Dear fellow members of the Columbia University community:

Today is a defining day for the Columbia community. Following a unanimous vote by the University Senate on May 1, 2015, the Trustees of the University approved changes to the University Statutes revising the Rules of University Conduct, while also stating their strong support for efforts by the Senate and President Bollinger to protect the rights of student journalists in covering protest activity. The history of the Rules of University Conduct dates back to the Columbia University protests of 1968, following a referendum from the Columbia University Senate and the creation of the Rules of University Conduct Committee. Since 1989, there have been no major changes to the Rules, until now. The revised Rules strengthen the right of freedom of expression for every member of the University and our ability to openly demonstrate, rally, picket, and circulate petitions, while still protecting the rights of others and allowing the University to continue to function normally.

The revised Rules highlight Columbia’s commitment to freedom of speech through an affirmative statement of rights. The new procedures provide greater clarity, choice and predictability. The most significant revisions to the Rules are changes that (a) streamline the adjudicatory procedure, (b) separate charging from sanctioning, and (c) establish an independent University Judicial Board as the sanctioning body. Together these revisions will result in a process that is more transparent, consistent in application, and uniform.

Under the leadership of Christopher Riano, the Senate Rules Committee undertook an arduous review process, examining our history and that of our peer institutions, holding three town hall meetings, and consulting with numerous student groups, administrators and alumni to ensure that input from our diverse community was heard. On behalf of the University Senate, I thank every member of the Columbia community who engaged with the Committee during the process of review and revision. I would also like to thank the members of the Rules Committee and in particular Senators Zila Acosta, Jared Odessky, and Angela Nelson for their contributions.

With Trustee approval and their commitment to the rights of student journalists, the Rules Committee will now resume its work, with a focus on the creation of guidelines for implementation. Through the process governing the implementation of the revised Rules, the Rules Committee will continue to engage with the Columbia community, consider diverse experiences across peer institutions, and strive to adopt best practices, reinforcing our pledge to freedom of expression.

To learn more, we encourage you to review the Rules of University Conduct. To get involved in Columbia’s enterprise of shared governance, please contact the University Senate Office.

Sincerely,

Sharyn O’Halloran
Chair, University Senate

The University Senate is a University-wide legislature, representing all constituencies, including faculty, students, administration, researchers, librarians, administrative staff, and alumni. It makes policy on a range of issues that affect the entire University or more than one school.