

Joint Statement by the American Association of University Professors,
Barnard and Columbia Chapters
April 19, 2024

The American Association of University Professors has defined two central pillars of higher education in America: [academic freedom](#) and [shared governance](#): the freedom to teach and do research without interference from entities external to the profession; and the “inescapable interdependence among governing board, administration, faculty, students.” In the last three days, Columbia University President Shafik and her administration have seriously violated both. We are shocked at her failure to mount any defense of the free inquiry central to the educational mission of a university in a democratic society and at her willingness to appease legislators seeking to interfere in university affairs. She has demonstrated flagrant disregard of shared governance in her acceptance of partisan charges that anti-war demonstrators are violent and antisemitic and in her unilateral and wildly disproportionate punishment of peacefully protesting students.

President Shafik’s testimony before the House Education and Workforce Committee on April 17 has profoundly disturbed us. In the face of slanderous assaults on Columbia faculty and students and of gross interference in academic practices by Congressional inquisitors, President Shafik not only did not object—she capitulated to their demands. Academic freedom was formulated from its very beginning to safeguard faculty from political or other non-academic sources of intrusion. President Shafik, the co-chairs of the Board of Trustees, and the former Dean of the Law School allowed this freedom for Columbia faculty to be publicly shredded. They effectively pledged, on the Congressional record, to end academic freedom at Columbia.

President Shafik’s decision on April 18 to call upon the New York Police Department to arrest over one hundred students for engaging in a peaceful protest is a grotesque violation of norms of shared governance. Section 444 of University Statutes, put in place after the police attacks of 1968, requires “consultation” with the University Senate executive committee before anything so drastic as yesterday’s attack would be permitted. President Shafik’s administration did not consult; they *informed* the committee of its decision. “The Executive Committee did not approve the presence of NYPD on campus,” said the Executive Committee Chair, adding that the Committee came to their decision “unequivocally.” President Shafik’s decision to invite the NYPD to campus was thus undertaken unilaterally, disregarding the very idea of shared governance.

In Wednesday’s hearing, President Shafik repeatedly claimed that she was inaugurating a new era at Columbia. Her actions thus far suggest that this era will be one of repressed speech, political restrictions on academic inquiry, and punitive discipline against the University’s own students and faculty. As the protesters’ chant rightly states, “Protest is democracy; this is a travesty!” AAUP Barnard and Columbia pledge continued support for our students’ right to protest and to speak freely, and for our colleagues’ right to teach and to write freely within their domains of expertise. We have lost confidence in our president and administration, and we pledge to fight to reclaim our university.