

University Senate

Morningside-Lamont Administrative and Support Staff Election to the University Senate 2026

Candidates' Statements

(Candidates Listed in Alphabetical Order)

There are 20 candidates in this election to one open seat in the University Senate:

1. **Melinda Aquino** | Associate Dean of Multicultural Affairs, CC/SEAS Undergraduate Student Life
2. **Amy Baker** | Managing Director, Research Affairs, Center on Global Energy Policy
3. **Naika Baptiste** | Project Analyst, Office of the University Registrar
4. **Elena Cabral** | Assistant Dean, Student and International Programs, Graduate School of Journalism
5. **Teresa Cal** | Prevention Coordinator, Sexual Violence Response, Columbia Health
6. **Manoah Finston** | Associate University Registrar, Office of the University Registrar
7. **Ingrid Gerstmann** | Assistant Director, Arnold A. Saltzman Institute of War & Peace Studies
8. **Mitchell Glazier** | Creative Writing Pre-College & Undergraduate Program Administrator, School of the Arts
9. **Drew Hardin** | Associate Director of Finance, OAD Central
10. **Abdalla Hassan** | Assistant Director of Emeritus Professors in Columbia, Office of the Provost
11. **Gerasimos (Jerry) Kokkinos** | Director of Human Resources, Center on Global Energy Policy
12. **Dimitra Koutsantoni** | Executive Director, University Corporate Foundation Relations, OAD Fundraising
13. **Susan Lee** | Senior Director of Event Management, School of International & Public Affairs
14. **Vishal Manve** | Project Coordinator, Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory
15. **Jinny Prais** | Associate Director, Institute of African Studies; Adjunct Assistant Professor, Department of Middle Eastern, South Asian, and African Studies
16. **Annapurna Schreiber** | Coordinator, South Asia Institute
17. **Daniel Steinbach** | Director of Operations, Columbia Dining
18. **Alyssa Timin** | Managing Editor, Journal of Philosophy, Office of the Provost
19. **Contina Walter** | Human Resources Representative, Facilities & Operations
20. **Sara M. Yllescas** | Career Placement Officer, Industrial Engineering & Operations Research



Melinda Aquino

Associate Dean of Multicultural Affairs
CC/SEAS Undergraduate Student Life

I am honored to serve as your 2024-26 Senator representing Morningside-Lamont-Manhattanville Administrative Staff. I have been a vocal advocate naming the specific challenges we face as staff and calling for more institutional attention to our experiences. I serve on the working group that launched the first-ever University-wide Employee Climate & Engagement Survey this past fall. As key findings are released, I am hopeful for data-informed change that will allow all employees to thrive.

Particularly as we welcome a new president and questions about governance persist, I will be a strong, steady, and informed voice representing you. If elected for a second term, I will remain vigilant in elevating the visibility/needs of staff and ensure the University's commitment to employees by leveraging the survey's findings. Additionally, after serving my first term, I acutely understand the limitations of a single position charged with representing thousands of staff on THREE campuses. I will lead efforts to increase the number of Senators representing administrative staff.

As Associate Dean of Multicultural Affairs since 2005, I will continue to bring my record of advocacy; deep understanding of campus culture and political dynamics; connections across the University; and dedication to equity and inclusion to serve our community.



Amy Baker

Managing Director, Research Affairs
Center on Global Energy Policy

I would be delighted to be considered for service on the University Senate. In my current role at the Center on Global Energy Policy within SIPA, where I serve as Managing Director, Research Affairs, and previously as Managing Director at the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), I have led complex administrative and research operations in a mission-driven organization, managed multimillion-dollar budgets, and developed policies to strengthen institutional effectiveness, transparency, and compliance.

My work sits at the intersection of administration, research, and strategy. While I recently joined Columbia, my interest in contributing to the institutions I serve reflects a consistent thread across my career, shaped over two decades at CFR. There, I served on cross-functional committees spanning conflict of interest and commitment policies, junior and mid-level staff professional development, overtime practices, and as a health/wellness ambassador, reinforcing the importance of clear, fair, and effective guidance. I have also worked on policies governing research activities and relationships with funders and collaborators.

Several of the Senate's current areas of focus—employee benefits, institutional accountability, and career progression for staff—closely align with my experience. If elected, I would bring a practical, solutions-oriented perspective and a commitment to careful listening, sound judgment, and collaboration.



