

## URIS VISION DOCUMENT

DRAFT 1/28/19

### **PREAMBLE**

The upcoming transfer of Uris Hall to Arts and Sciences in 2023 provides a unique opportunity to re-imagine the intellectual aspirations of the school and to re-think some of the central ways in which teaching and learning will be conducted in the twenty-first century. Uris is advantageously situated within the geography of the central campus. Located in the direct line that leads from Butler Library to Low Library to the northern reaches of the central campus, the building is strategically positioned to become an exciting intellectual hub drawing together students and faculty, promoting educational **innovation** and **community**, and amplifying the public **impact** of our teaching, learning, and research.

From the beginning the Uris Vision Committee has seen Uris as an opportunity--not just to solve problems of over-crowding elsewhere on campus or to replicate the kinds of teaching, learning, and research spaces already available--but rather to rethink how we conduct our teaching and scholarship by facilitating emerging, often collaborative, research projects and cutting-edge ways of teaching, learning, and disseminating knowledge. In pursuit of those goals, the Committee urges that wherever possible space in Uris be viewed as public and shared, rather than private and sequestered; that rooms serve many purposes, rather than just one; that space be reconfigurable rather than fixed; and that intelligent adjacencies be integrated at every opportunity. It should serve the intellectual life of students and faculty, keeping administrative offices to an absolute minimum. The vision is of an environmentally-friendly green building that has been decluttered, opened to the light and to the world, and designed to support twenty-first century intellectual work. Such work requires new kinds of teaching and learning spaces; library facilities; gallery, exhibition, performance, and maker spaces; and places of public convening and sociality, as well as the ability to connect and communicate seamlessly with the world outside. In what follows the Committee offers a draft blueprint of our vision for the building, moving from the first three base floors, where teaching and learning, public convening, dining, performance, and exhibition activities will be clustered, to the top five tower floors devoted to faculty-driven research. Examples of buildings that approximate the kind of openness and

innovation we desire for Uris include the [Milstein Building](#) at Barnard and the [Vagelos Building](#) at Columbia's Medical center.

Uris alone cannot address the many space needs of the faculty, departments, centers, and institutes that comprise the Arts and Sciences. Doing so will require the development of a comprehensive plan for re-imagining and enhancing the physical structures throughout the Morningside campus. However, as we detail below, some existing units will move into Uris, alleviating space pressures elsewhere, though which units will move and how many are questions this document is not designed to answer. Instead, we were tasked with providing an intellectual vision for the building, outlining in the process some of the principles that could guide the eventual selection process. Much of our attention, however, has been directed toward the needs of those faculty and units who will *not* find a permanent home in Uris but who will, we believe, be drawn into Uris by the possibilities it will offer for innovative teaching, research, and collaboration. Shared access to its forward-looking facilities—from flexible classrooms to spaces designed for interdisciplinary projects, sociality, and assembly—is key to the building's role in the future intellectual life of the Arts and Sciences as a whole. In regard to our larger space problem, besides space freed up by whole units moving to Uris, we envision that certain collaborative research activities there will also draw faculty away from their departmental homes for varying lengths of time, further increasing the pockets of space that will open across the campus to address pressing needs.

### **The Base: Floors One through Three**

The **first floor** of the base should provide an inviting and open entry to the building and signal the activities that will occur there by means of attractive signage and display cases. An initial architectural rendering of a possible [new entry and front for the building](#), although preliminary, shows one of the many ways in which Uris could be opened to the world and informal meeting space increased. If the façade were removed and replaced with materials providing greater access to natural light, the feel of the entire building would be changed. Beyond that enhanced entrance, the first floor—many of its private offices simply stripped away—could become in part a student-faculty commons. Such a commons would strengthen the sense of community and help foster interactions between students and faculty. Anchoring this floor would be a re-designed Watson Library featuring at its center a new digital hub to support

