On Campus

Academic Freedom for All

Winter 2004-05

In response to student allegations of intimidation in some Columbia classrooms, the University has established an ad hoc committee to look into concerns about faculty conduct in their role as teachers. The accusations were made public in *Columbia Unbecoming*, a short film released last fall by The David Project, a Boston-based pro-Israel advocacy group. Covered widely in the press, the film features students claiming that they felt unable to express themselves freely in classes dealing with the history and politics of the Middle East.

In a letter to all students, Vice President for Arts and Sciences Nicholas B. Dirks explained that the committee was "one of several steps the University is taking to help ensure that we are doing everything necessary to protect the rights of students and faculty and to create an academic environment that promotes the frank and open discussion of ideas without the threat of intimidation, discrimination, harassment, or censorship."

The committee was formed by President Lee C. Bollinger in December on the recommendation of Provost Alan Brinkley and Dirks. In an open letter to the Columbia community, Bollinger wrote that it "will hear all complaints brought to it, investigate those it thinks require investigation, and deliver a factual report . . . for appropriate action. A summary of the committee's report will be made public. The committee will not investigate anyone's political or scholarly beliefs and will not review departments or curricula."

Ira Katznelson, Ruggles Professor of Political Science and History, is chairing the committee, which is composed of Lisa Anderson, dean of the School of International and Public Affairs; Jean Howard, William E. Ransford Professor of English and vice provost for diversity initiatives; Farah Griffin, professor of English and comparative literature and director of the Institute for Research in African-American Studies; and Mark Mazower, professor of history. The distinguished First Amendment lawyer Floyd Abrams is advising the group, which is expected to release its report within the next

few months.

Bollinger has stated on several occasions that “academic freedom is at the center of University life” and that “it makes what we do possible and gives what we do meaning.” He has also emphasized that students have a right to that freedom and that any violation of it is “antithetical to University policies and principles and [is] an affront to our community.”



Guide to school abbreviations

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