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Editor’s Note

“**T**he walls have eyes.
They’re ours.”

This slogan is printed in block letters on a scan of a photo of a flyer that hangs above The Daily Californian’s news desk. A relic of a time when the newspaper thought of itself as an Orwellian force for good, the poster posits a vision of ourselves as an insular watchdog. While the newspaper has a mandate to report the news as we see it, these eyes are not ours alone. Each of us bears witness to a different Berkeley.

Just look at Sproul Plaza. As you walk through Sather Gate, you’re immediately confronted by the swirl of chaos and commotion that defines daily campus life. At once, you must pledge \$10 to a bee,

politely decline to join a bible study group and take a chance on an AI dating app. There’s simply too much to see.

This inaugural print issue of *Stacks* is a double-take. It serves as a closer look into campus phenomena that blur into the background, from so-called Christian ‘cults’ and CALPIRG’s political inefficacy to state lawmakers’ silent war over UC Berkeley protest policy.

In contrast to our print paper, the second glances in *Stacks* do not come from the Daily Cal as such, but rather from students’ situated and positional views of Berkeley. In this issue and beyond, *Stacks* will serve as an archive of Berkeley — in all the ways we see it. ☐

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Inside the beehive: The political inefficacy of CALPIRG

By Tariq Ravasia | Staff

When CALPIRG's hiring team approached me in the spring of my freshman year, I was as bright-eyed and enthusiastic about the work as anyone. Sure, I'd been annoyed by the constant haranguing for a "pledge," but I figured that working for the organization was an easy way to make a measurable difference as a progressive, engaged person.



For the uninitiated, CALPIRG, or the California Public Interest Research Group, works to promote environmental and other "public interest" legislation, describing itself as "an advocate for consumers."

CALPIRG Students — the group of people in bee costumes earlier this semester — are legally distinct from the larger organization CALPIRG, supporting its

work largely through \$10
semesterly donations

from students. They

pursue this mission largely by stopping students on their way to class. CALPIRG itself is an organization under the Public Interest Network umbrella, funded primarily through canvassing from its affiliate, the Fund for the Public Interest.

This structure is so Byzantine that an ex-canvasser I spoke to, who requested anonymity for fear of retaliation, reported they were "unsure who (their) technical employer was," while working for the summer canvass.

I joined CALPIRG

as a summer canvasser in 2023. Far from the fulfilling, engaging job I'd imagined, my time at the organization left me feeling stung.

I came to find that the organization is not only ineffective but actually harmful for progressive organizing.

In 2019, HuffPost described the Fund as a "liberal sweatshop" that burns and churns through its employees. This was on full display during my time at CALPIRG. By my second week on the job, a massive proportion of the roughly 30-canvasser team I joined was gone. In their place were a veritable army of new recruits, hired under the same pretense of "making an impact" that had drawn me to the organization in April.

In her ethnographic study of the Fund, sociologist Dana Fisher reported that the average length of employment for a canvasser at Fund affiliates was two weeks. Canvassers routinely quit, citing long hours, low pay and physical and mental strain caused by the work.

Their experience was not unique. The Fund has a 2.0 star rating on Glassdoor, with hundreds of employees alleging brutal working conditions. Moreover, the organization has a labor record that would be troubling for an Amazon warehouse, much less a youth-oriented progressive political organization. In 2009, it settled a \$2 million labor lawsuit with its former employees in Los Angeles. In 2014, it settled another lawsuit in which an employee alleged they had been fired for attempting to start a union. In 2002, 2005 and 2019, it shuttered summer canvass offices shortly after NLRB complaints or unionization efforts.

Some would argue that these working conditions are simply the cost of an effective progressive political organization. Canvassers could always get a different job and

political work is difficult.

CALPIRG State Director Jenn Engstrom said the quick turnover is natural because canvassing is not for everyone. She added that it is a byproduct of the sheer number of people they "invite to try the experience."

"We don't see (the quick turnover) as an indication of a problem," Fund National Director Emily Reid wrote in an email. "There are lots of ways to make a difference and important roles in the world, and they're not all going to be right for everyone."

to seemed likely to get involved beyond simply giving money to the organization, they told me, "I'd guess almost none." Rather, donors hurriedly give a small amount to a canvasser at their door or on their campus, receive junk



mail they will not read and forget about the organization altogether.