the teaching and learning activities of the Arts and Sciences' faculty and students. No longer just depositories for books and archival collections, the Columbia Libraries manage untold numbers of digital holdings; they store and archive faculty-generated data; they offer instruction in the use of the many digital tools and resources that undergird the research life of the modern research university. For several years the Libraries have been working on a plan to create a digital hub to consolidate many of the teaching functions and the cutting-edge equipment now scattered across a variety of sites. In the Watson digital hub, students (and faculty) would learn from library specialists how to use 3-D printers; how to use global mapping tools; how to manipulate, store, and securely preserve enormous quantities of data (from census data to the corpus of 18<sup>th</sup> century novels in French), and how to initiate and execute programs in the digital humanities, social science, and sciences that connect the academy to the world beyond. While preserving a significant number of study seats for Arts and Sciences and SEAS students in order to relieve the pressure for space occurring in nearly every library on campus, the digital hub would also provide teaching rooms and collaborative work spaces equipped to support twenty-first century intellectual work. Walls and corridors designed for the display of the work produced in these sites and elsewhere in the building would enhance its function as a place where public-facing work is exhibited to visitors and to the rest of the academic community.

The Uris Vision Committee urges that a key principle organizing the building should be that of intelligent adjacencies, leveraging the impact of individual units by promoting conversations and interactions across several. It might be exciting, for example, to put Columbia's Teaching and Learning Center adjacent to the re-designed Watson since students and faculty would use both heavily, and their purposes are complementary but distinct. This is an arrangement found at other schools, such as in the new Milstein building at Barnard and the [Wilmeth Active Learning Center at Purdue](#). Columbia University's Writing Center, which supports student writers at every stage of their careers from freshmen to postdocs, might offer a further effective adjacency, encouraging these centers to engage with one another and underscoring the Arts and Sciences' commitment to pedagogical innovation and the successful mastery of many kinds of crucial intellectual competencies. Such adjacencies might extend to a small, flexible performance space where students, in particular, could practice and perform movement and musical skills.

Also essential to the ground floor of the building would be attractive café and dining options. The Morningside campus is a food desert. Tiny cafes with inadequate seating, some of them closed to undergraduates, like Nous Café in Philosophy Hall, are the main venues where faculty and students can share a meal or grab-and-go. Expanding and improving the Uris Cafeteria, preserving table seating and natural light, with the addition of a few side rooms that could be reserved for faculty-student lunches, would encourage informal meetings and conversation outside the classroom and across disciplines. Uris's central location, at the heart of the main campus, makes it an ideal site for such a facility. A smaller coffee and sandwich stand in the front extension of the first floor could provide students and faculty with a quicker option if desired.

In short, the ground floor of Uris should be designed as a space that would serve the emerging teaching-learning needs of faculty and students in the Arts and Sciences and a place for the kinds of collegial socializing that are so essential to vibrant intellectual life.

**The second floor** of the base should extend the building's pedagogical function by being devoted largely to teaching activities. Given the severe shortage of classrooms on the Morningside campus, the fact that Uris at present has sixteen classrooms--one holding 117, another 266, and four holding 60 or more students—is potentially transformative. Our most pressing classroom needs are for large *lecture rooms* and for *different kinds* of classrooms: above all, those that do not have seats bolted to the floor but that have movable chairs and tables, smartboards, and collaborative work spaces. In many disciplines the model of a master teacher standing at the front of a room and lecturing while students take notes is being abandoned; instead, many classes, including those in STEM fields, are organized around group projects and active and collaborative learning models. In addition, truly global teaching requires classroom spaces set up with the technical services to allow a class on Morningside to talk to a class in Istanbul or Santiago. Classrooms that accommodate these needs are also rooms that can serve other purposes: in the evening tables and even walls can be reconfigured to allow for meetings of clubs, study and reading groups, political organizing, collaborating with peers at other universities. We imagine that the second floor of Uris, decluttered of its many offices, will be largely given over to such multi-purpose rooms as well as to several large classrooms to meet the continuing need for big lecture spaces. Architectural advice will provide options for imagining

some of these spaces as fixed and some flexible; some open to view and others with greater privacy; but all provided with well-designed lighting, high-quality furnishings, top notch educational technology, and an eye to aesthetics. These should be rooms where one **wants** to teach, learn, and gather. That these rooms will sit atop the Watson Digital Hub and potentially a suite of other teaching and learning services sends a powerful message about the seriousness and commitment with which Arts and Sciences attends to its pedagogical mission.

