

 COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
Faculty of Arts and Sciences
Policy and Planning Committee of the Arts & Sciences

May 24, 2014

President Lee C. Bollinger
202 Low Library

Dear Lee,

We, the Policy and Planning Committee of the Arts and Sciences and the Department Chairs of the Arts and Sciences, are writing to follow up on the issues raised during the A&S faculty meeting of May 7, and in many conversations among faculty in the days that followed. The large turnout at this meeting and the urgency expressed in questions raised by members of all three divisions of the faculty reflect the sentiments of the faculty as a whole.

In light of that conversation, we urge you to take action on three fronts: 1. to place a high priority on increasing the endowment of the Arts and Sciences; 2. to put in place effective guarantees that major university-level fundraising initiatives will serve the needs of Arts and Sciences; and 3. to authorize immediate, substantial financial support so that the Arts and Sciences can embark on effective fundraising from a position of strength.

We have been dismayed by a shift in administrative rhetoric and practice over the last decade, in which the Arts and Sciences has been treated as equivalent in its needs and realities to any of Columbia's other constituent schools. To the contrary, the Arts and Sciences is the core of the university, and cannot be regarded as a school like any other. In fact it is not a school, but a faculty responsible for a collection of schools, with a unique mission that places us under unique financial burdens.

We are the carriers of the university's social values: we express its commitment to diversity through our generous financial aid policies; we express its commitment to intimate and demanding undergraduate education through small classes and in our Core Curriculum, which distinguishes us from our peers; we support a world-class graduate school that trains the next generation of scholars; and we add reputational luster to the university through our extraordinary basic research pursuits. We assume these responsibilities and discharge them with pride.

But these are expensive obligations. They require considerable investments and support that are not captured by the rhetoric of boats bobbing along on their own bottoms. In fact, key parts of our budget—tuition and financial aid most notably—are determined by central administration policy and not by our own decisions. This arrangement can be successful only if we are seen as the beating heart of Columbia, as the part of our collective enterprise without which the whole does not make any sense, and supported accordingly.

Unfortunately, these obligations cannot be fulfilled given present levels of support. The most visible manifestation of this problem is the current crisis in the natural sciences, but its effects are felt everywhere. In the natural sciences, the roots of the crisis go back at least a decade. While the central administration's recent help with a number of high profile retentions has provided some relief, this kind of crisis assistance is extraordinarily expensive and inefficient, and does not create a stable, sustainable

basis for operations as we go forward. We can no longer afford to allow our infrastructure and programs to atrophy in this way.

The problems we face are not new. They are cumulative, compounded over many years of forced neglect and ad hoc crisis management. With its severely constrained budget, the Arts and Sciences has not been able to formulate, let alone implement, a sustainable plan. If we are to avoid what at present looks like an uncertain future for the Arts and Sciences, we need a stronger foundation composed of both endowment and reliable current use revenue streams. Leadership is needed to help us achieve three objectives:

First, a key element in any plan to sustain the competitiveness of the Arts and Sciences in the years to come should be a significant enlargement of its endowment. In order to guarantee that future—as well as to sustain basic A&S operations in the present—it is in the interest of the entire university to earmark proceeds from the recently concluded capital campaign to supplement the A&S endowment. This goal should be prioritized in the next campaign as well.

Second, we see considerable potential to link problem-centered central university fundraising initiatives on such themes as personalized medicine and global policy issues to the basic research done by A&S faculty. It is important, however, to make sure that such centralized fundraising efforts are conceived and implemented in a way that is strongly inclusive of Arts and Sciences and takes into account the full range of our needs. After all, the reason to do applied work in a university setting is the opportunity to anchor such work in deep knowledge and rigorous scholarship of the kind that A&S faculty can provide.

But A&S fundraising cannot proceed mainly from university-level initiatives. The Arts and Sciences is in the process of developing its own fundraising initiatives to support our basic research and other core activities. We consider the Science Initiative, which resulted from a process of extensive consultation with science departments and their faculty, to be a model of how to develop an intellectually strong set of proposals that serve the Arts and Sciences' essential needs. Similar conversations will soon be moving forward in the humanities and social sciences, leading to initiatives on a range of lively themes that should attract donor interest and contribute to the vitality of our research and teaching.

If these efforts are to succeed, they will require the full, active leadership of the central administration. As you told us at the May 7 faculty meeting, donors often feel that they lack the knowledge to make informed decisions about which academic projects to support. They need to be educated about the value of a wide range of basic scholarship. As President, you are uniquely positioned to accomplish this.

Third, we are ready and willing to fully support efforts to raise additional funds for the Arts and Sciences, but due to the accumulation of problems that currently face us, we will require budgetary assistance to sustain our basic operations until fundraising starts taking effect. No one will want to donate to unstable academic programs whose prestige is endangered by neglect.

Your willingness to engage the Arts and Sciences faculty on these issues is encouraging. We look forward to the opportunity to undertake concrete measures that will allow us to carry out our mission and justify our claim to be a peer of the greatest institutions of higher learning in the world.

Sincerely,

Faculty members of PPC:

Yinon Cohen, Chair of Sociology
Nicholas Dames, Chair of English and Comparative Literature
E. Valentine Daniel

Robert Friedman
Shahid Naeem, Vice Chair and Chair-Elect of PPC
Frits Paerels, Chair of Astronomy
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Elizabeth A. Povinelli
Chair, Anthropology

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Chair, Biological Sciences

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Deborah Steiner
Chair, Classics

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Peter B. deMenocal
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Chair, Italian

Jesus D. Rodriguez-Velasco
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Giuseppe Gerbino,
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