Still, the canvass attracts a large number of donations. CALPIRG reported more than \$12.8 million in assets in 2017, and the Fund reported more than \$15 million in revenue in 2024. Engstrom told me that "most of the resources go toward the staff... there are limited operating costs." In terms of the staff's day-to-day, she told me much of their funding goes toward their advocacy team, which collects petitions, holds press conferences and speaks to legislators.

Political scientists Martin Gilens and Benjamin Page found that attempting to out-lobby major corporate interests such as Amazon and pesticide lobbies, two of CALPIRG's recent targets, is a manifestly hopeless political strategy. Nevertheless, Fund groups remain wedded to institutional rather than direct action approaches. If CALPIRG really did exert any kind of meaningful political influence over its members, we may expect it to routinely mobilize its donors for demonstrations — or at least align itself with people who do.

Engstrom walked me through the mobilization thought process CALPIRG prefers to use — appealing to bigger legislative decision makers first through tactics like editorials, as opposed to more direct action.

"It's not like we have a rule against it, as much as we're just trying to be really thoughtful about what's going to convince decision makers to act," Engstrom said. "And oftentimes, we've just decided (protests or boycotts) might annoy them more so than convince them to take action."

In this context, CALPIRG's donors outsource politics rather than participate in them. Moral values are commodities to be bought and sold: If you care about the climate, all you need to do is make one donation, with no need for the cumbersome and



costly business of organizing for real political change. After all, we wouldn't want to go out of our way to annoy the legislators watching idly as corporations set the planet alight.

In this sense, ideology becomes separated from action: All the ambient negative sentiment that accompanies exploitation can be wished away with the promise that someone else is fixing the problem, and donors can rest easily without interrogating the more structural causes of this political malaise. It puts off broader questions surrounding economic and political organization in favor of a brand of reform that is piecemeal, outsourced and moralizing.

The rise of fascism in the U.S. presents a more immediate problem. Under President Donald Trump's administration, we may expect groups committed to guaranteeing a voice and space for the public to be organized radically against the Republican Party. Other organizational problems aside, civic groups could represent a powerful source of opposition to authoritarianism. CALPIRG's official student website for UC Berkeley continues to proclaim its nonpartisanship with smiling students in front of balloons representing the Democratic and Republican parties.

This is curious. One of these parties is cementing a ruthless authoritarian regime committed to invasions of civil liberties, sale of public lands and other policies that are not in the public interest. I asked Engstrom — who emphasized the importance of nonpartisanship on issues that are "above that kind of political polarization" — how much longer a group committed to fighting for the little guy could remain neutral:

"Forever." ☐



Milan Rafaelov | Illustrator
Ella Bohmann Farrell | Graphic Designer

MAIN



Main Stacks was never meant for humans. Quietly constructed in the 1990s, the behemoth exists first and foremost to house the written word. The narrow halls and fluorescent lights hardly provide even the bare minimum for human existence.

It is impossible to know all of Main Stacks. Even after exploring all its nooks and crannies, shifting shelves and innumerable storage rooms, you'd still have to contend with the trillions of words among its shelves.

Stacks inhabitants will come and go, but the library will stay here — haunted by the absence of the authors and poets that shaped its skeleton and gave it blood. ☀

BUCKIN STACKS

Sam Clayton | Staff



STACKS



“ARE YOU INTERESTED IN STUDYING THE BIBLE?”

Inside
UC Berkeley’s
Christian
‘cults’



By Esme Hyatt & Kelcie Lee | Staff

Content warning: mentions of suicide and religious trauma

For all its Nobel Prizes, research opportunities and history of activism, UC Berkeley wrestles with the realities of its size. Each year, campus welcomes more than 7,000 freshmen to a swelling student body of 45,000. While the chaos offers near-infinite opportunities for those who know where to look, it’s also easy to get lost. Fresh-faced 18-year-olds can fall all too easily into isolation amid the first few weeks of Greek life rush, consulting club mania and intense weeder classes.

