

Agenda for Senate Meeting, Friday, January 26, 2001

Schapiro Engineering Auditorium, 1:15 pm

1. Adoption of the agenda
 2. Adoption of the minutes of December 8, 2000
 3. Report of the President
 4. Report of the Executive Committee chairman
 5. Old business:
 - Report from the subcommittee studying Fathom.com
 6. New business:
 - Report from Prof. Harvey Goldschmid, chairman of the Advisory Committee on Socially Responsible Investing
 - Resolution to Establish an Ad Hoc Committee on Research Staff Affairs (Executive)
 - Resolution to Establish Six New Departments in the Joseph L. Mailman School of Public Health (Education)
 - Resolution to Establish the Institute for Social and Economic Research and Policy (ISERP) (Education)
- University Senate
Proposed: February 23, 2001
Adopted: February 23, 2001

MEETING OF JANUARY 26, 2001

President George Rupp, the chairman, called the Senate to order shortly after 1:15 p.m. in the Schapiro Engineering Auditorium. Forty-six of 87 senators were present during the meeting.

Minutes and agenda: The agenda was adopted as proposed. Sen. Luciano Rebay (Ten., A&S) commented on discussion recorded in the minutes of the December 8, 2000, meeting, but offered no revisions. The minutes were adopted as proposed.

Report of the President: President Rupp made the following points.

- Applications are up again in Columbia College and (somewhat less) in the Engineering School.
- Federal research support for the last quarter was on track to surpass an annual total of \$400 million for the first time. Overall government funding, including state and city support, would reach \$487 million for the year at this pace, or \$65 million more than last year.
- The Keck Foundation has awarded \$1.5 million for Profs. Aron Pinczuk and Horst Sturmer for work in condensed matter physics.
- On January 18, near the end of the Clinton administration, President Rupp signed an agreement with outgoing U.S. Secretary of Energy Bill Richardson at Biosphere 2 in Oracle, AZ, that will assure the center's future as a national user facility for earth system science and education. Secretary Richardson said his successor in the Bush administration, Spencer Abraham, supports the agreement.
- Gov. Pataki's current state budget includes major cuts in Bundy aid, the main source of public support for students in private colleges. The cuts would mean a 40 percent reduction of Columbia's allocation of this aid, but an aggressive lobbying has provided reason for cautious optimism that the cuts will be restored.

In response to a question from Sen. Alex Oberweger (Stu., Bus.), the President spoke briefly about former vice president Al Gore's new role on the Journalism School faculty.

Sen. Allison McDermott (Stu., SW) read a statement on behalf of her constituents, expressing disappointment that ten weeks into what was to have been a six-week moratorium on construction of a new Social Work building on 113th Street, the administration still has no concrete recommendations. The statement acknowledged the complexity of the political and financial problems the University faces in this case, but declared dissatisfaction that students and others at Social Work have had no direct communication from administrators about the status of the project. Sen. McDermott expressed concern about some of the development plans now under consideration, and hoped that educational quality will be the paramount priority in any resolution, as it should be at an institution like Columbia. She said that the more than 600 Social Work who provide vital outreach to the New York City community through their field work now feel disenfranchised. While they recognize the University's efforts to find a solution during the moratorium, they remain disappointed that these efforts came *after* a groundbreaking ceremony for a new building in the fall and the community's reaction. Sen. McDermott requested frank and timely efforts to address student concerns, with weekly e-mail updates like one President Rupp sent in December. She concluded by asking the President for an update.

President Rupp said the question was reasonable, but regretted that he had no news yet. He said a number of alternative plans are under consideration. He said the problems Sen. McDermott mentioned have become more difficult because a major bequest expected by the Social Work School for its building plan has not matured. He said the Dean of Social Work is up to date on deliberations, but it is premature to say much more publicly.

Sen. Rohit Aggarwala (Stu., A&S) asked the President to comment on a report in that day's *Financial Times* that the Worker Rights Consortium has identified a factory in Mexico that is violating the group's anti-sweatshop code. The President said that he was not aware of the report, but that it might fit an overall WRC approach of relying, in the absence of sufficient resources to support regular monitoring, on spot checks of factories in areas where the group already has contacts. Sen. Eugene Litwak (Ten., A&S), chair of External Relations, said his committee will look into the report.

Report of the Executive Committee chairman: Sen. Paul Duby (Ten., SEAS) said the Executive Committee on January 19, 2001, had made preparations for two meetings with Trustees on February 13. The first, involving the whole Senate committee and a few members of the Trustees' executive committee, will address two issues of community concern: online learning and the University's long-term space needs. The second meeting will bring together the Trustee-nominating subcommittees of the two executive committees, to discuss nominees that the two groups have submitted for the position of Senate-consulted Trustee.