Naika Baptiste
Project Analyst
Office of the University Registrar

My name is Naika Baptiste (she/her), and I am incredibly grateful to be a candidate in the University Senate election for the Administrative and Lamont Officers Representative position.

Since joining the Office of the University Registrar in 2023, I have had the privilege of working alongside and building rapport with many colleagues. My role has allowed me to support and advocate for many stakeholders who rely on our systems and identify meaningful solutions that streamline their existing processes. Through these experiences, I have developed a deep appreciation for communication and collaboration in creating equitable change and lasting impact.

Navigating our benefits and the structures that support us as officers, structuring them each year, while carefully calculating their costs and impact on my livelihood, has been a defining experience for me. An experience I know many of us share.

My goal as a candidate is to continue connecting with colleagues, understanding your stressors, amplifying your concerns, and casting my vote in ways that reflect our collective voice.

In our university's ever-changing landscape, I am committed and honored to advocate for meaningful changes that positively impact our lives and careers.

Thank you dearly for your time and consideration.



Elena Cabral

Assistant Dean, Student and International Programs
Graduate School of Journalism

I want to be a University Senator to promote transparency, rebuild trust, and foster informed decision making at a school that has been my intellectual home since 1989.

As an undergraduate, reporter and news editor at the Columbia Daily Spectator, I learned the importance of maintaining accountability within an inclusive campus community that has sustained Columbia as a beacon of learning and leadership across the world. As a journalist, educator, and now Assistant Dean of Student & International Programs at Columbia Journalism School, I have paid close attention to the challenges and opportunities we have faced. I want to use the institutional memory and reporting skills I possess to foster a community that respects diversity, shared history and facts. In my current role, I support and educate students around the world, advise student initiatives, and help build partnerships across borders. I believe deeply in collaboration and respectful dialogue across differences. I believe in the brainpower within our community to find solutions that are meaningful, not just practical.

Despite the pain of the last few years, I remain hopeful about Columbia's future and would be honored to help support steady, informed leadership guided by experience and an openness to change and grow.



Teresa Cal

Prevention Coordinator, Sexual Violence Response
Columbia Health

I am excited to run for the University Senate to advocate for transparent, inclusive, and effective governance at Columbia.

My commitment to shared governance is grounded in my experience in student government at both George Washington University and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where I implemented initiatives for sustainable dining facilities, launched a pilot mutual aid program, and oversaw a project to increase student belonging.

Professionally, I have worked across departments at Pratt Institute and Columbia University, navigating complex decision-making processes to advance the personal and academic achievements of the faculty and students. I accomplished this by assisting in the relaunch of the Men’s Engagement Task Force at Columbia and serving on the committee to revise Pratt Institute student and staff handbooks. These experiences honed my ability to balance competing perspectives, communicate effectively to diverse stakeholders, and move initiatives forward.

I am committed to Senate decisions that reflect the diversity of experience in the Columbia community and incorporate these voices in a feedback process. I have always prioritized accessibility, equity, and meaningful engagement, and I will bring these skills as a Senate candidate work to ensure that policies are thoughtfully developed and effectively exercised.



Manoah Finston

Associate University Registrar
Office of the University Registrar

My name is Manoah Finston and I am enthusiastically presenting my candidacy for the University Senate. My decade of service to Columbia has fortunately brought me into the orbit of many University stakeholders – faculty, administrative staff, students, alumni, school leaders, and community members – and has exposed me to the craft and complexity of University governance. I’ve seen what makes this University great. But I’ve also seen how the institution hinders its own growth and progress.

The thousands of talented and dedicated administrative staff across Morningside, Manhattanville, and Lamont have precious few opportunities to articulate concerns, share ideas, and speak truth to power at Columbia. The University’s geographic breadth and corporate decentralization leave us atomized and voiceless, even as we are asked to take on more and more work supporting initiatives that so many of us are never consulted on or informed about. And yet, we are ALL subject matter experts and distinguished stewards of this institution.

We need more outlets for dissent and more opportunities for collaboration. I’m ready to fight to ensure our service is visible to leadership and our ideas are taken seriously. It would be a tremendous privilege to serve as your Senator and advocate. Thank you.



