

Annual Meeting, University Seminars, April 13, 2016

Robert Pollack

Good evening, and welcome to the first Pop-up Dinner of the University Seminars. I'm Bob Pollack, fifth Director of the University Seminars.

"Pop-up" was Summer Hart's phrase, on the notice we sent out to as many of you as we could, saying that we hope to have turned a burst pipe under the Faculty House into a fountain of good cheer here at the Kraft Center.

Let me begin then, by thanking a few people for tonight. No surprise that I begin by thanking my colleagues at the Seminars Office: Alice Newton, Summer Hart, Pamela Guardia, Gessy Alvarez and John Jayo. Not even a water main break washed out the cheerful and kindly mood of our office, but setting this event up here has taken them all a great deal of work, so, thanks.

David Martin, Emerald Currie and the staff of Faculty House get thanks for the dinner tonight; somehow they managed this, a bit of magic I know enough not to ask about.

And finally, Brian Cohen, Jim Levin and their colleagues here the Kraft Center get thanks for turning on a dime, making this space available, and for being completely helpful in all possible ways. When my colleagues and I raised the money for this building from Robert Kraft and others in 1999, no one could have imagined that it would be put to this use. More importantly, no one would have thought it odd.

Now, by way of welcoming you all, I'd like to offer a brief summary of how the University Seminars got here. We're an organization of more than 90 Seminars, and the Seminars office has been working to maintain and support them, for seven decades.

We have always asked each Seminar to be a collegium, that is, a group of colleagues. So, when discussion by the group generates an idea for a book or a conference in addition to the Seminar meetings themselves, we do our best to find the resources to help that idea along.

The result has been seven decades of intense intellectual activity by a group now numbering more than 3000 scholars and experts from Columbia and elsewhere, meeting in 90 or so Seminars. It has generated an archive of millions of pages of transcripts from these Seminars. These have been brought into the current moment as a searchable digital archive, and I invite you all to try this archive out at your own convenience. Details are on our website.

The Seminars themselves are supported in full by our endowment from the family of Frank Tannenbaum and his wife Jane Belo, which covers the costs of our uses of Faculty House [when it is open], and which in addition sends hundreds of thousands of dollars each year to the Graduate School in the form of stipends for our rapporteurs

In addition, when generous friends help us out, we can do other things, like hold tonight's Tannenbaum Award ceremony, hear our Annual Lecture from one of our most distinguished colleagues, and also offer the Schoff Lecture series each year, with the lectures published through Columbia University Press.

I hope you will all agree that what we are doing now with the extra funds we have in hand, hints at what else we might do were generous friends to provide us with additional funds.

That's enough of a pitch.

I'd like to introduce the Chair of the Seminars Advisory Board, Barnard Psychology Professor Robert Remez, to open the evening with the presentation of the Tannenbaum Award to Herb Terrace.