It comes as no surprise that an innocent-looking student’s invitation to join a Bible study group can offer a respite to incoming freshmen wandering Sproul Plaza. UC Berkeley boasts more than 30 Christian-affiliated organizations, and these conversations often result in supportive communities of students who share a faith. However, for those approached by a select few groups, the salvation promised by the Berkeley Christian community can turn dark as they fall into the grasp of decades-long “cult-like” groups operating on campus.

The Daily Californian spoke to numerous former members of such groups, many of which reported tactics of isolation, pressure and religious absolutism. Some were granted anonymity and are addressed under pseudonyms for fear of retaliation. Over the past three decades, allegations have swarmed around some organizations driving some students attempt suicide, or coercing members struggling to pay for groceries to “donate” thousands of dollars.

As these groups regularly change their names and exist within a complex web of nationwide churches, it can be difficult for students to identify potentially dangerous organizations, even if they have been previously called out online or at another university.

The word “cult” has no formal legal definition, but it carries power. Experts generally describe such groups as “high-control” environments built on charismatic leadership, fear and the manipulation of belief.

“Obviously, the word ‘cult’ has a really scary connotation,” said Joseph Lee, president of Unity in Christ, or UiC, an inter-fellowship umbrella

Cristina Couch | Graphic Designer

that unites more than a dozen campus ministries. “But for the most part, Christian cults are groups that call themselves Christian but twist biblical teachings and try to manipulate and misguide people.”

Former ASUC senator Will Park, who represented the Christian community, defined “cults” as groups that enforce the claim that their “idea of Christianity is the only way to heaven.” He said “warning signs” appear when doctrine departs from the core of Christianity.

Lee said coercion, fear and emotional dependence often follow but added that these tactics aren’t always obvious.

“They are heavily trained in trying to draw people in,” Lee said. “These people might be ordinary, nice people in surface-level interactions — you might have classes with them, they might be a partner in a lab group. But when it comes to what they believe in, in terms of the cult, they might be starkly different.”

On the surface, Thrive — a registered student organization, or RSO, that hosts Bible studies across campus — seems like any other ministry. But several former members described their experiences as high-controlling and anxiety-inducing.

“I apologize to any former members who have felt this way,” said Thrive president Balthazar Moreno in an email. “These are never our intentions.”

Thrive’s story is tangled in a lineage of Bay Area churches. The group was once connected to the San Francisco Bay International Christian Church, or ICC, before aligning with a splinter congregation, Restored Church Worldwide, or RCW.

In 2016, it was registered on campus as D.R.E.A.M. Campus Ministry, before changing its name to Thrive in 2024.

RCW Pastor Mike Patterson said members left the ICC in 2024. He alleged “corrupt leadership,” “lack of transparency,” dwindling numbers and “the Bible no longer being the standard.” The ICC declined to comment.

“By the time Restored Church Worldwide was officially formed ... Thrive had already begun moving toward a healthier, more transparent, Bible-centered approach,” Patterson said in an email.

Lee, however, alleged that Thrive still teaches an exclusivist doctrine. “An example with Thrive would be their

primary doctrine referencing salvation,” Lee said. “You have to be baptized at that church, you have to be affiliated with that church, no matter what, stuff like that. And obviously that’s just not true.”

Patterson disputed this characterization, saying RCW “believe(s) that anyone who is a disciple of Jesus is part of God’s church ... regardless which organization they may be in.”

“A healthy group will point you to Jesus ... they will not control your faith”

JOSEPH LEE

†

He clarified that Thrive’s primary doctrine is “simply the Bible and it is the only source we use for our doctrine.”

Baptism remains a focal point. According to Patterson, new members typically complete seven studies before being baptized, though it isn’t a fixed requirement. He said baptism, “an urgent decision,” can happen anywhere there is water.

However, when Jamie — a former member from last year — recalled telling a Thrive member she preferred to be baptized at another church, they “started getting mad.”

“If it was actually somebody wanting you to be baptized ... they wouldn’t be so adamant on you

getting baptized at their church — they would just want you to be baptized in general,” Jamie said.

Samantha, another former member, said she was startled to learn that immersing herself in such a group meant reordering her life — potentially leaving her sorority and boyfriend. “It felt like everything was happening so fast,” she said. “If I decided (to join) I’d have to give up a lot.”