Ingrid Gerstmann

Assistant Director

Arnold A. Saltzman Institute of War & Peace Studies

I have worked for the University for 30 years, and I've also had the privilege of being a student here. I would like the opportunity to give back to Columbia, which has given me so much, by representing my peers in the University Senate. I have experienced working both as a union member and as an officer - I have been managed, and I have been the manager. I have seen administrations come and go. I was here for Y2K, 9/11, the 2008 crash, the pandemic, and the transition to a myriad of new HR, finance, purchasing, and facilities platforms. I have watched departments and schools reorganize and cut their workforces, and I've seen job and wage freezes. I have made friends across the University. I believe that when you see something, you should say something, and I am not afraid to speak truth to power. In these challenging and uncertain times, I will work hard to ensure that Columbia focuses on priorities important to us, listens to our concerns, and continues to challenge itself to be the best University FOR ALL that it can be. A vote for me is a vote for all of us. Thank you.



Mitchell Glazier

Creative Writing Pre-College & Undergraduate Program Administrator
School of the Arts

Hello! My name is Mitchell Glazier (SOA, '20), and I serve as administrator for the Pre-College and Undergraduate Programs in Creative Writing. I have also taught Beginning and Intermediate Poetry workshops as an adjunct assistant professor here at Columbia. Along with my teaching and administrative duties that extend between the School of the Arts and the School of Professional Studies, I run a poetry reading series called No Smoking, sponsored by Undergraduate Creative Writing, and am at work finishing a debut collection of poetry. I have published poems in several of America's leading literary journals, including POETRY Magazine. As a passionate alum, arts administrator, and artist, it would be an honor to serve the Columbia community as a voice for positive change.



Drew Hardin

Associate Director of Finance
OAD Central

I joined the Office of Alumni and Development at Columbia in January of this year, energized by the prospect of rolling up my sleeves to support projects that benefit the Columbia ecosystem. A fresh administrative and support staff perspective, in tandem with the presidential transition, could provide a new vantage point to the Senate’s important work. The university has weathered, and will continue to weather, new challenges and opportunities with fresh leadership; I hope to use my enthusiasm and resilience to serve the broader Columbia University community. Before this role, I worked in Yellowstone National Park, a number of private companies in New York, and even hiked from Mexico to Canada on the PCT. Those experiences had small, interwoven communities—and Columbia is without a doubt the largest and most dynamic community of which I’ve been a part. My experience navigating diverse communities has sharpened my ability to listen, cooperate, and contribute constructively. I would be elated for the chance to bring those qualities to the University Senate, and I hope you’ll consider me.



Abdalla Hassan

Assistant Director of Emeritus Professors in Columbia
Office of the Provost

As your University Senate candidate, these are my priorities:

- I strongly believe in shared governance. A system grounded in democracy and transparency leads to more informed decisions. When these principles are neglected, the costs are reputational damage and significant financial losses.
- Staff deserve cost-of-living increases that keep pace with rising costs. Educational benefits and retirement matching should begin at hiring.
- The University's endowment should align with the Columbia community's shared values. Rather than investing in companies tied to genocide, war crimes, and human rights abuses, we should direct those resources toward advancing Columbia's own cutting-edge research and innovation. We need an ethical model for university investing.
- I am committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion; to fostering an open, welcoming campus; and to genuine collaboration with all stakeholders, including the student workers' union.
- I strongly support academic freedom, freedom of expression, and institutional autonomy.
- Student disciplinary processes must be fair, transparent, and include University Senate involvement.
- The Board of Trustees must be accountable, transparent, and reflective of Columbia's diversity. Its practice of closed meetings and 50-year embargoes on minutes raises serious concerns about oversight and openness to the students, faculty, and staff it serves.

Feel free to reach me at afh4@columbia.edu.



Gerasimos (Jerry) Kokkinos
Director of Human Resources
Center on Global Energy Policy

My name is Gerasimos (Jerry) Kokkinos, and I bring over a decade of experience in the education sector, including leadership roles in nonprofit management, K-12 teaching, and higher education. Previously, I served as a director for a non-profit organization in New York City and taught English in the Department of Education, which deepened my commitment to community engagement and educational equity. Currently, at Columbia University, I oversee efforts for officers of research, officers of administration, and students at the Center on Global Energy Policy. My role involves managing human resources and organizational initiatives, drawing on over ten years of higher education experience. Throughout my career, I have developed a strong understanding of university policies related to academics and DEIA (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility). My diverse background provides valuable perspective on some of the pressing issues facing our communities today. I am dedicated to fostering an inclusive and equitable university environment and believe my experience positions me to contribute effectively as a member of the University Senate. I am grateful for the opportunity to serve and represent our community's interests and honored to be considered as a nominee.



