



# Catlin Gabel

December 18, 2019

To the Alumni Community,

I'd like to begin with an apology to each of you for the pain suffered and witnessed by so many of you. This is not the end, but the beginning of a process of listening, growing, and healing for the school and this community. I am deeply grateful for the many voices that have helped launch this journey and hope to hear from more.

Last Saturday, Barbara Ostos, assistant head of school, and I held a listening session with a group of about 45 alumni. Please know that this was only the first gathering, and that there will be other sessions to join, both in person and online.

My goal is to remain open about what we are learning and what we are doing to effect positive, lasting change in the school's culture. The first step today is to share with you what we've heard from alumni on Saturday, as well as through emails, phone calls, and social media posts about their time as students and what they are asking of the school now. The detailed message below was posted recently on the private "Catlin Gabel Alums" Facebook group, as many of those who were in attendance on Saturday are active within that group.

As we mentioned in the post, we will continue to share updates within the Facebook group as well as through email and letters. Please don't hesitate to reach out to me at any time to share your thoughts, as well.

Sincerely,

Tim

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## **THANK YOU FOR SPEAKING OUT**

As the head of school and assistant head of school, we want to express our gratitude and appreciation for those alumni who shared with us on Saturday their personal stories. In addition to the short notice, we realize that returning to campus was not easy for many of you.

Stepping forward to share your truths with us was powerful, affecting, and critical to helping us gain a deeper understanding of the ways we can move forward. We were able to listen to the many perspectives that our alumni have on the findings of the investigation, as well as some individual experiences that shape those views.

We also want to recognize and thank those who are engaging in this private Facebook group to share your feelings and feedback. We know for many of you this investigation and the subsequent interactions

have been extremely painful and traumatizing.

We extend our deepest apologies to the students who endured sexual, physical, and emotional abuse by former Catlin Gabel employees. We remain focused on supporting survivors, being transparent about our past failings, and continuing to strengthen the safety policies and protocols we now have in place. The insights of you, our alumni, are crucial to this work.

Neither of us is part of this Facebook group, but both of us are available at any time to engage directly with you and other alumni. We want to continue to hear from you. Emails or phone calls are the best way to reach us. Our contact information is provided at the bottom of this post.

## WHAT WE LEARNED

Below is an overview of the themes and messages we heard from you from the meeting on Saturday, as well as from other communications:

- The key findings from the independent investigation indicated there was a lack of accountability at Catlin Gabel. Many of you were shocked that the perpetrators of misconduct, as well as past administrators, were not held accountable for their actions.
- Alumni voiced anger and frustration that the scope of the investigation was limited to sexual misconduct. Reports of nonsexual physical and emotional abuse were not addressed and included in the findings.
- Some alumni shared at the gathering that when they were students, they had been told that they wouldn't amount to anything. These alumni attribute low self-esteem to these damaging interactions with educators.
- Alumni felt the school normalized abnormal behaviors, and students were often left to manage these abnormal situations by themselves. Alumni questioned why faculty and staff did not question or stop the behaviors.
- The tight-knit community at the school made it feel insular and isolating to some alumni.

## CLARIFYING INFORMATION

The discussion on Saturday and some of the comments on this page revealed a few points that deserve further clarification:

### **Scope of the investigation**

The Board of Trustees hired Lori Watson, an independent investigator, to solicit, review, and compile reports from past and current students, faculty, and staff of the school surrounding any sexual misconduct that was experienced or witnessed. She was hired by the Board because she is an experienced independent investigator. Her work was methodical and thorough, and the report based solely on sexual misconduct took more than a year to complete due to the number of individuals who came forward with information for her to investigate.

In the course of the investigation, other types of misconduct were also reported, including physical abuse in the classroom. Ms. Watson compiled that information, and though it wasn't part of the key factual

findings of the sexual misconduct investigation, the details were reported to the Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) and to law enforcement.

We realized the investigation was the beginning of a process, not a conclusion. The Board retained Ms. Watson to expand the investigation as needed. We will be communicating the next steps in more detail later this week.

### **How we've made contact regarding the findings**

Survivors who reached out to the investigator were given notification that the findings would be released and also were provided the findings ahead of the community release.

We included alumni, past and present employees, and past and current parents in our email communication. For those for whom we do not have emails, we are sending a letter, which will be received in the coming days. We also posted the findings on our main Facebook page and alumni page.

### **Timing of the report release**

Our priority was to share the findings as soon as they were ready. We understand that for some this was an especially difficult time of the year to receive these findings, and we hear that concern. There's simply no "right" time to distribute terrible news, so we determined that ASAP was the best choice.

### **Support for survivors of sexual misconduct**

We are working with RAINN, the nation's largest anti-sexual violence organization, to establish a Catlin Gabel Therapy Fund to assist survivors with costs related to therapy associated with sexual misconduct experienced during their time at Catlin Gabel. Any survivor who is an alum will be eligible to access this fund. Details of this resource will be shared in the weeks ahead.

### **Reporting mechanisms**

Any student or member of the community with a concern about any form of misconduct or abuse can make an anonymous report outside of the school. Catlin Gabel is using SafeSchools Alert, a tip-reporting service that allows any safety concerns to be submitted via phone, text, email, or online, including bullying, mental health, weapons, and threats of violence.

The school also has a Response Team. This means any report that is sent to the Catlin Gabel Tip Line is shared directly with the head of school, assistant head of school, director of human resources, and chair of the board of trustee's audit and risk management committee. This group will convene and involve other parties, including law enforcement when appropriate.

### **Ongoing trainings**

All employees are mandatory reporters, and faculty and staff are required to complete annual training modules, in person and online, related to understanding and reporting adult-student boundaries, sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, or abuse. Any failure to do so will result in termination. Our current safety policies and procedures can be reviewed here.

We'll continue to share information and answer questions as they arise. We want to continue to clarify any questions related to the process when they are brought to our attention.

## WHAT WE HEARD ALUMNI WANT

Below is a summary of what we believe you would like the school to do now:

- Continue to listen to, understand, and support survivors, as well as those who were impacted in any way.
- Develop ways to bolster interaction with and among the alumni community, including ways to communicate with each other both online and in person.
- Share the reports of physical and psychological abuse that were already submitted to provide full transparency. Some alumni felt re-victimized by not all abuse being listed.
- Organize a time and place for alumni in Portland to gather off-campus, with notices being sent electronically and by mail to reach the highest number of alumni possible.
- Provide access to professional support.
- Engage the help of external experts in organizational culture change.
- Have the Board of Trustees engage more with alumni.
- Help find more survivors and offer to help them. Some of you would like to become class agents to help spread knowledge of who the perpetrators were. By asking others to speak up, more information will come forward as to what was wrong and what needs to happen to create change.

We are meeting now with others to respond to what we heard from you. We will post an update on actions we are taking on this group page before the end of this week and also send an email and letter to the wider alumni body. We will also be providing a broader communication to the entire Catlin Gabel community with a comprehensive update by either late February or early March. We want to ensure we can hear from more alumni before compiling this update.

Sincerely,

Tim and Barbara



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