

Date: Tue, Apr 23, 2024 at 10:21 AM
Subject: CC Student Council: Hold President Shafik Accountable!
To:

Dear Columbia University Faculty:

We hope you are all safe in light of the recent events on campus.

We would first like to thank all of you for all the incredible work you do for your students. We are consistently amazed by all that we have learned and how our Professors have made our academic experience both deeply enriching and enjoyable.

This letter is **not meant to be political**, but rather an **objective recounting of the facts and feelings** that have come out of the events of the past several months, and to provide a way forward for our campus during these grim times. No matter what side of these issues you stand on, we should all be able to agree that at bare minimum, all members of our community, including administrators, faculty, and students must adhere to University Statutes. ***Please forward this message to any faculty member who might be interested in this content.***

As many of you are aware—and may have experienced yourself—the last few months have not been kind to the student body. Our community is a splintered and distressed version of its former self. Much of this can be traced to **President Shafik's actions**. Her administration's unilateral suspension of Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) and Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) in November—bypassing existing University policies—stifled free speech on campus and deeply harmed students' trust in administrators. While the continued protests over the last few months have certainly added a chill to the atmosphere on campus, President Shafik's authorization of over 100 student arrests on Thursday greatly escalated the tensions at Columbia. Our home—campus—is now externally patrolled by NYPD and internally surveilled by NYPD drones.

Amidst these actions, Jewish students, Muslim students and students of color have increasingly felt unsafe and been victims of vitriol and violence. Student groups have canceled performances, cultural events, and end of year celebrations. Students have begun to wear masks out of fear of being broadcast in the media, disciplined by the University, or antagonized by peers with opposing perspectives. As a University, we have lost our mutual commitment to robust and open debate. **We have lost track of our foundational principles of academic freedom and respectful dialogue.** We have attenuated the bonds that once united us and unleashed antagonism, eroding the collaborative spirit essential for a thriving academic environment. And perhaps most importantly and most sadly, we have lost our dedication to being in community with each other.

But we are not yet ready to give up on our Columbia community. So how do we rebuild? The first step is to return to order. The University Senate, created in the wake of the similar 1968 protests, was designed to bring order to Columbia through convening faculty, administrators and students for shared governance. The University Senate has a series of Statutes that govern administrative behavior, and how University rules and policies can be created, amended and

enforced. Unfortunately, President **Shafik** and senior administration **has not acted in good faith to respect faculty governance, the University Senate, and University Statutes.**

Her first offense concerns her and her senior administration's hastened decision to quietly modify the University Rules of Conduct in November without faculty or student approval, leading to the suspension of two student groups, SJP and JVP. Specifically, her administration changed the event policy to seemingly stifle free speech and place an 'undue burden' on student groups, **violating the 'narrowly tailored' stipulation of section §440 of the University Statutes.**

Her second offense is that President Shafik **did not** act in good faith to **comply with section §444(f)** of the University Statutes on Thursday. The Statutes allow the President to authorize NYPD presence on campus if they "consult" the University Senate and identify a "clear and present danger." Not only did Dr. **Shafik disregard the Senate's "unequivocal" instructions to restrict NYPD from campus**, there also was no "clear and present danger" posed from the protest. **The protest occurring on the lawns was extraordinarily peaceful:** students screened a movie, danced and sang. The protest also occurred outdoors, in a designated demonstration location. Even the NYPD Chief of Patrol noted the respectability of the protesters; "the students that were arrested were peaceful, offered no resistance whatsoever and were saying what they wanted to say in a peaceful manner." Dr. Shafik then suspended these students, overriding countless Deans' authority.

Time and time again, Dr. Shafik has impeded faculty governance and the University Statutes designed to maintain order in these very times. **Her decision to move classes online on Monday only underscores the consequences of her executive overreach: a total breakdown of the day-to-day operations of a University—teaching and learning.** Clearly, President Shaifk does not believe she can create a safe and productive environment, and is also unwilling to follow the University's only rules to do so.

As the faculty of the University, we call on you to **help hold our administrators accountable** and work to foster a safe and productive environment for teaching and learning. We ask that you call for two sets of actions:

First, ensure President Shafik and senior administrators are held accountable both to rectify the current state of affairs and to ensure that a precedent is set that prevents this from ever happening again:

- 1. Call for the University Senate to censure Dr. Shafik to hold her accountable.**
- 2. Ask the Senate to conduct a questioning of President Dr. Shafik's repeated exercise of unprecedented executive power and disregard for University governance.**
- 3. Implore President Shafik to issue a formal apology for violating University Statutes, authorizing the arrest of students, and reaffirming her commitment to free speech.**

Second, though just as important, please help us revitalize our community:

- 1. Reversing suspensions for all students who peacefully protested last week**
- 2. Call for the removal of all NYPD presence from campus**

Please **click on [this link](#) to be directed to an email template** to be sent to the Provost, General Counsel, University Life, the Office of the President and the Senate, **AND click on this [link](#) to sign on to the above demands**. Both methods of participation are important to **pressure Columbia through direct communication and broader media** (concrete numbers of sign-ons).

Please let us know if you have any questions. Thank you for all that you do for your students.

Signed,
Columbia College Student Council