

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK
PROVOST

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To help us plan for the possibility of a strike by graduate teaching fellows, I am distributing this memo about possible courses of action for our discussion at tomorrow's meeting. In the event of a strike, the University's top priority should be to minimize the disruption to our educational programs by assisting the departments and programs in finding alternative means of instruction. In addition, we should seek to reduce the possibility of future strikes in our response to those teaching fellows who fail to meet their instructional commitments.

As part of their responsibility for the University's curricular programs, the departments, programs, and their faculties should determine the most appropriate methods of meeting the educational needs of their students. The Provost and deans should advise and monitor the efforts of the departments and programs while leaving the units with the flexibility to handle instructional staffing in the manner that makes the most sense for their situations. The central administration should take the responsibility for developing a University policy for responding to the teaching fellows who choose to leave their classrooms.

Meeting Instructional Needs

The departments should be asked to explore all possible options for covering courses, discussion sections and other instructional activities that are abandoned by teaching fellows. These could include

- 1) Moving students affected by the disruption into other sections;
- 2) Recruiting other graduate students to take over affected sections;
- 3) Asking adjuncts to teach additional classes;
- 4) Having the faculty cover affected discussion and problem sections in the manner most appropriate for their individual courses; and
- 5) As a last resort, looking for additional part-time faculty outside of the University.

Anyone who assumes additional responsibilities, including those graduate teaching fellows who continue to meet their classes, should be compensated financially for the extra work.

In developing their strategies for ensuring continuity of their programs, the departments and the faculty should be assured that additional expenses will be funded centrally.

Responding to Students Who Fail to Perform Their Instructional Duties

Part of the teaching fellows' stipends is distributed as a monthly salary. The University should immediately stop making those payments to any teaching fellows who deliberately fail to meet their instructional commitments. If teaching fellows leave the classroom before the distribution of the second installment of the spring fellowship, we will need to consider whether they should be deprived of that payment as well while they are not performing their instructional duties.

In addition, the University should consider taking other measures to discourage teaching fellows from abandoning their instructional responsibilities. These will vary depending on whether the teaching fellows are still on the five-year funding plan or teaching in a later year of study. Students in their first five years of study could

- 1) Be required to teach an extra semester or year within the five-year period in order to meet the teaching requirements for their degree;
- 2) Lose their eligibility for summer stipends; and
- 3) Lose their eligibility for special awards, such as the Whitings.

Students beyond their fifth year of study could be told that

- 1) They are jeopardizing their chances of receiving further instructional assignments; and
- 2) Those teaching in the Core will not receive the summer stipends normally given to preceptors who are reappointed to teach in the subsequent year.

Communicating Our Position

In the event some of the teaching fellows refuse to meet their instructional commitments,

- 1) The deans should write to all of their graduate student officers warning of the consequences of participating in such an action.
- 2) The Vice President of the Arts and Sciences and the deans of the professional schools should write to their department chairs and program directors about the University's response to the potential action, their responsibility for ensuring the continuity of the instruction in their courses, and the assistance the University will provide them.
- 3) In a separate communication, the Vice President and deans should ask the chairs and directors to provide daily reports on the number of classes and other instructional activities with teaching fellows that were scheduled for the day and the number that actually met. The reports should also include a list of the teaching fellows who failed to fulfill their commitments.

If time permits, all three of these communications should be sent prior to the start of the expected disruption of classes.

The Vice President and deans will need to develop mechanisms to ensure the daily collection of information about the classes and other instructional activities affected by the teaching fellows' withdrawal from the classroom and should forward that information to the Provost Office. In addition, they may wish to convene an informational meeting of chairs and directors prior to the onset of the action to help prepare for managing its consequences.

Once a strike begins, the undergraduate deans should write to parents about the steps being taken to avoid the disruption of their children's education. The Provost should send a similar communication to the entire University community. In addition, the web site developed last year should be reactivated and updated to reflect current conditions and the University's new policies for dealing with the strike.

Sincerely,



Alan Brinkley

cc. Stephen Rittenberg
Roxie Smith