The Executive Committee also agreed to set up a new committee that will focus not only on Fathom.com but on the long-term implications of online learning. Sen. Duby urged senators to

participate fully in discussion of these issues later in the meeting, to give the Executive Committee as much guidance as possible in setting up the new group.

In addition to the other agenda items that it approved for the present meeting, the Executive Committee continued an earlier discussion about how to improve procedures for selecting honorary degree recipients; received permission from the Provost for student senators to send global e-mail messages to their constituents; and discussed questions raised by student members about distinctions among centers, institutes, and departments, including the question of which academic units can hire faculty.

Finally, Sen. Duby said, the tenured members of the committee met at the end of the January 19, 2001, meeting to review recommendations from the Provost to appoint three new University Professors. A public announcement must await Trustee approval.

Sen. Frances Pritchett (Ten., A&S) asked if any Senate group is studying the status of teaching assistants at Columbia. The chairman said there is no such inquiry now. He suggested graduate student members of the student caucus could work with the subcommittee of the faculty caucuses on salary equity that Sen. Pritchett is chairing.

Sen. David Cohen, Vice President for Arts and Sciences, said the Provost has convened a group on the needs of TAs that is meeting productively with leaders of the Graduate Student Advisory Council in the Arts and Sciences, and has successfully addressed some issues GSAC raised last spring, including stipend levels. The Provost has been trying to set up similar efforts for other graduate programs.

Old business:

Report from the subcommittee studying Fathom.com: Co-chair Richard Bulliet (Ten., A&S) said the subcommittee began its inquiry early last fall with the premise that Fathom, as the most visible of Columbia's numerous initiatives in online learning, should occupy its attention first.

He said Provost Jonathan Cole and Executive Vice Provost Michael Crow have been helpful in answering questions about Fathom, a for-profit corporation owned by Columbia. Since last spring, the University has invested \$10 million in Fathom, plus \$8.7 million to acquire the operating platform, which is licensed to Fathom. The administrators candidly said that Fathom's business plan was in flux. A precise strategy for making the venture self-sustaining without an infusion of Columbia resources was never laid out. There has been considerable skepticism about the idea that advertising revenues and the sale of books and online learning in connection with the presentation of free content could support Fathom. These questions may have figured in decisions made in the last two weeks to reduce the rate of investment in Fathom, closing the marketing operation and restructuring production. Columbia is now committing \$5 million to the project for each of the next two years, to hold a place on the internet, with the hope that the Fathom partners can distribute new content to 20,000 paying customers. With the marketing department disbanded, the target audience will be the aggregate alumni population of the Fathom partners, perhaps two million strong.

The new content to be distributed will not be the free material provided by Fathom so far, but new “e-courses”: 5-to-10-hour educational “packets” providing no credit toward any degree. Nevertheless, the subcommittee, and all faculty, are uneasy about the academic implications of this use of the word “course.” The new offerings will be available free to anyone with a Columbia Unix account, but off-campus audiences will pay for them.

Sen. Bulliet said starting Fathom without having courses ready might be considered putting the cart before the horse. On the other hand, institutions that have developed courses with no distribution arrangement might be said to have the horse but no cart. Sen. Bulliet said he could not judge whether \$5 million a year is too much or too little to spend to hold this place on the internet. But it is a significant sum, which will be used to sustain the site, and maintain working arrangements among the Fathom partners.

Sen. Bulliet referred to the January 26, 2001, *University Record* to describe the reconfiguration of Columbia’s online initiatives now under way. Part of the Fathom production staff has reapplied for jobs with Columbia Interactive, a new internal unit that will develop the e-courses. Its director is Kate Wittenberg, former editor-in-chief of Columbia University Press, who also heads the Electronic Publications Initiative at Columbia (EPIC). Sen. Bulliet said Ms. Wittenberg, an outstanding person to be taking on this role, will be pleased to work with faculty in general and in particular with any new Senate committee.

Here the President added that Ms. Wittenberg has been closely involved in the development of two award-winning web sites that have secured foundation support and are now self-sustaining: Columbia International Affairs Online (CIAO) and Earthscape.

Sen. Bulliet said that with the present change in direction, Fathom.com will recede into the background, and the Fathom subcommittee is coming to the end of its work. But it is all the more important to create a new committee, probably at the February Senate meeting, to focus on the new courses. In the years to come, he concluded, online learning will affect many parts of the University. The School of Engineering already offers degrees entirely by distance learning, and a whole range of new initiatives is in the works. It is vital for the Senate to develop a conspectus of all this activity, to see if it fits together into a worthwhile enterprise that can also bring in revenue for the University.

