

University Senate

Proposed: February 24, 2017

Adopted:

MEETING OF FEBRUARY 3, 2017

President Lee Bollinger called the Senate to order shortly after 1:15 pm in 104 Jerome Greene Hall. Fifty-nine of 97 senators were present during the meeting.

Minutes and agenda. The minutes of December 15, 2016, were adopted as proposed.

President's remarks. The president said this was a difficult time for the university, first because of the recent loss of four undergraduate students. The death of any Columbia student is a tragedy and an occasion for grief, he said, but the loss of four of the youngest members of the community in such a short interval is almost incomprehensible. He said he had much more to say on this subject, but wanted to leave that for another time. For the moment he wanted to stress the importance of making sure that everyone in the Columbia community feels like part of the community and feels responsible for one another. He said the University is always striving to improve its policies, services, and practices. But the essential point is that it is a community. That word can sometimes sound banal, but it has a real meaning. Community plays itself out on a large scale but most importantly on a small scale. He said the university wants anyone feeling isolated or depressed to understand that other people care about them.

The president said he wanted to affirm the same point on the next topic—the new period that the country had entered with the new administration. He said there were disturbing statements during the campaign, but it was not clear how they would play out after the election. There were now some indications, most recently in the ban on refugees and immigrants from seven mainly Muslim countries. Such an action requires the University to reflect on first principles. To know how or whether to respond, the University has to decide what it stands for. Clearly it stands for the discovery of new knowledge and the responsibility to teach it to each new generation. But how does this commitment fit in the political world? The University is now facing actions that it strongly disagrees with, not entirely but largely.

The president said he would continue to try, as he had many times before, to articulate what he understood to be those first principles. He said Columbia is not a political institution of any ideology—not Republican, not Democratic, not anything. He said it is extremely important to preserve that sense of neutrality, even disengagement. There's no University position on trade, for example, or taxation, or many other subjects with political implications. The debate about universities' involvement in political affairs goes back many years. It was right for universities to say in the 1960s, for example, that they would not take a position on the Vietnam War. And similarly, Columbia does not now take positions on important current issues. On the other hand, faculty and students are free to take positions on these as citizens, apart from their academic lives.

But the president said the University's principles are complex. If the government takes an action that directly impacts them, then the University can and must respond. He said the principle of affirmative action, for example, reflects a deep sense of what it means to be educated in the modern world and thereby a sense of what is a just country and how we participate in that. Columbia upholds this principle through its admissions and faculty appointments policies, and through its curriculum. If the government challenges these efforts, the University has a right and a duty to stand up in opposition. The government's executive order barring immigration from the seven countries constituted such a challenge. Columbia has been an international university for well over a century, and believes in a global student body, just as it believes in a nationally diverse student body. Furthermore, if the University determines that the actual motivation of this executive order is ideological and religious, with the effect of excluding people from the institution on that basis, then it has a duty to respond.

The president said the position he had taken on behalf of the University was not that it is cruel to treat refugees in this way, nor that U.S. foreign policy will be adversely affected by this policy, but rather that it strikes at the heart of the University's mission.

The question then is, What else can Columbia do? Some measures include counseling and help for students and faculty, particularly pro bono legal services. He said EVP for University Life Suzanne Goldberg is organizing discussions and intellectual exchanges around the institution. Every school is taking part.

On behalf of the University, the president had also signed on to a number of letters and petitions in recent days, and made media appearances—the usual ways to express the university's views publicly. He said there were other activities that he could not talk about. Some students had requested the creation of an easily accessible website explaining any positions or actions Columbia has taken or will take in the current political environment. The University also may participate in litigation through amicus briefs.

The president said there had also been a recent rise in instances of private discrimination and even violence that may be related to the atmosphere of the last few months. These are serious problems, difficult to solve. The Columbia administration will do its best to respond, both by helping victims cope and by trying to identify perpetrators.

Looking to the future, the president anticipated further challenges to the institution, and said Columbia will continue to respond as it is responding now. He identified another serious challenge to the University's basic principles, which he had identified in the global email he had sent out on January 29 soon after the executive order barring travel. That is the disregard for facts and the truth reflected in deliberate falsehoods and repudiations of knowledge in the public forum, such as the denial of climate change or the theory of evolution. At some point the institution cannot function in a society that rejects these basic values, and in such cases the institution is justified in joining the public debate.

The president expected to predict certain developments with great accuracy. There will be more challenges to students in the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, to people with H-1B visas, to faculty who have signed certain petitions, and so on. There will be

more private harassment and violence. He said the University must be ready for these challenges, and has the will to face them.

The president said that particularly during this challenging period, the University will maintain an open community. Ideas of all kinds will be protected. There have been difficulties around the country in implementing the principles of free speech that Columbia values. He said he would do everything in his power to prevent attempts to shut down freedom of speech on campus, though there might be circumstances beyond the University's control. He said this principle must be applied consistently, allowing the expression of views about immigration policy and other issues that are unpopular on the Columbia campus. This is one of the ways in which first principles play out in day-to-day lives at Columbia. People can express their views passionately. But it is not acceptable to have a culture that does not allow other people to express their views.