Thrive’s lesson notes, obtained by the Daily Cal, include a session on “persecution,” warning that believers may face hostility even “from those closest to you.” Moreno denied the dark implication of the lesson and the allegations that Thrive pressures students to sever relationships. He said it encourages communication with family and involvement in other campus organizations that “respect (members’ own) moral beliefs.”

Thrive’s only aim, Moreno said, is to prepare students “for possible repercussions” of following the Bible, not to estrange them from family.

Several students described the atmosphere as tense and fast-paced — meeting daily, feeling judged for doubts or being contacted repeatedly after leaving.

“I started getting extremely bad anxiety,” Jamie said. “(I realized), ‘This is not God.’”

Moreno said members can leave at any time and that Thrive does not “harass” students who step away. “If they are not interested, there will be no further follow-up to contact them,” he wrote.

When asked about “high-control” religious groups, UC Berkeley spokesperson Adam Ratliff said campus cannot confirm or comment on specific student matters, citing privacy rules.

Oversight falls largely to student government and peer ministries. Christian ASUC Senator Abigail Cho said while she’s aware of such groups, the ASUC has not addressed them formally.

“The removal of certain groups ... could bring up a lot of discourse,” she said, noting that religious freedoms limit administrative intervention.

Lee, however, alleged that Thrive still teaches an exclusivist doctrine. “An example with Thrive would be their

Under campus policy, RSOs may lose recognition only if they violate the Code of Student Conduct. This can happen, for example, by causing “physical injury or personal degradation resulting in psychological harm.”

Other former members from Bay Area offshoots echoed similar experiences. Leyla, a former student at San Francisco State University, alleged she was told to “repent” for holding hands with her boyfriend.

“It’s important to do your due diligence ... by looking at (a group’s) statement of faith or doctrine,” Lee said. “It doesn’t take too much investigation to find out what groups are solid and what groups aren’t.”

The current anxiety around Thrive echoes earlier chapters in Berkeley’s religious history. In 1981, Berkland Baptist Church was founded on the Berkeley-Oakland border. In 2006, when Berkland disbanded, a new congregation, Gracepoint, split off. Gracepoint expanded nationwide under the broader Acts 2 Network — its campus branches include Acts2Fellowship at UC Berkeley.

Today, Acts2Fellowship is an active UIC-affiliated group in good standing.

But former members of Berkland and Gracepoint described a darker past, including allegations of isolation and control that leaders now deny.

Mary Choi, who joined Berkland as a student in the 1990s, recalled being “love-bombed” by friendly upperclassmen. Soon, she was encouraged to live only with church members. “That’s how they control you,” claimed her husband, Jin, also a former member. “They cut you off from outside influences.”

Former Berkland pastor Ed Kang denied these claims, saying the church never dictated housing or contact with family.

Money was another source of strain. The Chois alleged that they were urged to tithe 10% of their income even as students on financial aid.

Kang said in an email to

the Daily Cal that tithing is a standard biblical mandate but “not a teaching emphasis,” and offerings are not collected during church gatherings.

Other former members from

Bay Area offshoots echoed similar experiences. Leyla, a former student at San Francisco State University, alleged she was told to “repent” for holding hands with her boyfriend.

“It’s important to do your due diligence ... by looking at (a group’s) statement of faith or doctrine,” Lee said. “It doesn’t take too much investigation to find out what groups are solid and what groups aren’t.”

Kang denied allegations

that physical contact was

prohibited. Al-

though the

church encourages sexual abstinence until marriage, he said, cal-contact bans “something we do.”

Ava, an-

former a Grace-ated min-Francisco said her in the ove

r member of point-affili-istry and San State graduate, involvement group spiraled time. She de-scribed how the demand to be “the cookie-cutter Christian they wanted me to be” began to take a toll.

I felt, because of that kind of condition-ing, like I wasn’t good enough. And what

was the purpose of me living, right? If

God couldn’t fix me, then why was I existing?” Ava ended up in and out of the hospital during her time in the church due to multiple suicide attempts. She later found out there were “dozens of other women” who had similar experiences.

