



COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK

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WEDNESDAY'S DISRUPTION OF BUTLER LIBRARY



May 7, 2025

Dear members of the Columbia community:

Earlier today, a group of protesters occupied one of the main reading rooms in Butler library, refusing to leave, and another group breached the front door causing substantial chaos—all of this as the bulk of our students are working hard to prepare for exams. These actions not only represented a violation of University policies, but they also posed a serious risk to our students and campus safety. We had no choice but to ask for the assistance of the NYPD, and I'm grateful for their help and professionalism, as well as that of our Public Safety team. Let me be clear, what happened today, what I witnessed, was utterly unacceptable.

I spent the late afternoon and evening at Butler Library, as events were unfolding, to understand the situation on the ground and to be able to make the best decisions possible. I arrived to see one of our Public Safety officers wheeled out on a gurney and another getting bandaged. As I left hours later, I walked through the reading room, one of the many jewels of Butler Library, and I saw it defaced and damaged in disturbing ways and with disturbing slogans. Violence and vandalism, hijacking a library—none of

that has any place on our campus. These aren't Columbia's values.

Let me be clear: Columbia unequivocally rejects antisemitism and all other forms of harassment and discrimination. And we certainly reject a group of students—and we don't yet know whether there were outsiders involved—closing down a library in the middle of the week before finals and forcing 900 students out of their study spaces, many leaving belongings behind. Our commitment to a safe, inclusive, and respectful campus community is unshakeable, and we will continue to act decisively to uphold these values.

Let me also make clear, our administration spent substantial time working to diffuse the situation in multiple ways, through Public Safety and Delegate visits to the students, scenes I witnessed firsthand. The students were told they simply needed to identify themselves and then leave, but most refused. I worked with professors who generously came to have the same conversations. I am enormously grateful for the many people we have in our community, our Public Safety officers, our faculty, our staff, and my team, who work so hard to make Columbia what we know it can be and should be for our community. I also made sure to be present when the police arrived; I wanted to see for myself how the operation would unfold, and I'm grateful that it was orderly, professional, and extremely limited, with a focus on the students who refused to leave the reading room.

I am particularly heartbroken, and incensed, that this disruption occurred when our students are intensely focused on critical academic work. At a moment when our community deserves calm and the opportunity to study, reflect, and complete the academic year successfully, these actions created unnecessary stress and danger. I have seen how much our community wants to take back our narrative, to do what they came to Columbia to do—learn, thrive, and grow—not take over a library. Moreover, I am deeply disturbed at the idea that, at a moment when our international community feels particularly vulnerable, a small group of students would choose to make our institution a target.

We, at Columbia, value freedom of speech, robust debate, and peaceful protest. Today's disruption of Butler Library was not that. We must, and we will, come together as a community to consider what civil disobedience actually is and what it means. We need to recognize that when rules are violated, when a community is disrupted for the sake of a few, that is a considered choice—one with real consequences. There is a clear line between legitimate protest and actions that endanger others and disrupt the fundamental work of the University. Today that line was crossed, and I have confidence the disciplinary proceedings will reflect the severity of the actions.

I am working with the Provost and University Life to ensure any affected students receive the support and resources they need. We have opened a new study space at Uris that will be available overnight for students.

Let me also say this. I've received many messages from concerned parents. The group involved less than one percent of our 36,000-person student body. Their actions had a disproportionate impact.

This is the last kind of message I want to be delivering tonight. But Columbia's strength lies in our resilience. We are strong, we are determined, and we will not let this moment define us. I have heard consistently from our community that we are ready to pull together, to fight for the value of Columbia. So, we will get back to business. Our real business. The business of teaching, learning, studying, and researching. We have an incredible Commencement to look forward to and finals to prepare for. We will move forward together to show the world the best of Columbia.

Sincerely,

Claire Shipman

Acting President, Columbia University in the City of New York