 per cent for faculty, 10 per cent for finances, 12 per cent for libraries, and 20 per cent for “reputation.”
Bad intentions or sloppy procedures are not necessarily to blame. More fundamental are the arbitrary weighting of factors and the dubiousness of such measures of quality. The survey allows the exclusion of questions about what excellence in the university might be, and what it might mean. Think of what is not being asked: Are grades or test scores the only measure of student promise or achievement? To take a question close to home, is affirmative action not only compatible with excellence in the university but also a criterion for it? Is graduating "on time" necessarily a good thing? What is a good professor? Is the best university a rich one? To what extent is knowledge in the university stocked in libraries? Why should administrators be the judges of "reputation," and doesn't the category of "reputation" raise hearsay and prejudice to the level of an indicator of value? The double irony is that crucial questions like these are left out in the name of excellence and that perfectly legitimate concerns for universities having to account for themselves are left out as well. Since it does not call ideals and purposes into question, the calculus of excellence is entirely internal to the system, like quotations in the Dow Industrial Average or Nasdaq on the stock exchange. This is not coincidental, either, since measures of excellence in the university fit the needs of technological capitalism for the production, processing, and marketing of information.

Now if excellence is dangerous, it doesn't follow that mediocrity is safe. The last thing I want to suggest is that the university should be drawing the wagons around old pieties—or new ones, for that matter. On one side are those insisting that the modern university must transcend triviality and incoherence by returning to the basics, the universals, the canons of "the best that has been thought or known"—as interpreted by themselves of course. On other side are those who argue that the university can only right itself with programs that allegedly emancipate students from the corruptions of the past—whether they want to be or not. These rival prescriptions for the university tend to fly past one another because it's clear by now that neither is going to have its own way exclusively. I suspect that the Market, our current form of Divine Providence, will remain equally indifferent to one argument or the other so long as it has the pick of the information producers and managers universities can supply. If anything, the Market may welcome these as academic distraction while it gets on with the business of consolidation, commodification, and cost-accounting in the global economy.

Where does this leave us? Out of time, for one thing. Italian friends I study and work with have told me, "You Americans have a terrible phrase, 'To make a long story short'; the best stories are always long." Since I need to conclude American-style, here is my short story. If I have succeeded in showing that excellence is dangerous in complicated ways, it's largely because propositions like this can and will be posed in the university. This is still the institution in our society with the deepest habit of debate and disputation—one reason why it's often so unattractive. It brings different disciplines and approaches that are often quite incompatible together, insuring that there will be contention and competition, but also that there won't be a party line. Probably more than any institution in our society it brings the old and young together, and though professors get older and graduating classes remain more or less the same age, we do learn how to learn from one another. The very contradictory missions of the university—to preserve and transmit, to discover and rediscover, to analyze and critique—seem to me to be excellences worth cherishing. But here I am heading toward pieties of excellence that are dangerous.
CALIFORNIA CHAPTERS OF PHI BETA KAPPA

Alpha     UC Berkeley, 1898
Beta      Stanford University, 1904
Gamma    Pomona College, 1914
Delta    Occidental College, 1926
Epsilon  USC, 1929
Zeta     Mills College, 1929
Eta       UCLA, 1930 (reorganized, 1939)
Theta    Scripps College, 1962
Iota     UC Riverside, 1965
Kappa    UC Davis, 1968
Lambda   UC Santa Barbara, 1968
Mu       UC Irvine, 1974
Nu       San Diego SU, 1974
Xi       University of Redlands, 1977
Omicron  San Francisco SU, 1977
Pi       Santa Clara University, 1977
Rho      CSU Long Beach, 1977
Sigma    UC San Diego, 1977
Tau      Claremont Colleges, 1983
Upsilon  UC Santa Cruz, 1986

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