“It’s very important for people to know that just because you think it could get better by staying, it only gets worse,” she said.

Today, Acts2Network and UC Berkeley’s Acts2Fellowship describe themselves as having mainstream Christian theology.

“People come and go as they please, I think the cult label is unfairly perpetuated, mainly through hearsay and the rumor mill,” said Acts2Fellowship college pastor Richard Tay in an email.

F o r the Chois, the memories linger. “(Leaving church) was very matizing for me because they were my family for five years,” Jin said. “When I left, I went from 300 friends to none.”

Decades later, Mary Choi still struggles to reconcile her faith with what she experienced. “I’m an ex-evangelical now,” she said.

But when she and her husband dropped her son off at college this fall and saw students advertising a familiar-sounding fellowship, she froze.

“There wasn’t a lot of information available when I started college,” she said. “I feel like it’s my duty to (speak out).”

Religious life at UC Berkeley has always reflected the campus itself — passionate, chaotic and at times, extreme.

Most Christian groups on campus operate openly and without controversy. But as generations of students have learned, discernment can be the difference between finding faith and losing oneself.

“A healthy group will point you to Jesus,” Lee said. “They will not control your faith.”

For students still searching for belonging, that distinction can be everything. ☐

What is a “cult?”

The word “cult” has no formal legal definition, but it carries power. Experts generally describe such groups as “high-control” environments built on charismatic leadership, fear and the manipulation of belief.



ISSUE I

12

FISHING FOR LOVE *on the* DITTO AI YACHT

By Dylan Skolnick | Staff

Everyone I speak to says dating today sucks. No one wants to be judged by their appearance and no one wants to admit they do the judging. Our dating apps, with their picture-first design, only seem to encourage this surface-level approach.

Ditto AI hopes to change that. I got the elevator pitch while crammed into the back of a black Mercedes overflowing with seven boys in suits and ties and a fruit platter placed precariously in the middle of us. One of them was Allen Wang who, alongside Eric Liu, co-founded Ditto AI, a dating service that claims to run a thousand “simulations,” find your perfect match and even plan your perfect date. Since Ditto AI’s founding in 2023, Wang and Liu are now flush with \$1.6 million in seed capital, an absurd amount of which went toward the event we were headed to: A yacht party in which Ditto would be really put to the test.

The yacht idea is really a compressed version of Ditto AI. Posters went up everywhere advertising a speed dating yacht party with a QR code to apply. From these applicants, a lucky 100 were selected: 50 boys, seemingly mainly chosen from UC Berkeley’s LinkedIn world, and 50 girls, some of whom it seemed were personally invited. Each one of these lovebirds was matched to another across the aisle using

Ditto AI’s special algorithm. As they entered the yacht, they were handed a wooden tag with a number from 1 to 50 that corresponded to an identical tag held by their selected partner. These numbers were kept secret until everyone was on board, the possibility for escape had been left behind on shore and the signal came to find your partner: “Look at your number and f---ing find them!”

Picture a room, slightly larger than a coffee shop, lit in a warm orange reflected everywhere by a mirrored ceiling, filled with more than a hundred people. Now make that room rock quite viciously because we were, mind you, in the midst of some sort of minor storm, and you would have a mental image of this circus. People took different approaches. Some began to shout their numbers to no avail. Others held their tags up over their faces and walked around as if they were advertisements. Eventually, everyone found their predestined one.

As I sat and watched, this began to feel like a culmination of all that is Gen-Z dating. The internet’s great promise was that it would bring us together by collapsing space and time. In many ways it has but in most, it hasn’t. Dating seems to have taken one of the biggest hits. Can AI fulfill this vaunted promise, or will it plunge us even further into isolation?

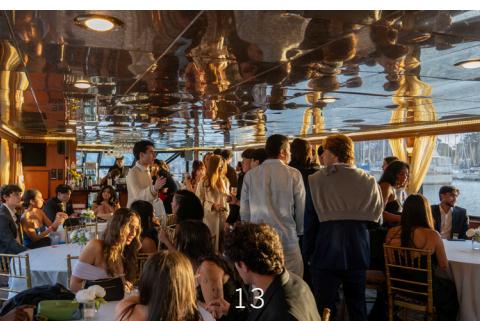
By the end of the night, what had begun

as various homogenous clumps of men or women had split into pairs seated in chairs a respectful distance away from each other. Attendees I interviewed afterwards were split on whether or not most people ended up sticking with their assigned match. But what is true is that I have never seen this many new couples together by the end of a party. Undoubtedly, this was something unique.

