

Minutes of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences Meeting

April 27, 2011

Faculty Record

Teodolinda Barolini, Da Ponte Professor of Italian and Chair of the Policy Planning Committee (PPC) convened the meeting at 12:13pm. Professor Barolini announced that the meeting would be dedicated to a discussion of the proposal by the Provost's Task Force on University Benefits. She explained that PPC had heard many concerns from the faculty regarding the real diminishment of benefits in a time of years of stagnant salaries, while rents in Columbia University housing and health care costs continued to rise steeply. Faculty point out that the evisceration of our benefits has a different impact on Arts and Sciences from other schools in the University, and that this impact negatively affects the quality of life of faculty and their families. She introduced Executive Vice President Nicholas B. Dirks at 12:13.

Executive Vice President Nicholas Dirks reiterated some of the points from the previous faculty meeting, in which he had spoken about the McKinsey and Co. report on the Arts and Sciences. Arts and Sciences at Columbia University:

1. Does more with far fewer resources than do our peers
2. Is at the low end of our peers in terms of budget
3. Provides essential central services for departments, and will continue to evaluate staffing models in order to be more efficient and more productive
4. Ranks well below the highest group of our peers in terms of faculty compensation, which also does not take into account the challenges of living in NYC
5. Is constrained by its facilities, which also need renovation and repair

He reported that Arts and Sciences is reliant on new revenues, has held faculty size constant over the last three years, and has established a raise pool for less-compensated faculty and a 2% raise for the rest. EVP Dirks then introduced new deanial appointments in the Arts and Sciences, Geraldine Downey (Dept of Psychology) for the Social Sciences, Pierre Force (French) for the Humanities, and Amber Miller (Physics) for the Sciences.

He finished by turning the floor over to President Bollinger, who would answer questions about the context and meaning of the elements of the proposed revisions to the benefits package.

President Lee C. Bollinger took the floor at 12:27, and provided a financial overview of where the University currently stands. Manhattanville represents the future of the University, and its construction solves the problem of lack of space that has held the University back in recent years. With 18 acres and a planned 7 million square feet of additional university buildings, the challenge right now is to sort out the short term, medium term, and long term uses of the new space. He announced numerous gifts by generous alumni, including for a conference center and a new Business School. What this means for A&S specifically is that the space that currently houses the Business School, Uris, will offer 200,000 square feet to our departments, centers, and institutes. The President summed up where things stand with our capital campaign, the second largest in the nation after Stanford: we have passed the 4 billion dollar mark, and the return on

our endowment is excellent. The Global Centers around the world exist exclusively for the work of faculty and students. Rather than invest in a single campus somewhere else in the world, the Global Centers allow for Columbia's significant engagement with many parts of the world.

The President opened the floor to questions and comments. The first questioner asked why, if there is so much good financial news, there must be such drastic cuts to our benefits. The President explained that the cost of benefits had gone out of control, and that, in order to do the things we need to do as a great university, there were "enormous trade-offs." Several faculty expressed concern about the narrow window of time between the release of the Task Force's proposal and the institution of the changed Benefits package; a sentiment that the present of the University had been sacrificed to the future, leaving the current faculty and students in unacceptable conditions that range from inadequate teaching facilities and resources for students to the quality of life for Arts and Sciences faculty.

The President responded that it was important to him to hear the faculty express their views. He went on to say that in his first couple of years at Columbia, space was the issue that everyone brought up, and that investing in space had to be the priority. It is not "space for space's sake," but essential to the greatness of this University. Nevertheless, the enhancement of teaching and research of Arts and Sciences has been at the center of his thinking. Several faculty made statements about the downgrading and erosion of the quality of life for Arts and Sciences faculty members and asked the President to stand up for the Arts and Sciences because we are at a dangerous point in our present and future. Suggesting that he has not been well-served by the report of the Task Force, faculty asked him to reconsider its proposals. The President agreed that we need to step back and go back to the table to consider the implications of the proposal.

At 1:30, Provost Claude Steele took the floor. He asked faculty to consider their concerns in terms of a national context, in which towns and cities were in dire economic straits, and that perhaps the issue was that universities were always the last kind of institution to examine the high costs of their benefits packages. The tough economic times and circumstances within the University led the Task Force to the conclusions they reached. Faculty members then directed additional comments and suggestions to President Bollinger about the ways in which Arts and Sciences faculty can be included in the all-important process of deciding which benefits to adjust and in what ways.

The President reaffirmed that the Task Force would need to step back and reconsider some of the very pressing issues that the faculty had raised during the meeting.

Professor Barolini thanked everyone for attending, and adjourned the meeting at 2:00pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Patricia E. Grieve
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