Sen. Gordon Christopher (Stu., SEAS) asked if the other Fathom partners will put money into Fathom in the next two years and contribute to the effort to develop e-courses. Executive Vice Provost Michael Crow said Columbia has not wanted to take cash from its Fathom partners, because that would complicate the ownership model. Instead, they are pledging contributions in the form of promissory notes, and have committed to contribute e-courses.

Dr. Crow also offered a clarification: Fathom is not moving away from free content, but is looking for ways to produce it at a lower cost, while the University has committed to producing more e-courses (or “e-seminars” or “knowledge modules” or “e-learning experiences”). Of the five that have been produced so far, Prof. Manning Marable’s offering on W. E. B. DuBois is the most highly developed.

Sen. Eugene Litwak (Ten., A&S) suggested that an inquiry into online learning may fall under the mandate of the Education Committee. Sen. Bulliet said online learning may be a bigger issue than an already busy committee like Education can take on by itself. He added that different constituencies may also be involved.

Sen. Letty Moss-Salentijn, chair of Education, said the committee has seats for students and an alumnus, two groups with a particular interest in online learning. But she added that the high level of interest in this particular issue makes it necessary not to confine the membership of the new group to Education.

In response to a question from Sen. Fran Pritchett (Ten., A&S), Sen. Bulliet said that the Center for New Media Teaching and Learning will continue with its present work. Dr. Crow added that a review of the Center may take place within the year. President Rupp said interaction among the various online initiatives is sometimes unpredictable. For example, the New Media Center, designed to enhance the online presentation of Columbia's curriculum internally, may provide innovations in course development that will benefit outside constituencies as well.

New business:

[Report from Prof. Harvey Goldschmid, chairman of the Advisory Committee on Socially Responsible Investing.](#) Prof. Goldschmid said the Trustees approved the creation of the committee in March 2000, with a mandate to "advise the University Trustees on ethical and social issues that arise in the management of the University's endowment." He understood the mandate to allow some latitude in the committee's work, including topics like screening (both positive and negative) of corporations to invest in. The most important focus so far has been on shareholder proposals. The twelve-member committee (four faculty, four students, and four alumni) has worked hard and cooperatively this year, consulting the literature on shareholder responsibility, proposals submitted last year, and a number of experts. There were also two open hearings in the fall. [In Room 211, Low Library, is a listing of the shares of publicly traded domestic and foreign corporations held directly by the University's endowment of 12/31/99.]

The focus this year will be, first, on environmental proposals from shareholders, addressing PCBs, dioxins, and global warming, as well as biotechnology and gene issues and the CERES principles, a set of guidelines on environmental quality for corporations. The second focus is on labor issues, including International Labor Organization standards on collective bargaining and working conditions. These two sets of issues may draw more than 100 shareholder resolutions this proxy season, between late February till and June.

The committee will also consider shareholder proposals on two other issues: diversity in race and gender on corporate boards, and board independence from company managers. The committee cannot guarantee that it will study every proposal in all four areas.

The committee is working on liaison arrangements with a Trustee subcommittee that will decide on the recommendations on shareholder proposals. Prof. Goldschmid hoped to report to the Senate again in April on how it has handled shareholder proposals to that point. It will finish that work in May or June, and will file a final report for the year in the late summer or fall.

Sen. Oberweger asked if the committee has made any divestment recommendations. Prof. Goldschmid said the committee will only begin thinking about screening techniques, of which divestment is the most dramatic, during the summer. The first sector the committee would have considered for divestment first is tobacco, but the Trustees beat them to it: Columbia owns no stock in tobacco companies.

Sen. Bulliet asked if the committee has considered Columbia's investments in companies that have given money to the University. For example, questions have been raised about investing in Exxon-Mobil, a corporation which recently gave Columbia \$1.5 million.

Prof. Goldschmid said the committee has not considered this question, though it has discussed rules for handling possible conflicts of interest, both for the University and for committee members. He said the committee has focused on the endowment, not on gifts. He said he is not sure the President is prepared to turn any corporate gifts down.

Sen. Bulliet asked about gifts from tobacco companies.

President Rupp said the University is not the only party that can choose its gifts: if Columbia votes consistently in favor of shareholder proposals hostile to the management of Exxon-Mobil, it is less likely to receive another \$1.5 million gift from the corporation.

Prof. Goldschmid said the committee will not consider such possible consequences in making its recommendations, though the Trustees and the President may.