Dimitra Koutsantoni

Executive Director, University Corporate Foundation Relations
OAD Fundraising

I joined Columbia in 2010, and have spent the past sixteen years in a range of leadership roles across multiple schools and central administration, in both the Morningside and Medical Center campuses. This breadth of experience has given me a deep, University-wide perspective and a strong understanding of the needs and priorities of administrative and support staff across diverse units.

In my current role as Executive Director of University Corporate and Foundation Relations, I partner closely with faculty, staff, and senior administrators across the University to advance Columbia's research and strategic priorities. Throughout my career, I have supported the full lifecycle of research and scholarly activity while also contributing to faculty development through workshops, and tools that help faculty navigate complex funding environments. I am equally committed to strengthening collaboration, knowledge sharing, and professional development opportunities for staff across the University.

I would bring to the University Senate a collaborative, cross-University perspective, a strong record of partnership with faculty and administration, and a commitment to advocating for the interests of administrative and support staff, particularly in areas such as professional development, equitable access to benefits, and a supportive workplace environment.



Susan Lee
Senior Director of Event Management
School of International & Public Affairs

As a representative of the School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA), as well as administrators and staff across Columbia University, I am honored to be a nominee for the University Senate position for the 2026–28 session. I have had the pleasure of working at SIPA for the past four years under the leadership of Dean Keren Yarhi-Milo, and I will be joining the Dean’s Administrative Council, which launches this year. I am also actively involved in SIPA’s Belonging and Engagement Committee. I believe that administrators are the backbone of the University and work tirelessly behind the scenes to support our incredible students and faculty. I want to continue to advocate for the staff and administrators across campus through the University Senate.

In my current role as the Senior Director of Event Management, I am fortunate to work with many administrators, staff, and students from SIPA and across the University. Through my work, I see the value in having diverse perspectives working towards a common goal in respecting each other’s different viewpoints. Vote for Susan G. Lee to encourage and advocate for our shared goals.



Vishal Manve
Project Coordinator
Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory

"Despite everything, I believe that people are still good at heart." This enduring sentiment from Anne Frank drives my decision to seek the Lamont Administrative & Supporting Staff seat on the University Senate. I fundamentally believe in our inherent worth, our capacity for purpose, and the vital importance of our voices being heard within this institution.

Having served in the Senate previously, I understand what shared governance can achieve at its best: a space where deliberation is genuine, representation is meaningful, and policy reflects the lived experiences of the community it affects. I am ready to contribute from day one.

At LDEO, I work alongside researchers and administrators tackling global challenges, from climate science to environmental policy. At a moment when academic institutions and scientific research face increasing funding pressures, the work happening at Lamont must have a clear, influential voice within Columbia's governance structures.

My background in journalism and global reporting equips me to bridge that gap—translating Senate discussions into accessible communication for our community while ensuring that Lamont's perspectives inform conversations on benefits, workplace policies, and priorities. Columbia stands at a critical transition. I hope to strengthen communication and ensure that our shared governance works as it should.



Jinny Prais

Associate Director, Institute of African Studies

Adjunct Assistant Professor, Department of Middle Eastern, South Asian, and African Studies

I am running for the University Senate to represent the Morningside and Lamont Officers of the Administration and Supporting Staff. As Associate Director of the Institute of African Studies, I am managing staffing vacancies and dwindling resources. What is happening at regional institutes is one indicator of what departments and units across the university are facing.

With over 15 years at Columbia, I bring experience across administration, teaching, advising, and fundraising. Teaching alongside administrative responsibilities has required me to navigate the needs and priorities of faculty, students, and administrative staff on a daily basis, and gives me firsthand experience of contingent work at Columbia.

I have used many of the benefits and resources that officers and supporting staff rely on, and I have assisted colleagues through work/life challenges that have required engagement with university administrative structures.

I want to use this seat to advocate for our constituency on the full range of issues we face, from immediate budgetary and staffing decisions to benefits covering time off, dependent care, medical, mental health, and work/life balance. I will advocate for transparent communication during the restructuring and for a senate that hears directly from those living these changes on the ground.



