

## Deans' Message on Columbia and Community

December 20, 2023

We, the deans of Columbia's faculties and 17 schools, wish to reflect on the last few months on our campus and to learn from the difficult events of the current semester.

Columbia is a big and dynamic institution, with diverse voices. As anyone who knows this university has come to expect, there is no consensus about particular actions taken by university administration, groups on and off campus, and individuals in our community. What we do know is that in the last two months, we have struggled to fulfill our fundamental role as an academic commons where the most difficult issues can be discussed with openness and rigor. And yet we also know that we can and should use the university's extraordinary intellectual strengths to help us navigate this crisis.

The right of members of our university to share views that may be unpopular or deemed offensive is protected and fundamental to an academic community that depends on the free exchange of views and ideas. We are trying to navigate this intersection of our core commitment to freedom of expression, and our commitment to mutual respect and community. How we move from these essential features of the university to our choices about language and expression has a major effect on the well-being of our community and on our ability to engage critically in meaningful conversation and learning.

Today, even as productive conversations have begun, we still hear from many that our campus culture has not been welcoming to meaningful engagement. We do not have a fully developed shared language for this difficult moment. Yet, when language fails to bring us together, we should still strive to acknowledge the genuine hurt felt by others: acknowledge that hearing chanted phrases such as "by any means necessary," "from the river to the sea," or calls for an "intifada"—irrespective of intentions and provenance—is experienced by many Jewish, Israeli, and other members of our community as antisemitic and deeply hurtful; acknowledge that the fear of being labeled as antisemitic or as a supporter of terrorism for expressing anguish about the loss of Palestinian lives in Gaza or the West Bank makes people fearful for expressing their concerns; acknowledge that doxing is an affront to the abiding interest that we all should have in the future success of our students and faculty. Even when language breaks down, the grace of compassionate engagement should be extended to all members of our community in equal measure.

As academic leaders, we pledge to foster ways to think about, discuss, and debate these critical issues, taking full advantage of our deep expertise and intellectual energy. Throughout the university, academic, student, and staff leaders are already initiating discussions where true listening is given the chance to take place. These interchanges take courage, leadership, and mutual respect.

We are committed to continuing and to expanding these discussions and to making them an ongoing part of the culture of our respective schools. To facilitate such conversations, the Office of the Provost and University Life will offer a range of programs and events on [speaking and listening across difference](#). We encourage participation in these programs with the goal of inspiring new agents of positive change, constructive conversations, and a new chapter of our collective work. We are affirming here our own commitment to nurturing a truly compassionate intellectual community, and to critical and constructive debate.

We wish everyone the best for the holiday season and hope you enjoy a restful and restorative winter break.

Sincerely,

Amy E. Hungerford, Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences

Costis Maglaras, Dean of Columbia Business School

Josef Sorett, Dean of Columbia College

Shih-Fu Chang, Dean of The Fu Foundation School of Engineering and Applied Science

Lisa Rosen-Metsch, Dean of the School of General Studies

Troy J. Eggers, Dean of the School of Professional Studies

Sarah Cole, Interim Dean of the School of the Arts

Keren Yarhi-Milo, Dean of the School of International and Public Affairs

Melissa Begg, Dean of the School of Social Work

Jelani Cobb, Dean of Columbia Journalism School

Andrés Jaque, Dean of the Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation

Jeffrey Shaman, Interim Dean of Columbia Climate School

Gillian Lester, Dean of Columbia Law School

Carlos J. Alonso, Dean of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

Katrina Armstrong, Dean of the Faculties of Health Sciences and the Vagelos College of Physicians and Surgeons

Lorraine Frazier, Dean of the School of Nursing

Linda P. Fried, Dean of the Mailman School of Public Health

Christian S. Stohler, Dean of the College of Dental Medicine