

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK



Dear members of the Columbia community,

Columbia University has finalized an [agreement with the federal government](#), ending a period of considerable institutional uncertainty. This agreement resolves multiple federal agency investigations and protects Columbia's academic mission, research enterprise, and independence. The resolution will allow the University to move forward with clarity and focus—returning our full attention to the work of teaching, discovery, and public service. It will also enable all of us to turn our attention to mending and rebuilding our community.

With the agreement, our access to billions of dollars in federal research funding will resume. Terminated grants will be reinstated and our faculty will become eligible again for future grants, as well as continuations of existing grants. Not only will this resolution restore Columbia's ability to fully participate in its longstanding federal research partnerships, but it also will ensure critical continuity for faculty, students, and staff across every discipline—many of whom have seen years, even decades, of progress toward medical and scientific discoveries placed at risk. I've received an outpouring of relief from our scientists in recent days as they started to learn that restored grant funding will allow their vital work to continue.

Critically, Columbia retains control over its academic and operational decisions. As set forth in the agreement: "No provision of this agreement, individually or taken together, shall be construed as giving the United States authority to dictate faculty hiring, university hiring, admissions decisions, or the content of academic speech." This was our north star, and we did not waver from it. Columbia's governance remains in our control. The federal government will not dictate what we teach, who teaches, or which students we admit.

As part of the agreement, Columbia will pay a \$200 million settlement to the federal government over three years, and \$21 million to settle investigations involving the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. I recognize these are substantial settlements. As Acting President, together with our Board of Trustees, we had to look at all the facts. We have seen not only \$400 million in federal grants frozen, but also the majority of our \$1.3 billion a year in federal funding placed on hold. The prospect of that continuing indefinitely, along with the potential loss of top scientists, would jeopardize our status as a world-leading research institution.

Furthermore, as I have discussed on many occasions with our community, we carefully explored all options open to us. We might have achieved short-term litigation victories, but not without incurring deeper long-term damage—the likely loss of future federal funding, the possibility of losing accreditation, and the potential revocation of visa status of thousands of international students.

As part of the settlement, the University has not admitted wrongdoing and does not agree with the government's conclusion that it violated Title VI of the Civil Rights Act. We are not, however, denying the very serious and painful challenges our institution has faced with antisemitism. For these reasons, we took several important corrective steps in March, many of which are in this agreement, including a new provision for a liaison to the Jewish community, situated in University Life.

Our commitment to creating a safe, respectful community must extend well beyond any agreement with the government. I announced additional measures to combat antisemitism last week. We know there is still more to do. We will work on multiple fronts to combat all forms of hatred and intolerance at Columbia, and you will see more efforts to that end in the coming months.

The success of the agreement requires that both parties honor it, and commit to the processes laid out in the event of disputes. To that end, we have agreed on a robust dispute resolution process that includes a mutually agreed upon independent monitor and arbitrator as neutral third parties, rather than ceding authority to the government or a court. The process requires that the government go through a very specific, prescribed set of steps if it believes we are not meeting the terms of the agreement. If the parties can't agree, the matter goes to the arbitrator, and then, as needed, to court. The agreement allows us to hold the government to that process with respect to any concerns about compliance. This predictable structure is far preferable, in our view, to piecemeal scrutiny, and will allow us to focus on long-term progress for our institution.

Certain terms of this settlement pertain to admissions and hiring and are wholly consistent with existing federal anti-discrimination laws, which our institution has always followed, and will always follow. That language was carefully drafted; we have agreed to provide data to which the government is entitled, and is currently requesting from scores of institutions, including ours. In several instances, the agreement codifies other practices or policies already in existence, or reviews already underway. We must always comply with government regulations regarding the international student visa program, for example.

For months, Columbia's discussions with the federal government have been set up as a test of principle—a binary fight between courage and capitulation. But like most things in life, the reality is far more complex. We established our non-negotiable academic and institutional boundaries clearly, and we chose to talk and to listen. We certainly did not always agree with the government's proposals, nor they with ours. It is important for the community to know that a broad academic leadership team worked with me closely, as well as with our Board of Trustees, to achieve this resolution. I consulted widely outside of the institution as well. In the end, we have arrived at a carefully crafted agreement that protects our institution and our values, and that will allow us to move forward, with strength, resuming the vital work we do in service to the nation and to humanity.

Countless faculty members and administrators have already been doing the nearly impossible, often invisible work, under enormous pressure, of safeguarding Columbia's future. They've confronted the real hardship caused by the loss of federal funding to our research enterprise, borne witness to the painful divides that have opened in our community, and labored to find constructive solutions to all of it. For this wisdom and dedication, I am grateful. It is the best of Columbia on display.

My hope is that the Columbia University community is ready to reset, to focus again on academic rigor and respectful debate, and to use this moment of challenge as a chance to imagine and build a stronger institution than ever. I am committed to that process.

We understand that members of our community will hold different views about this decision. We made it with care, with seriousness, and with an unwavering commitment to the mission, values, and future of Columbia University.

Sincerely,

Claire Shipman

Acting President, Columbia University in the City of New York