

Letters from the PPC

February 28, 2012

President Lee Bollinger, Columbia University

Dear Lee,

The complex organizational structure of the Arts and Sciences at Columbia University is unlike anything found in comparable institutions. In keeping with the Policy and Planning Committee's statutory role as a faculty voice in A&S governance, you, the President of Columbia University, and Nick Dirks, Executive Vice President of A&S, asked the faculty members of the PPC to consider whether changes in this structure might improve its functioning.

Arts and Sciences has been highly successful in recent decades, raising the standing of the College while simultaneously sustaining world-class research programs that offer exciting opportunities for these students. The harmonious and strong working relationship that exists between faculty and students has been the key to this success. There is no conflict between the teaching duties of the faculty and their scholarship, and no tension between the students' education and their participation in research expanding the frontiers of knowledge. This symbiosis between teaching and research should be expressed in the structure of the university. It is our view that any change in administrative structure that separates students from faculty, or that segregates Columbia College from A&S as a whole, would be detrimental to those essential relationships. On the contrary, it is important to achieve a better integration of the College with A&S, so that the Dean of Columbia College / Vice President for Undergraduate Education can better understand the activities of departments and can be more visible in departments.

Having students and faculty working together in a shared enterprise is also an essential practical step toward securing the financial base and thereby solidifying the excellence of our faculty and schools. While each unit in Arts and Sciences should have considerable discretion regarding its internal administrative affairs, budgetary autonomy for any unit in the Arts and Sciences would tend to separate students from faculty and teaching from research, thereby subverting the synergies that our students and faculty find so stimulating.

It is our view that significant improvements in the working relationship between the offices of the Dean of the College and the office of the Executive Vice President for Arts and Sciences can be achieved without a dramatic change in structure or reporting lines. A more collaborative framework for major financial and administrative decisions and identification of fundraising priorities could be achieved through a committee that approves all key budgetary, space, and fundraising decisions. For instance, an Executive Committee of the Arts and Sciences, composed of the EVP of A&S, the Dean of Columbia College, and the Dean of the Graduate School, and the Chair and Vice Chair of the PPC, would establish an explicit venue for collaborative decision making that recognizes both the key administrative units and the voice of the faculty. The Executive Vice Dean of A&S and the divisional Deans could be present as appropriate, as could relevant members of A&S and Schools' staff, other administrative leaders, and subcommittees of the PPC. This Committee would meet at least biweekly and would decide on all major issues

involving our shared enterprise: the budget, departmental IBSs, space allocation, the size of any of the Schools, and fundraising plans and priorities. The full PPC would meet at least on alternate weeks in an advisory capacity. While we would expect important decisions to be reached by consensus among the EVP, the Dean of Columbia College, and the Dean of the Graduate School, ultimate decision-making authority in A&S should rest with the EVP. Such a structure, combining the advisory role of the PPC, the executive roles of the EVP, the Dean of Columbia College, and the Dean of the Graduate School, and the oversight authority of the Provost, would enhance the ability of A&S to deliberate effectively on the trade-offs as required by good governance, and restore A&S to its rightful place at the center of the university.

Under these arrangements the Dean of Columbia College, and the Dean of the Graduate School, would be more fully involved in questions of A&S resource allocation than they have been previously, and the EVP of A&S would be more aware of the resources and constraints affecting both the College and the Graduate School than may have been the case in the past. To ensure coordination among the graduate and undergraduate programs and central A&S leadership, the Executive Committee will have annual meetings with chairs of each department to discuss ongoing and planned teaching and research. Routinized coordination and strong norms of sharing information in a timely fashion between the key offices EVP A&S, the Dean of Columbia College, and the Dean of the Graduate School, and with the full PPC, will improve the ability of A&S to interact effectively and transparently both with Central Administration and with the Departments.

Although not a realistic option to adopt at this time, a structure in which the roles of the Dean of the Faculty and the Dean of the College are merged in a single person also merits further discussion and consideration, particularly as a possible long-term remedy to the structural problems that have beset A&S.

Any potential change in the administrative structure of the A&S has the potential of perturbing the unit where most faculty-student interaction occurs, the unit where faculty governance is most expert and most flourishes, namely the departments. It is essential that any proposed structural change be examined from the point of view of workload in the departments, safeguarding that we do not add to the current strains on chairs and faculty but rather protect the valuable scholarship and teaching that occurs between students and faculty in departments and centers.

A key objective of improved administrative arrangements must be to improve the financial stability of the A&S and its schools. Because of a constrained budget, the A&S at Columbia strains to continue to build an eminent faculty and thereby to sustain first-rate programs in our elite schools. The constraints include a relatively low endowment for A&S, a high tuition offset rate, and the highest term bill in our peer group. To facilitate coordination in fund raising, well considered job descriptions for all three of the key roles, the EVP for A&S, the Dean of Columbia College, and the Dean of the Graduate School, need to be developed and made public, along with an organizational chart for the university that is clear and similarly accessible. In the long term, the A&S and its schools will be more stable only if we improve our fundraising process and move to a more collaborative process for the key financial decisions in the schools and in the departments.

It is of utmost importance to maintain and build the excellence of the faculty, thereby sustaining world-class undergraduate and graduate research. This must be a primary and shared goal of the Dean of Columbia College, the Dean of the Graduate School, and the EVP of A&S. We propose these adjustments in administrative structure and practices to facilitate their collaboration in articulating a vision of excellence and in mobilizing the support that will be needed to achieve it.

Sincerely,

The Faculty Members of PPC

Ann McDermott, Chair
Cathy Popkin, Vice Chair
Teodolinda Barolini
Robert Friedman
Bob Jervis
Michael Riordan
Jack Snyder
Philip Watts
William Zajc