On Campus

James J. Valentini Steps in as Interim College Dean

By
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|
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James J. Valentini meeting with College students in early September. (Michael Divito)

James J. Valentini, a Columbia chemistry professor and former chair of the department, has been appointed interim dean of Columbia College and vice president for undergraduate education.

Valentini’s appointment on September 2 came just one week after the unexpected resignation of Michele Moody-Adams, who said she was stepping aside because she feared that administrative changes being considered at the University could diminish the College dean’s authority. She is remaining at Columbia as a tenured professor in the philosophy department.

President Lee C. Bollinger, in an e-mail announcing Valentini’s interim appointment, affirmed the University’s commitment to the College. “I can say to you, without any qualification, that our commitment to the College has never been stronger,” he wrote, “and that the College has never had a stronger role in the University.”

He noted that Valentini’s “two decades at Columbia have been marked by a love of teaching undergraduates and a dedication to supporting their intellectual journey.”

Valentini, an expert on chemical-reaction dynamics, has served on Columbia committees for curriculum matters, undergraduate affairs, faculty governance, and tenure.

Since his appointment as interim dean, Valentini has held a town hall–style meeting with students, created a special e-mail account for students to send him ideas, and posted online a video introducing himself to the community.

“The students of Columbia College are brilliant, inventive, creative, imaginative, and also . . . fearless,” he said in the video. “There is an enormous number of fantastic students that I’ve known over the years, and the opportunity to have more extensive interaction with you, the student, is one of the more important things in my life.”

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