I am not sure if it’s entirely attributable to Ditto AI’s computing, though no doubt some credit is deserved there too. What I think was actually effective is, bluntly: They help us offload our free will. Choice is hard, and the truth is that we would often rather avoid it. Ditto’s model of selecting for you, even down to the content of your date — and in the specific case of this yacht, bringing you onto a boat where you have no choice but to mingle — means you have almost no exposure to decision at any step along the way.

This sounds bad, and it might have some consequences for our decision making in the long term, but at the same time, Wang and Liu did it. They did what seems so elusive that every major publication has already published a think piece on its impossibility. They got Gen-Z to have sex and even, maybe, to make love. For that, perhaps anything is worth it. ☐

Casey Scaduto | Photographer
Grace Vierra | Graphic Designer



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STACKS MAGAZINE

Subhuman

By Stella Merims | Senior Staff

Before my first meaningful sexual encounter with a boy, I called one of my best friends across the country. I was coming from the loving arms of lesbianism. Throughout high school, I'd only dated non-men and consequently identified as a lesbian. That is, until I met one boy the weekend before I left for college, who I now had to make this phone call about before he visited, feeling embarrassment through my cheeks at the utter newness I thought I had graduated from years prior.

So I called her. The advice was exactly as you'd expect: mostly platitudes to assuage my anxiety and very minimal practical directions. But something my friend's roommate said stuck with me for the past two years: "He's not even going to notice if you're nervous. Honestly, it doesn't even matter what you do. He'll just be happy to be there with a hot girl."

After I heard that, I said a quick thank you. Hung up. Burst into tears.

He's not even going to notice if you're nervous. This was the scariest part to me — that it was completely normal to have sex with someone who was expected to have the perceptual capacity of a toddler. In fact, his lack of awareness was supposed to be for my benefit and would help me excel, as if this were a performance and my audience were senile.

Sometime two years later, my lesbian friend asked me for hypothetical boy advice. I prattled off a list of platitudes and very little practical information before saying: "He's just a boy. He's just going to be happy to be there."

Is it not absolutely terrifying that these women I loved, women I respected, were entrusting their bodies to the subhuman? Were interfacing with beings they gave less

dignity to than their dogs? Was it not terrifying that I had become one of those women?

...

Every woman I am friends with is emotionally intelligent, sweet, articulate and beautiful. And no matter what, each and every one who dates men has had her heart shattered by the callous actions of a teenage boy. But if we ascribe agency to those boys, we acknowledge a suffering that is impossible to reconcile. No wonder we continue to soothe ourselves with the thought that we are naturally better, that they don't know what they are doing.

"He'll just be happy to be there" is a sentiment that is much easier to stomach than the idea that he can perceive you as you perceive him, and he still hurt you. This coping mechanism is used on a whole gamut of interpersonal evils, from a boy not remembering the color of your eyes to being sexually violent ("Boys will be boys" is perhaps the most classic form of this rhetoric). It works out wonderfully for them, shirking responsibility. And it "works out" for us if we keep our expectations low, they can't fail us.

But implicitly, this line of thinking devalues us, too, even if it is meant to protect us. When we place our trust in boys who we don't view as fully fledged human beings, we imply that we deserve subpar treatment. It is dangerous. It is terrifying. And it is borderline dystopian.

Engaging in intimacy with a person who you don't think would notice if you weren't into it, if you wanted it to stop, a person who you unequivocally think is less empathetic than you are, is guaranteed to end catastrophically. So why do we keep putting ourselves in this position?

Because of course we do, because of course I do, because of course everyone does. But I think in this case, the reason many women make these choices is because our value is supposed to be derived from our appearances. Imagine your friend is left by her depraved, manipulative, low-commitment, high-intensity hookup (this goes across the

gender spectrum). What goes in your pep talk? I'd guarantee one of the things you'd say is something like, "They're ugly anyway." In exchange for the other person's lack of kindness, we comfort ourselves by asserting how much better we are in our most precious asset: our looks.