The president said some would object that it is wrong to give people who are spewing hate the opportunity to add to discrimination, and the University should be able to stop them. The president said he understood that argument, but it had not changed his views, and he would not allow a small number of people to change the University's values. He said he would be happy to consider arguments in favor of a different conception of freedom of speech. Such arguments might prevail over time. But it was not acceptable to act on one's own particular conception of free speech and stop the rest of the community from having the free speech it wants.

The president said the University would be engaged in a number of activities in the next three to six months that he could say nothing about now. He listed some measures the University had taken recently, including the creation of the Knight Institute on the First Amendment—the first such institute anywhere—with Jameel Jaffer in charge. With a \$50 million funding base, the institute has three functions: to bring litigation, to foster research, and to develop public awareness about the First Amendment. The president also mentioned the Global Freedom of Speech Initiative, led by Agnès Callamard, which has a network of people all around the world. A third initiative was a University-wide advisory council—to be set up in the next few weeks—to make plans to protect the University against the challenges ahead.

Sen. Sonah Lee (Stu., Journalism) thanked the president for the commitment to vulnerable students. She asked about additional steps the University might take, such as hosting a cultural event with artists from the countries most affected by the executive order to raise funds for students who might be affected by the recent executive order, or guaranteeing summer housing for undergraduate students who are unable to return to their home countries.

The president invited Sen. Lee to send her list of recommended actions. He also invited Provost Coatsworth to comment.

The provost said he would wait to say more. He said his office was considering all the ramifications of the executive order for Columbia students. He said the University would be well prepared.

EVP for University Life Suzanne Goldberg said her office has provided a special space on its website with information for undocumented students, including those in the Deferred Action for

Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. There had been a forum the night before for these students, which was now online.

The president once more stressed the theme of community. He said times like these are highly stressful, especially for certain community members. He reminded everyone that the administration intends to help people to sort through things. Senior administrators are considering a large number of requests to sign letters and petitions, and to participate in speak-outs. He appealed for understanding of administrators' efforts to be as principled and effective as possible in choosing among these requests.

Sen. Samuel Silverstein (Ten., P&S) noted that New York has been called a "sanctuary city." What legal options are available to protect the University against all the problems that could arise in that situation?

The president said "sanctuary city" seems to mean different things to different people. He said the provost had sent out a memo in November detailing courses of action available to the University. What can Columbia do for students that are here, as well as for potential students and faculty? The one step the president could not agree to was committing the University to violating the law. He could not support attempts to engage the University effectively in civil disobedience.

As for the question of what New York City's policies may mean for Columbia's policies, he did not know the answer. He said the University could take its own actions, but could not put itself in a position to violate the law.

The Provost said the University had deliberately avoided the "sanctuary" path, but he said the University does have ways to protect its students that are well within the law. It is not obligated to collaborate with police or immigration officials unless they carry a warrant or subpoena. Columbia can also provide many services to the students who are at risk.

Sen. Goldberg emphasized the message that Columbia can send to its community about its commitment to every member, documented or not, from the targeted countries or elsewhere. This, along with the legal steps that Columbia is able to take, should provide at least some measure of security.

Executive Committee chair's remarks. Sen. Sharyn O'Halloran (Ten., SIPA) mentioned two new appointments of Rules of Conduct personnel:

1. *University Judicial Board (the five-member panel that hears charges of violations under the Rules of University Conduct):* Robert Kass, Hosack Professor of Pharmacology and chair of the Pharmacology Dept., to a faculty seat
2. *Appeals Board (the panel of three school deans that hears appeals from UJB decisions):* Law School Dean Gillian Lester.

New business.

Resolution to Support the Columbia University Senate Statement on DACA Students (Student Affairs). Sens. Aidan Quinn (GSAS/NS) and Daniella Urbina (SIPA, SAC Vice Chair) presented the resolution. Sen. Quinn said the resolution reaffirmed recent statements on students in the Deferred Action on Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program by the president and the provost, as well as an statement from Student Affairs accompanying the present resolution.

Sen. Urbina said the resolution was just an expression of solidarity. It exclusively concerned DACA, not President Trump's executive order. She said Student Affairs had put together a working group to figure out additional ways to support DACA students.

The Senate then unanimously approved the resolution, without abstentions.

Sen. Goldberg added that her office had been helping DACA students, both individually and in small groups since the presidential election. She said Elora Mukherjee, who runs the Law School's Immigration Clinic, has been managing these sessions. Arrangements have been made for pro bono individual legal counsel for undocumented student who need it. Care has been taken with communications for this effort—University Life does not want to be keep lists of undocumented students. The outreach is conducted through student organizations created to work on these issues. In addition, a small working group of students, faculty and administrators is trying to make sure Columbia is doing all it can to address these students' needs.

Committee reports.

--*Student Affairs on mental health issues.* SAC co-chairs Sean Ryan (CC) and Grace Kelley (Nursing) presented the report. Sen. Ryan said mental health issues for students have been serious for years at Columbia, but the death of six students this academic year from various causes has underscored the urgency of the problem. In a memorandum to the Offices of University Life and the President, as well as the Senate Executive Committee, SAC had recommended steps for the University to take in response to these tragedies. He and Sen. Kelley then presented those recommendations, referring to a set of [PowerPoint slides](#).