Sen. Pritchett asked if there can be concerted action with like-minded groups on shareholder proposals, as in the campaign against sweatshops. Prof. Goldschmid said shareholder resolutions are often collaborative efforts, from labor unions or universities or other groups. This spring the committee will focus on the voting process; in the summer it will consider whether Columbia should play a more active role at times.

President Rupp noted that Columbia has studied related initiatives at sister institutions, to see what works and what doesn't. Prof. Goldschmid said the committee knows how those institutions voted last year on proposals likely to come up again this year.

Sen. Oberweger asked if the committee is actually lobbied by activist groups.

Prof. Goldschmid said the 1934 Securities Act allows any investor who has held shares in a company for a year to submit proposals of 500 words or less, which the company must circulate to all shareholders. No one lobbies the Columbia committee. Instead, it reads the proposal and an opposing statement from management, as well as assessments by the Investor Responsibility Research Center, a neutral evaluation group the University uses. It may also consult members of the Columbia community, particularly experts on scientific or other issues. Then the committee makes a recommendation.

The President said Prof. Goldschmid's experience as a senior official in the Securities and Exchange Commission makes him uniquely qualified for the complex job of leading this committee, and he thanked him again for taking it on.

Resolution to Establish an Ad Hoc Committee on Research Staff Affairs (Executive): Sen. Stephanie Neuman (Res. Stf.) said Columbia's 1100 researchers need such a committee because they have only two voting Senate representatives and six committee seats, in contrast to the University's 900 tenured faculty, which has 45 Senate seats and more than 60 designated committee seats. One concern expressed at two meetings of researchers last fall is that they are sometimes at a disadvantage in seeking funding for their projects. A study of research titles at sister institutions is under way. Sen. Neuman hoped to attract researchers to the committee, but was not optimistic, partly because they are on soft money and on deadlines, with little time for other activities.

In response to a question from Sen. Neuman, the President said that government funding of Columbia research, which now totals \$487 million, makes up somewhat less than a third of Columbia's current operating budget of \$1.75 billion.

The Senate then approved the resolution without dissent.

Resolution to Establish Six New Departments in the School of Public Health (Education): Sen. Letty Moss-Salentijn (Ten., SDOS) said the resolution is an outgrowth of the creation of autonomous faculties a year ago for Nursing and Public Health.

At her invitation Andrew Davidson, Vice Dean of the School of Public Health, outlined the proposal. He said the school now has no departments and six divisions, which have really functioned as departments for the past 15 years: each represents a recognized area of scholarly inquiry, sets its own instructional course, and runs its own budget. Dean Davidson said the school faculty strongly supports the proposal. He added that Columbia is along among the top schools of public health in this country in lacking its own departments, and that it now clearly has the resources to run them, with 180 full-time faculty members, 750 graduate students, and an annual budget of about \$75 million. The smallest of the six proposed departments has 17 full-time faculty, with 80 graduate students; the largest, 48 faculty and more than 200 graduate students.

Sen. Frank Lichtenberg (Ten., Bus.) asked what the School will gain by the change. Dean Davidson said recruits in the last three searches all objected to being directors of divisions rather than departments, as they would be at other leading schools.

The Senate approved the resolution without dissent.

Resolution to Establish the Institute for Social and Economic Research and Policy (ISERP) (Education): Sen. Moss-Salentijn said the proposed institute, a new version of the Institute for Social and Economic Theory and Research (ISETR), brings together many research initiatives and is well-funded.

Sen. Pritchett asked if the proposal primarily calls for a name change, and if so, why. Sen. Moss-Salentijn said the present institute is also larger and more complex than its predecessor. Sen. Sharyn O'Halloran (Ten., A&S) said the new name reflects a larger emphasis on policy in the new institute.

Sen. David Cohen said that in 1996 the Arts and Sciences faculty Academic Review Committee looked at the institute's forerunner, the Center for the Social Sciences, and concluded that it was not functioning effectively. The new unit, recast as an institute, with new leadership recruited from the outside, is now thriving. The reason policy was not formerly in the name (and mandate) of the institute was a fear that it would encroach on the policy orientation of the School of International and Public Affairs. When it became clear that the institute could function harmoniously with SIPA faculty and programs, the change was in order.

Sen. Roosevelt Montas (Stu., GSAS/Hum) was troubled that the Senate approves the establishment of institutes and centers without defining these units. He called for Senate discussion of this issue soon. Sen. Moss-Salentijn shared his concern, but pointed out that the Senate approves only institutes and not centers, for reasons that require clarification.

The Senate approved the resolution without dissent.

The President adjourned the meeting at around 2:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Tom Mathewson, Senate staff