

Frequently Asked Questions about Tolman Hall: Closure of General Assignment Classrooms

1. The campus recently decided to reassign general assignment classes scheduled in Tolman Hall. Why now?

Tolman Hall is currently rated “poor” in the university’s rating protocol. A plan for addressing its seismic safety has been presented to the Office of the President for inclusion in the state-funded capital program; however, the current fiscal environment makes it very unlikely the campus will receive state funding any time soon for the potentially \$200 million project.

Since UC Berkeley is committed to improving seismic safety by alternative means wherever possible, the Chancellor decided it is prudent to reduce the occupancy level in Tolman Hall now rather than to wait for sufficient funding. Because the 13 general assignment (GA) classrooms in Tolman Hall are the most heavily occupied spaces there, Chancellor Birgeneau has opted to move all classes scheduled in those rooms to suitable spaces elsewhere on campus. This will reduce the population in Tolman Hall by as much as 6,400 people per week.

Beginning this fall, the campus classes, University Extension classes, and student activities held in Tolman Hall’s general assignment classrooms will be relocated.

2. What will happen during the spring 2012 semester?

It is anticipated that the GA classrooms will be closed, and that all classes and student activities scheduled in them will be moved to alternate spaces.

3. What about the other space in Tolman Hall: are people who use those rooms at risk?

In 1997, Tolman Hall was rated “poor” under the campus’s SAFER Program, meaning that it is a high priority for seismic upgrade, like many public buildings currently in use in California (please see the SAFER web page for more information on the rating system: <http://www.berkeley.edu/administration/facilities/safer/>).

Although the seismic risk has not increased, we believe that it is prudent to reduce the level of occupancy in Tolman Hall since there is no short-term prospect of state funding for its seismic mitigation.

4. Which units are currently located in Tolman? Will all of them stay?

All the departments and programs there now--the Graduate School of Education, the Department of Psychology, the Education-Psychology Library, the Institute of Human Development, and the Institute of Personality and Social Research--will stay at this time. Plans will be made to relocate them to appropriate alternate spaces as soon as that is feasible.

5. How many GA classes previously assigned to Tollman will be moved?

Most of the 198 scheduled classes have already been relocated to alternate classrooms, with a total of 34 classes remaining to be moved. Public Health (49 courses), Environmental Science Policy Management (36 courses), and Education (21 courses) have the greatest number of courses that must be moved to other venues.

6. Will the building still be available to students seeking space after hours to hold student group meetings or for other purposes?

Beginning this fall, the GA spaces in Tolman Hall will not be available for student group use after hours. The overall goal is to decrease the density of use in the building, so we are closing the most heavily used rooms.

7. Have there been similar situations in which the campus moved some uses out of a structure because it had concerns about its seismic safety?

Yes, a few. For example, the Berkeley Art Museum/Pacific Film Archive was rated “very poor” in the SAFER Program study, so we closed the heavily used PFA auditorium for general use and moved the PFA across the street to the temporary building on the Hearst Field Annex. The museum and its staff remain in the building. The museum has been retrofit and upgraded to “poor,” but the PFA will remain in the Hearst Field Annex until the new art museum is in place on Center and Oxford Streets.

8. What has the campus done to-date to address seismic safety issues involving other campus buildings?

The campus has made great strides over the years to improve the seismic safety of most of our vulnerable buildings. Structural evaluations done in 1997, which led to the creation of the SAFER Program (<http://www.berkeley.edu/administration/facilities/safer/>), indicated that 1/3 of the campus’s square footage was in buildings rated “poor” or “very poor” in the university’s rating scale. As of this June, 75% of the vulnerable square footage has been corrected or vacated, is now under construction, or is in the design phase.

The university has improved, or no longer occupies, all buildings rated “very poor” in the 1997 SAFER survey, save one; the last of these buildings, Hearst Greek Theater, is being seismically improved by a project now under way. The campus seismic program maintains its goal to improve or replace the remaining buildings rated “poor.”

9. Other buildings like the Stadium are currently undergoing seismic retrofit, and there are plans to replace Eshleman. Why is there no funding for Tolman Hall?

The seismic and renovation work at Memorial Stadium is financed, in large part, by funds from donors. The improvement of Eshleman, a building used primarily for student organizations, is part of an overall improvement effort for Lower Sproul and is financed, in part, by fees that students voted to impose on themselves for improved facilities.

Typically, the renovation or replacement of academic buildings is financed by capital funds made available to the campus by the State of California, through the UC Office of the President. Some of our buildings have been retrofit with federal funds from FEMA as well. In some cases, private foundations and individual donors have contributed significant amounts to building replacements. Unfortunately, the state's ongoing fiscal difficulties indicate that state funds are not likely to be available in the near future.

While the work on Tolman Hall could exceed \$200 million, Campbell Hall, another academic building rated "poor" in the 1997 SAFER Survey, was vacated over the course of two years in anticipation of a largely state-funded \$87 million project. The funds for Campbell are drawn from a previous bond issue, and included in the California State Budget of 2009.

10. Is there somebody I can talk to about a specific question that isn't answered here?

Yes. With questions about classroom scheduling, please contact Pam Armstrong, in the Office of the Registrar, at p.armstrong@berkeley.edu. With other questions, please contact Sarah Nathe, in the Office of the Vice Provost-Teaching, Learning, Academic Planning & Facilities, at sknathe@berkeley.edu.