Annapurna Schreiber
Coordinator
South Asia Institute

I am Annapurna Potluri Schreiber, and I have been a Columbia employee for over 15 years as an administrator at the South Asia Institute. I seek to join the University Senate to best represent the concerns and ideas of support and administrative staff at the University Senate. As the University recovers from a difficult period in its history, I am eager to be part of a Senate that is responsive to employee and student concerns. As an admin, I have been involved with all levels of the community: faculty, administration at the highest levels, adjunct professors, researchers, and both graduate and undergraduate students. I am a mother of two, and the co-president of my kids' school's Parents Association, so I also work within the wider community and with local politicians in Harlem-Morningside on areas related to children's wellbeing, neighborhood safety and quality of life. I was previously the head of my children's preschool Parent Board, and part of the Local 2110 negotiating committee. I have a BA from NYU in comp lit linguistics, and an MPhil from the University of Cambridge in theoretical linguistics, and I am writing my second novel in my time off.



Daniel Steinbach
Director of Operations
Columbia Dining

As Director of Operations in John Jay Dining Hall, I work on the front lines of student life every day. I'm not removed from the experience - I'm actively in it. I interact with students in real time, understand their feedback, and see firsthand what works and what doesn't. Whether it's managing the unit, responding to concerns, or improving services, my work style is rooted in listening and then action.

Food service isn't just about the meals; it's about creating a space of community, accessibility, and well-being for our students. It's about building relations and trust with them through consistent presence.

As a Senate candidate, I would bring that same grounded perspective by advocating policies that reflect the real needs of both students and staff, and not just assuming what's best for them. I know how to turn feedback into action and am committed to making Columbia a place where every student feels heard, supported, and valued.



Alyssa Timin

Managing Editor, Journal of Philosophy
Office of the Provost

My name is Alyssa Timin. I've been Managing Editor of The Journal of Philosophy since 2010. I've lived in Upper Manhattan for almost 20 years and have made my family here.

I volunteer to serve in the University Senate in the civic spirit of former Senator and Managing Editor Leigh S. Cauman (1917-2015), who spoke up "for those who had no voice, often against rather formidable opponents."* Likewise, I volunteer to serve in the memory of Justus Buchler (1914-1991), former Book Editor at The Journal of Philosophy, Vice Chairman of the National Academic Freedom Committee of the ACLU, and 1973 awardee of Columbia University Butler Silver Metal.

If elected, I'll advocate strenuously for the interests of Morningside and Lamont Officers of the Administration and Supporting Staff. Naturally, I view our constituents' voices and interests as integral to the well-being and continued flourishing of our community as a whole, as well as to the realization of the promise of shared governance.

* "IN MEMORIAM: LEIGH S. CAUMAN." *The Journal of Philosophy* 112, no. 6 (2015): 335–36. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43820912>.



Contina Walter
Human Resources Representative
Facilities & Operations

My name is Contina Walter, and I am an experienced Human Resources professional with over 20 years of administrative experience supporting organizational operations, leadership, and employee needs. I have been employed at Columbia University since 2017, where I currently serve as a Human Resources Representative and support staff member with Local 2110.

Throughout my career, I have worked effectively with diverse teams and managed complex administrative functions with professionalism, care, and attention to detail. In my current role, I support a wide range of human resources functions, including employee relations, administrative processes, documentation, and coordination with management and union representatives. I am known for being dependable, organized, and detail-oriented, with a strong commitment to confidentiality, compliance, and respectful workplace practices.

Since 2022, I have been an active member of the Facilities & Operations Belonging and Engagement Steering Committee, where I contribute to initiatives that promote inclusion, engagement, and a strong sense of belonging across the organization.

I am passionate about contributing to a positive, well-structured work environment and remain committed to continuous learning and professional growth in support of organizational goals.



Sara M. Yllescas
Career Placement Officer
Industrial Engineering & Operations Research

As Career Placement Officer for IEOR, I see daily how data, communication, and compassion shape the experience for our students and colleagues. My goal is to bring that connection to the University Senate, ensuring staff priorities and student success move forward together.

Before joining Columbia, I chaired the NJHPG Data and Research Committee, leading data-driven initiatives to address systemic challenges. My previous experience as a UN policy analyst for The Bahamas and with UN Press strengthened my dedication to transparent, evidence-based decision-making.

At Columbia, I have served in student leadership through the Teachers College Senate and the Intercollegiate Governing Council, centering equitable access and inclusion. If elected, I will advocate for clearer communication, fairer benefits, and data-informed policies that better serve both staff and the students who rely on us.

My vision is a Senate that listens actively, thinks boldly, and acts with integrity, building a University where staff and students are not only heard but empowered to lead. Working together, we can move Columbia toward a stronger, more inclusive future for all.