The **third floor** of the base might be seen as a transitional space between the openness of the first floor, the teaching functions concentrated on the second, and the research activities located in the Tower. Since several of the largest classrooms in the building are presently found on this floor, those might be preserved. However, while floor one focuses primarily but not exclusively on student needs, floor three foregrounds more directly the needs of faculty. This floor should feature a mid-sized conference facility to enable scholarly activity within Arts and Sciences and to make it available to a wider public. Uris can facilitate new ways of working together across boundaries not only by re-assigning specific units to the building on a permanent basis, but by making certain spaces and resources widely available for more general use. Not every small center needs its own conference space, but each center would be better able to enhance its intellectual and public impact if it could have occasional access to a rent-free conference facility centrally located on the Morningside campus: auditoriums with technology allowing off-site participation, reception spaces, small galleries for exhibits, and several breakout rooms. Housed in the same building as a new cafeteria, such a conference facility would revolutionize the possibilities for centers, institutes and departments to mount more ambitious and outward looking programming. Perhaps no single factor more effectively stifles a shared intellectual life in the Arts and Sciences than the paucity of rent-free spaces in which to exercise the power to assemble scholars together to share work in public. Some departments do not even have rooms large enough to hold a faculty meeting of its members. Those departments need access to the meeting rooms that might be designed for this floor. Such shared space, used for the common good, would be of a piece with the building's hosting of re-imagined classrooms and a forward-looking digital hub and innovative teaching and learning facilities. All the spaces on this floor should be designed as multi-purpose facilities, usable for conferences, meetings, or certain kinds of performance.

Depending on how architectural models for the conference center develop, this floor might also accommodate a few carefully selected centers or units that have an established track record of promoting interdisciplinary inquiry and convening workshops, small conferences, and talks that draw together large numbers of scholars from different departments. The conference facility, however, would be designated primarily for the use of the many Arts and Sciences units not housed in the building but having need for such a facility. Clear procedures for signing up for the space and insuring equitable access would be developed and widely disseminated.

### **The Towers: Floors Four Through Eight**

The same principles that drive the use of the first three floors would apply to the five tower floors. Teaching and research units located there or developed especially for this site should look to the future and further collaborative learning, intellectual synergies, and public-facing outcomes understood to include new research models and discoveries, curricular materials, and/or artistic expressions and creations. In short, the towers will be dedicated to the production of emerging knowledge in the many forms practiced within the Arts and Sciences: basic research, patentable discoveries, public policy, poetry, archive creation, new teaching materials, the unearthing of hidden histories, and much more. Much of the current architecture of the Arts and Sciences favors siloed endeavors and puts barriers in the way of collaboration among units that might have fairly easily imagined synergies. The new Uris would invite faculty to transcend both spatial and intellectual silos through physical adjacencies aimed at stimulating new questions and ways of thinking among existing and newly-created academic entities. Research undertaken in the tower spaces should arise from the intellectual aspirations of the faculty. The most ambitious visions for the tower floors would invite the development of endowments to support faculty, students, outside visitors, and postdoctoral fellows. The towers would be topped with one floor dedicated to collaborative short-term projects of a year or a semester that might be incubators for longer-term undertakings or, alternatively, might allow significant work on a particular question to be advanced. The middle and bottom floors would be dedicated, respectively, to longer-term projects and to permanent facilities for interdisciplinary units whose work inherently draws together many members of the Columbia community. Throughout the tower floors attention would be paid to the public dissemination of the work undertaken there and to provoking interactions and conversations among those who temporarily or permanently

inhabit it, whether they are working on a new curriculum, a new book, or an ongoing research project