Being out of someone's league is presented as a saving grace, as if one will be healed by the knowledge that their sexual commodity value is high. In this paradigm, girls are asked to ignore their feelings and relish in their value as sex objects — the most depressing consolation prize for heartbreak.

I will speak for myself in this conclusion because I'm not Carrie Bradshaw, this isn't an advice column and I don't have an answer to any of these questions. I didn't write this to disregard the violence that women experience. Women make assumptions to keep ourselves safe, and will continue to do so. But in this endless cycle of thinking men are beneath us, there is no winning, and there is no love.

When I repeated what had terrified me two years prior, I realized this line of thinking was getting me nowhere. Why would I continue to be interested in people who I didn't even think were capable of caring about me? No amount of superiority could give me a satisfying answer. By devaluing them, I was devaluing myself.

The worst realization has been that if I'm ever going to fall in love, I'm going to have to consider the other person my equal. I must have faith that they'll notice if I'm anxious, that they aren't just happy to be there. To get the gift of humdrum reciprocity, the daily exchange of feelings that occurs between equals, I will have to believe that everyone has the same capacity to hurt and to care. So the next time someone asks me for advice, I'll say, "For better or for worse, he's not just a boy. So good luck." ☀

Why devaluing 'men' devalues us

"He's not even going to notice if you're nervous."

"He'll just be happy to be there with a hot girl."



Milan Rafaelov | Illustrator

Ella Bohmann Farrell | Graphic Designer

“A chilling effect”

California lawmakers' silent war on campus speech

By Sam Grotenstein & Cam Lippincott | Staff

If you're a UC Berkeley student reading this, open CalCentral. You will notice that there is a new task waiting for you called "Civil Rights and Open Expression." If you haven't completed this task, no one can blame you — its generic title and attached 30-minute video hardly make an impression.

But if you sit through the whole 30 minutes, a few moments might stand out. Maybe it's an offhand remark in the time place and manner section, which suggests that UC Berkeley has banned masks at protests. Maybe it's the definition of harassment, which includes

creating an "offensive environment." Or maybe, it's the hypothetical instances of discrimination that include a protest of Israel that blocks the path to a building and features slogans like "no Zionists can pass."

This video, tucked away in a corner of the student portal, alludes to a larger conflict that has impacted political speech at all levels of California public education.

At the time of writing this, California Democrats

are attempting to define themselves as stalwarts against Trumpism. This self-definition has been



challenged by the issue of antisemitism on college campuses. Through a series of congressional hearings and funding cuts, the Trump administration spun a narrative that campuses had become hotbeds of (leftist) antisemitism. In turn, UC Berkeley handed over the names of 160 students and faculty to the federal government. California lawmakers were relatively silent about this, gesturing towards a broader strategy: proactively policing speech in academic environments, while trying to maintain distance from Trump.

"Just because Donald Trump is abusing anti-Semitism doesn't mean that anti-Semitism somehow doesn't exist," said Scott Weiner, the co-chair of the California Jewish Caucus, in a press release.

In 2024, Weiner co-authored the seemingly innocuous SB 1287. Penned primarily by former state representative Steve Glazer, the "Equity in Higher Education Act" demands that the UC Regents and Trustees of the California State University update campus demonstration policies to take a proactive approach in combating "conduct that creates a hostile environment for students on campus."

SB 1287, touted as a generic anti-discrimination bill, was

the impetus for the aforementioned video and updates to the UC code of conduct. In an interview with The Intercept, Glazer refuted the idea that the bill was uniquely charged.

"People want to make this be about pro-Palestinian, anti-Palestinian bill — I would argue, pro-Hamas, anti-Hamas," Glazer said. "Whatever framing you want to use to make your case, people are doing that — I'm not."

Opponents, including California Jewish Voice for Peace, or JVP, the California Faculty Association and ACLU Cal Action, argued that the bill's lack of specificity would produce a chilling effect on campus free speech.