The two SAC co-chairs made the following additional points:

--Sen. Ryan said it was urgent to confront what he called Columbia's stress culture. He said SAC had encountered a lack of transparency about the efforts of different offices. He said this issue was close to him, as a former Residential Advisor and member of the Mental Health Task Force.

--Sen. Kelley began by asking two questions. The first was for faculty and staff: How many knew a student who had struggled with a mental health issue and could have benefited from more help? A number of hands went up.

The second question was for students: How many have struggled with mental health issues themselves, or seen a close friend in that situation? A number of hands went up, including those of Sens. Kelley and Ryan. Sen. Kelley said everyone was deeply affected by this, and that was why many people were present now.

--Sen. Kelley said Columbia students need to build a community that knows how to have fun. She students find themselves continually reminding themselves and others that they come to Columbia not only to pursue academics, but also a sense of community, a connection with peers and professors. By fun, she said, she meant fun, not more panel discussions or more people to inspire students to seek change, but a place to release some steam. She said New York City is a vital part of the Columbia experience, but less for students who can't afford to go out. She wanted to see the community enact a spirit of fun, not just pay lip service to it.

Sen. Ronald Breslow (Ten., A&S/Natural Sciences) said there had been many improvements at Columbia since he began teaching in 1956, but the system of faculty advising was not one of them. Back then he had a group of undergraduate advisees in the sciences, whom he got to know and talk to a lot, and not just about their courses. That arrangement was not particularly onerous for faculty, but it has largely faded away over the years, and advising has become a mainly administrative function.

Sen. Ryan appreciated the question, and said faculty interaction with students outside the classroom, in social settings, as mentors and friends was something SAC had requested in its memorandum.

Sen. Daniel McConnell (Stu., P&S) said he went through a dark time as a Columbia sophomore, and his Contemporary Civilization professor watched out for him, and helped him get through his undergraduate years.

Sen. Jeffrey Kysar (Ten., SEAS), chair of the Mechanical Engineering Dept., said the Engineering School has advising sessions in which faculty meet with students. In Mechanical Engineering, faculty always want to know how they can do a better job.

Sen. Ryan said he hoped the interaction in departments like Sen. Kysar's could be applied across the University.

Sen. Anne Armstrong-Coben (NT, P&S), an advisory dean at P&S, said her school had a strong advising system. She commits 20 percent of her time to that responsibility. She said the system is effective: she meets students when they first arrive and stays with them for all four years.

Sen. Ramond Curtis (Stu., GS) underscored Sen. Kelley's point that the focus on academics at Columbia can be so intense, particularly for students encountering it for the first time, that other issues can easily fall through the cracks. He hoped that faculty could do additional advising with only a minor adjustment in their workload.

Former Alumni Sen. Daniel Libby, the father of a Columbia junior, praised the idea of faculty advisors, but said a lot of parents and alumni could also serve as mentors, and also just help students along the way.

Sen. Ryan reiterated what he considered the overriding message—that students' lives here are more than their transcripts. They need to be hearing that from faculty, staff, and administrators.

Sen. Lisa Northrop (Fac., Barnard) said Barnard was having similar conversations. She said there was a serious need to renovate the Dodge Fitness Center, which is much too small for the user base, and which is crucial for physical health. She also stressed the value of role models for healthy habits, such as regular exercise and sufficient sleep. She said it's important to show that people can have success while maintaining a balance in their lives.

Sen. Ryan said Sen. Northrop's point about role models suggested a way to achieve the culture shift he was calling for, changing the norms of what a student's time at Columbia from admission to graduation could be.

Sen. Kelley said she had forgotten to mention student efforts to plan a student center. One solution could be to a partial redesign of Lerner Hall, to allow a place where students can gather and connect with friends.

Sen. Sonya Nanda (Stu., Bus.) said it was wonderful to hear about faculty advising students on their own time. But are there financial and other incentives for advisors?

Sen. Ryan said one of the students' requests was to consider mentorship and outside social interactions with students as one of the expectations for tenure.

Sen. Breslow pointed out that no one paid him or other faculty extra to be advisors; that was part of the job, and an enjoyable part. He was skeptical of providing incentives for faculty to do their jobs.

The president and Sen. Goldberg both thanked the SAC leaders for their work.

Diversity Commission update. Sens. Shantanu Lal (NT, CDM) and Daniella Urbina (Stu., SIPA), the Commission co-chairs, presented the report, referring to a set of [PowerPoint slides](#).

Sen. Susan McGregor (NT, Journalism) expressed particular interest in socioeconomic diversity, the next topic in the Commission's plan for the year. She also asked how the proportion of underrepresented minorities in the international student population compared to that in the domestic population.

Sen. Urbina explained that the racial and ethnic data the Commission had compiled involve only domestic students. Such statistics have not been compiled for international students.

There being no further questions or comments, Sen. O'Halloran adjourned the meeting shortly after 2:30 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Tom Mathewson, Senate staff