The intellectual aims of the tower floors would be sustained by a bold renovation aimed at opening all the floors to maximum natural light by the liberal use of glass and other transparent materials to create a mixture of offices, conference rooms, and collaborative work spaces capable of opening to the view of all or of being temporarily enclosed to meet particular needs. At the moment each floor consists of faculty offices lining a central core largely given over to administrative cubicles and crowded work spaces. The effect is claustrophobic and privatizing, the antithesis of an architecture conducive to a vibrant collective intellectual life. In the renovation process, attention should be paid to the development of attractive working environments that allow people to see one another, to work together, and to have access to shared infrastructure from kitchens to small conference rooms to equipment to support staff. Centrally-placed open staircases, such as found in the Pupin Theory Center, might be used to connect one or more floors to encourage collaboration among units. Architects should be asked to generate models showing how to realize this vision most effectively. What follows offers a broad-strokes vision of the kinds of intellectual activity we would like to see exemplified in this flagship building.

The tower floors would be unified under the concept of Emerging Knowledge, but with differentiated entities within that construct. On the top floor would be The Emerging Knowledge Research Center intended to bring together faculty and scholars predominantly from the Arts and Sciences, but as appropriate from Columbia's professional schools or distinguished visitors from outside, to work for a year or a semester on a problem or an idea proposed by a cross-disciplinary group of Columbia faculty. The Center would encourage projects on timely topics understood not only as pressing social issues, such as decarceration, but as conceptual or intellectual problems with cross-field implications, such as the links between empirical and theoretical research across a number of fields, or on ambitious curricular projects. The Center would be a kind of incubator for work that might later be developed in a variety of ways or for bringing certain pieces of work to a conclusion, including syllabi and courses as well as papers and books. Attention would need to be paid to ensuring diversity and inclusivity in regard to the topics and the people selected to work at the Center each year. As with other research centers,

scholars could be relieved of teaching duties for a term or a year and would be expected to be fully present in the Center on a regular basis and to take part in its communal and collaborative life, including the public presentation of the group's work. Unlike at most research centers, however, participants at the Center would be encouraged to think of innovative ways to use the building's capabilities to present work to the public in novel forms including exhibits, performances, digital learning tools, curricular materials, oral histories of the group's work, as well as in papers and roundtables. The Center would serve several purposes. It would encourage and showcase the innovative work of Columbia faculty, advance the careers of promising junior faculty, and promote the retention of excellent senior faculty by providing protected time for research without leaving home and allowing them to work with colleagues outside their customary disciplinary homes.

One or two of the middle floors in the tower would be given over to longer-term, faculty-generated research projects that would engage participants from multiple disciplines on topics at the leading edge of academic inquiry: creating, in effect, Collaboratories for Emerging Knowledge. Research groups of faculty from several departments or units could propose projects with a life-span of multiple years. Ideas identified in the Arts and Sciences strategic plans, such as computation and culture, molecular architecture from molecules to devices, or the nature of the social contract in the twenty-first century, are examples of topics in which faculty have already expressed long-term interest. Participants would dedicate a portion of their time to this collaborative work and could anticipate reduced responsibilities elsewhere. The aim would be to produce high-value research that would attract national attention and position the Arts and Sciences at the forefront of initiatives to break down intellectual silos and accelerate the creation of knowledge on problems and topics of broad consequence. Some topics might be organized under the rubrics of the current capital campaign such as Just Societies and projects solicited under those headings. Some might be designed to make use of Columbia's Global Centers and the possibilities they afford for a globally-inflected research agenda. Most, however, would simply be generated by the ingenuity of the proposers. Proposals could come from any members of the Arts and Sciences' faculty and might include postdoctoral and graduate students in their development and execution, as well as engaging undergraduate students through curriculum and research opportunities. The building would create the conditions under which such collaborative undertakings would thrive, providing well-designed working environments, sophisticated support

for digitally driven research, and spaces for convening larger groups and for displaying and disseminating outcomes in effective and novel ways. Proposals would be evaluated in terms of their ambition and potential to transform intellectual paradigms across disciplines or to produce striking real-world results. The benefits of such work would also be multiple. It would further high-value basic research across disciplinary boundaries and/or promote collaboratively-derived contributions to solving contemporary problems; it would promote the careers of the graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, and junior faculty on the research team; and it would allow senior faculty to invigorate their research through sustained collaborative effort. It also marks the Arts and Sciences as a national leader in the production of emerging knowledge across disciplines.