Since then, the legislature has turned its eye towards K-12 education. On the two-year anniversary of October 7th, Gov. Gavin Newsom signed AB715, creating a state-level office of civil rights to review curriculum for perceived antisemitic content. The debate over AB 715 echoed SB 1287.

SB 1287 and AB 715 deploy vague and ostensibly neutral language. While the legislature has not created legal barriers to demonstration, these bills work as a tactic to discourage a wide range of political discourses and actions while maintaining deniability.

The framework that California lawmakers use to police antisemitism in public schools has been largely influenced by the Jewish Public Affairs Committee, or JPAC.

JPAC has immense influence in the California State legislature. Newsom is a recurring speaker at JPAC's annual capitol summits, which are routinely attended by ADL lobbyists and a diverse array of state elected officials. This tight-knit relationship is thanks in part to David Bocarsly, the current executive director of JPAC and former director of the Jewish Caucus.

Bocarsly takes pride in SB 1287's openness to interpretation, claiming the biggest "achievement" of SB 1287 lay in a school's

ability to "adopt their own policies." Similarly, Bocarsly notes AB 715's lack of strict content guidelines and definitions.

"There is nothing in this bill that defines anti-semitism," Bocarsly said.

For others, this openness to interpretation is the problem.

Recently, the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, or ADC, announced plans to litigate over the passage of AB 715.

"AB 715 doesn't directly say this is how we're defining antisemitism, and I think it's intentional," said Jenin Younes, the legal director of the ADC. "I think they're giving people the impression that it includes criticism of Israel, or various forms of criticizing Israel and Zionism."

Though Bocarsly refutes any specific definition of antisemitism, he has previously suggested that it is synonymous with anti-Zionism. In an August 2023 JPAC press release, Bocarsly stated that, "there is still a lot of work ahead to implement robust ethnic studies courses across California's schools that are also free from antisemitism and anti-Zionism."

This echoes the perspective of campus organizers, who have faced mixed messaging following the passage of SB 1287.

"We are aware that this generally increases an air of surveillance and sets a precedent for further restrictions," said Maya, a member of Berkeley's JVP.

A few weeks ago, a handful of students staged a teach-in at Doe Library — this year's first test of the updated time, place and manner regulations.

The protest was short-lived. After a couple hours, the students were met by UC police in riot gear and chased out of the library. While no arrests were made, campus spokesperson Dan Mogoluf said authorities will "seek (protesters) out in an effort to impose appropriate consequences," clarifying that the protesters wearing masks were violating UC policy.

"I wore a mask because our campus administration has been complicit in systematically suppressing the voices of protesters by using antisemitism," said a Doe Library protester. "Funnily enough, wearing the mask might get me arrested." ☐

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER

TITLE

UPCOMING EVENTS

DATE	EVENT	LOCATION
NOV. 22 11 A.M. - 10 P.M.	"BOTANICA NEGA" BRAZILIAN VINYL LISTENING PARTY	COUCHDATE
NOV. 23 7 P.M.	UC JAZZ ENSEMBLE	FREIGHT & SALVAGE
NOV. 29 6:30 P.M.	JAQUES DEMY'S "THE UMBRELLAS OF CHERBOURG"	BAMPFA
DEC. 3 7 P.M.	THE MOTH STORY SLAM	FREIGHT & SALVAGE
DEC. 3 6 P.M.	"AVENTURERA," INTRODUCED BY DANIEL HANDLER	THE ROXIE
DEC. 5 7:30 P.M.	LAUGHS WITH BENEFITS: COMEDY FOR GAZA	LA PEÑA CULTURAL CENTER
DEC. 6-7, 13-14, 20-21 11 A.M. - 6 P.M.	BERKELEY HOLIDAY STREET FAIR	3100 ADELINE ST.
DEC. 13 6:30 P.M.	LUIS BUNUEL'S "VIRIDIANA"	BAMPFA
DEC. 13 7 P.M.	BENEFIT FOR BAY AREA LESBIAN AR - CHIVES FT. BERKELEY WOMEN'S MUSIC	LA PEÑA CULTURAL CENTER
DEC. 14 1 P.M.	INTRO TO RISOGRAPH WORKSHOP	BAMPFA