

Annual Meeting of the Chairs of University Seminars

October 2014

Remarks by the Director

I have sat up here once a year since I joined Bob Belknap's Advisory Board, about seven years ago. Then when I followed Bob as Director, I still sat up here with him, until this year.

Many of you attended his memorial service and felt as we did: unexpectedly safe and welcomed. Bob's unique capacity to put one at ease and make one feel cared for was remembered so well that the room itself felt more welcoming than any previous afternoon in Saint Paul's Chapel has ever felt, at least in my limited experience.

Today I want to open this meeting by asking how we might respond to this gift from Bob by our own plans and policies for the University Seminars now and in the future, to assure that each Seminar may continue in its own way to be as welcoming to new members and new ideas, and as safe from any punitive consequences of disagreement, as possible.

Our first task is to learn more about who we are. That is, to assemble a roster of members and associate members from Columbia and elsewhere, and to present ourselves with the full spectrum of universities, colleges, seminars, foundations, governments and corporations our full membership encompasses. For that, I will ask that you each make sure your rosters are as up to date as possible, and that you take the time to ask those guests who come back to join your Seminar as full members.

Based on a past attempt from the previous century, I predict that the University Seminars will be the largest component of the University's outreach to colleagues of other institutions in and around New York City, and to alumni of Columbia itself.

At the same time, my colleagues and I in the Seminars Office will continue to clarify the boundary conditions of our operation as it is seen by those university offices with which we work most closely.

To date,

- we have established with the office of the Endowment that we may begin to plan a three-year budget going forward;
- we have opened conversations with the Office of Facilities to discuss ways that we may help with attempts to find outside and gift funding for the Faculty House where we reside;
- we have corrected an oversight in the budgeting of the books published by Columbia University Press as our Schoff Lecture series so that they will now be reimbursed for certain expenses in a manner consistent with our policies toward other University Presses;
- and we have begun planning with his many colleagues, for an event to celebrate the publication of Bob Belknap's book in the Schoff Lectures series.

In closing, my best understanding of how to incorporate Bob Belknap's gift into our future, is to ask that you all understand and accept that our first priority will always be to help each of you with your own version of a University Seminar.

To do that may mean we will have to say no to some ancillary aspect of our operation, like funding for an event, or a book. But of course we will never just say no. We will ask you to try to raise at least part of the funds for those parts of your Seminar, while we maintain our endowment to cover the real costs of the Seminars themselves.

Thanks,

Bob Pollack