The lower floors of the towers would be used somewhat differently. Many existing academic units at Columbia already produce multi-disciplinary, boundary-crossing knowledge of the sort we urge should be privileged in the new Uris. Some of these units should be relocated to Uris, but with the express aim of expanding and re-invigorating their efforts by the opportunity to work in close collaboration with expected and unanticipated partners. The new Department of African American and African Diaspora Studies, with its inherently interdisciplinary focus, might anchor one floor of the towers, for example, but would be joined by other units anticipated to create important synergies with its work. These could include entities studying problems of justice, urban life, environmental justice, the built environment; ethnicity, race, and social difference; African studies, oral history, religious culture and public life, gender and sexuality, and many others. Another example of an already existing interdisciplinary center is Columbia's thriving NeuroTechnology Center that draws on a number of centers and institutes in the Arts and Sciences and SEAS. Interesting adjacencies might include units devoted to ethics, science and society, genome engineering, the history of science, invention and innovation, and complex and emergent phenomena in the sciences and beyond. Such co-locations could create community across academic units that have often been stranded in isolated circumstances. Part of the creative process of filling these floors might involve inviting proposals for intelligent and exciting adjacencies that would augment the teaching and research efforts of each unit and enhance the collective impact of them all, while freeing up space in buildings all over campus into which other units could expand.

## **In Closing**

As this general concept for the building moves forward through the Arts and Sciences faculty governance process, more detailed plans for accepting and evaluating proposals for inclusion in Uris can be developed in the second semester, but there should be an overarching commitment to equity in the distribution of resources, including space, across divisional and departmental boundaries. It should be understood that faculty would continue to work with the architects and construction teams as renovations proceed. This is to ensure the creation of spaces that integrate and are responsive to the faculty's needs and priorities.

Ultimate decisions about the exact build-out of individual floors of the building depend in part, of course, on successful fundraising to support the renovations and the research efforts outlined above. We believe that this proposal will offer many attractive opportunities for donors to help realize the vision articulated here. The building itself affords a naming opportunity; elements within the building from the re-imagined Watson Library to the state-of-the-art classrooms to the Collaboratories to the Research Center for Emerging Knowledge all offer other opportunities to support particular aspects of the larger concept. The building would be designed to support the intellectual ambitions of all the faculty and students who teach, study, and do research within the Arts and Sciences construct. It will also benefit other members of the wider Columbia community, especially those on the northern Morningside campus such as SEAS and GSAPP, and the public who will make use of its facilities.

The central location of Uris Hall puts it at the very heart of Columbia: its Arts and Sciences campus. We believe that an ambitious renovation of this crucial structure has the potential to revolutionize the collective life and well-being of the Arts and Sciences. Re-designed to further an inclusive, innovative, and forward-looking academic vision, the building will provide not only much needed space and facilities, but, more importantly, an unprecedented opportunity to support in new ways the intellectual life of faculty and students, fostering community and innovation and heightening the impact of all the extraordinary work done, and to be done, within the Arts and Sciences.

## **Committee Mandate**

The addition of Uris Hall to the Arts and Sciences in 2023 presents a unique opportunity to re-imagine how the Arts and Sciences does research, scholarship, and teaching in the new millennium. Building on the work of the prior Uris Committee, the new committee will develop an academic vision for the Arts and Sciences' use of Uris Hall as a prelude to the future revitalization of the entire Morningside Campus. Specifically, the Committee is charged with exploring how the building may be reconfigured to provide shared infrastructure to support twenty-first century research, teaching, collaboration, and the dissemination of knowledge. Issues that might be considered include: supports for interdisciplinary work, including the possibility of space for working groups focused on shared themes; attention to state-of-the art classrooms and library services and spaces that serve the emerging needs of faculty and students and propel digital learning, collaboration, and innovation; social spaces that foster community; conference facilities open to all Arts and Sciences units; the bringing together of academic units that reflect the intellectual interests of many partners and constituencies. The building will alleviate some existing space needs, but it must do more. It must be designed and populated in a way that helps to realize the best future of the Arts and Sciences.

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