

Report on the Columbia Global Centers

Columbia University Senate

Alumni Relations Committee

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FINAL

The mission of the Senate Alumni Relations Committee (ARC) is to consider areas that are of strategic importance in the university's quest to enhance its lifelong connection with alumni/ae. ARC has undertaken a review of the Columbia Global Centers (CGC) beginning more than a year ago. The questions we have been concerned with are how can alumni (both internationally and domestically) contribute best in the activities of the CGCs and how can the CGCs be of service to our alumni in the region? We believe our alumni represent a vast wealth of intellectual and experiential resources that are critically important to the mission of the university in nearly every sense – the GCs being one facet of Columbia's mission.

First of all, we are pleased with the progress made by Ken Prewitt, Vice President for the Global Centers, during his stewardship in these critical early years. In just a few short years, Ken and his team have opened up eight CGCs around the world and initiated many programs throughout these far-reaching regions. However, as with any young initiative – especially one with the ambitious goal of bringing Columbia University out into the world, literally – now is an appropriate time for university leadership to take a moment to evaluate what is working well and what could be done differently to better effect Columbia's goals for the CGCs. The purpose of this report is to provide several possible suggestions that could be helpful to the development of the CGCs. We regret that a report such as this must necessarily omit many positive successes that have been realized by the CGCs to date.

We have been struck by the diversity of opinion on what the CGCs are intended to accomplish, by what means, how quickly and at what expense. Faculty members have expressed concern that no clear guidance exists as to what the CGCs can do for them. To illustrate this point, the following are a sampling of questions from various constituencies that we have heard while performing our review.

Alumni

- 1) How can alumni be more involved in the overall mission of the CGCs?
- 2) Does a budget plan exist to lay out what are expected to be future developmental needs?
- 3) Does a funding/marketing plan exist to partner with alumni or institutions financially or strategically?

Faculty

- 1) Can/will the faculty be able to use the CGCs to be in residence while conducting research overseas?
- 2) Can/will the CGCs be able to advise faculty on limitations on academic freedoms while working at a CGC?
- 3) How might extended time served at a CGC impact a faculty member's tenure and/or sabbatical eligibility etc?

Students

- 1) Are the CGCs equipped to offer support to students studying abroad or in a 5th year program (i.e. legal, medical, logistical etc)?
- 2) How will academic standards be aligned and enforced for academic programs emanating from the CGCs?

We believe these types of questions reflect a lack of consensus view of how the CGCs can be used by students, faculty and alumni and a vacuum of actionable information for these same three core constituencies. To solidify a consensus view, it may be helpful to **internally develop a long range plan for the CGCs, perhaps with the assistance of a consulting or market research firm.** Such a plan should include an agreed upon vision of the future of the CGCs with actionable steps these constituencies can use to take advantage of them and metrics to gauge success.

Regardless of the final vision of how our constituencies can broadly take advantage of the CGCs, it is reasonably certain that **the CGC would be best positioned for success if they were incorporated within the overall array of global initiatives at Columbia University.** Logistics, funding, governance and branding decisions among others are best handled when considered jointly. More importantly, Columbia's international presence and effectiveness is enhanced by coordinated global policies, information flow and resource utilization.

Enhanced information flow and effective communication are a recurring theme. Certainly there has been widespread information of the CGC in outlets such as the university website, alumni magazine, online newsletters and the mainstream press. This has succeeded in raising the visibility of the CGCs. However heightened visibility brings with it increased responsibility to fulfill the promise of what the CGCs are destined to one day become. The CGCs will be Columbia's outposts in an increasingly interconnected world for the mutual benefit of its three core constituencies and the local people, culture and environment.

However, as we suggested above it is actionable information to its core constituencies that is needed. In particular, students, faculty and alumni would benefit greatly from clear **guidelines of how they can interact with the CGCs and what services they can expect.** Of course such a set of guidelines must be

consistent with a consensus vision of the CGCs, but we should not hesitate to initiate this task in the absence of such a consensus vision. In fact, the discipline brought to bear in completing such a task will assist in bringing the long term plan for the CGCs into sharper focus.

A non-traditional form of “communication” might also be very helpful in furthering the mission of the CGCs. Specifically, disseminating the important message that the university greatly values strategic partnerships with alumni (and potentially other people and organizations as well) that promote the development of the CGCs would do much to build a community of support for the CGCs. Toward this end, it might make sense to **create an ad-hoc committee to explore the creation of a means to recognize and honor such individuals and/or institutions that have contributed greatly to the development of the CGCs and the promise they represent.** This ad hoc committee would be charged with deciding the criteria and the means by which such honors would be bestowed and other accompanying details.

While there have already been alumni and other individuals who have contributed greatly to the creation and early development of the CGCs, more external support of both a financial and strategic nature will always be needed. This reflects in part the fact the CGCs exist outside of the traditional geopolitical sphere of the Morningside campus. For the CGCs to flourish and grow they will continually require engagement in the world in which they exist locally. The Columbia community should **think expansively about the development of a dedicated effort to engage the CGCs in strategic partnerships with local industry/governmental/cultural institutions.** Such partnerships could work with the CGCs to provide academic or consultative opportunities for Columbia faculty, students and alumni. While such a suggestion offers significant potential, we note that it will be important to monitor the costs and benefits of any new initiative, especially in its early stages.

Lastly, we note the Advisory Boards and Faculty Steering Committees, convened for purposes of assisting the development of the CGCs, have met infrequently and have been mostly ineffective to date. It may be helpful to **develop a set of guidelines or an operating agreement for these Advisory Boards and Committees.** Such a document might provide guidance as to how these groups can contribute to the development of the CGCs. In addition, it may be worthwhile to include representation from alumni leadership on each of these Advisory Boards – both local alumni leadership (e.g. leaders of the local alumni clubs) and central CAA alumni leadership.

This report represents the consensus opinion of the Columbia University Senate Alumni Relations Committee. Please direct inquiries to ourselves as co-chairs.

Respectfully submitted,

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