

OPINION | OP-EDS

Letter from the Student Workers of Columbia to President Armstrong: We must defend our education



By [Anna Fedorova](#) / Deputy Photo Editor

BY [STUDENT WORKERS OF COLUMBIA](#) • MARCH 5, 2025 AT 12:26 AM

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Dear President Armstrong,

We write to ask you to take a stand. Our research and teaching are under attack. Scholars across the University—and across the country—face politically-motivated censorship, meted out through both [broad](#) and [targeted funding cuts](#) as well as [expanded](#)

administration is **cutting programs** focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion, sowing confusion and fear and leaving our community members unsure of their funding or program stability. Our fellow Columbians—especially noncitizens and **transgender** people—are under attack, facing threats to their legal status and healthcare that jeopardize their right to participate in University life and undermine their very right to live full and secure lives.

In response to these attacks, Columbia's leadership has overwhelmingly capitulated. The University has quietly **withdrawn** support for trans athletes, **modified or removed** Columbia-affiliated web pages referencing DEI, and only offered **vague promises** to keep monitoring federal funding cuts. In February, the Student Workers of Columbia sent you a letter asking for assurance that Columbia would protect noncitizen students, faculty, and staff. In response we received a vague reply from your office, which seemed to reference a completely different topic. Rather than standing up for the Columbia community, the University's leadership has stood by or, worse, accelerated and enabled these threats.

The University's actions and inaction, its speech and its silences, have real consequences for members of this community. We have heard from Columbians across schools and disciplines—both members of SWC and not—who are concerned that their funding or program is at risk, who worry their research will be targeted for its social justice focus, and who are uncertain about their future at Columbia. The University's silence means that members of our community live in daily fear of political persecution. It means that noncitizen Columbians are forced to question whether the University they call home will sell them out to curry favor with an authoritarian presidential administration. It means that trans Columbians have to wonder whether the University will undermine their healthcare and their ability to publicly participate in University spaces to defend their bottom line. It means that all of us are forced to question the sincerity of this institution's commitment to higher education and the security of our supposed "shared values."

This is not the time for silence and acquiescence, but for courage and solidarity. We have always believed in a better Columbia. We are a strong community with strong values. We believe in education that is accessible to all and that responds to a diverse and complex world. We believe that research is a public good and that funding it is essential to our mission of building a better world through academic inquiry. We believe in inclusion and accessibility for all people at Columbia, including noncitizens and trans people. We condemn the Trump administration's attacks on DEI programs, which clearly serve to

to stand firm in this critical moment.

We call on you today to take action and stand up for education and your community by:

Firstly, committing to ensuring funding for our research and publicly fighting against cuts to federal funding.

Additionally, establishing Columbia as a sanctuary campus for noncitizens; refusing to cooperate with immigration authorities investigating students, faculty, and staff; stopping all surveillance of the political activities of students, faculty, and staff; and destroying any existing records of such surveillance. This is in line with what we have already asked in a previous letter to President Armstrong.

Thirdly, publicly affirming that Columbia will stand up for the rights of our trans community members to access all parts of the University, to receive essential healthcare, and to live with dignity. This includes reestablishing the trans inclusion policy at Columbia Athletics.

Finally, immediately reinstating DEI policies that have been changed in recent weeks, restoring DEI commitments to University websites, and publicly affirming that Columbia supports its diverse community.

We understand, as you likely do as well, that we are in a challenging political climate for research and education meant to benefit the public, for noncitizens and trans people, and for diversity efforts. You may believe that you are acting in the best interest of this institution and your students, but what exactly are we preserving if we betray the values that supposedly define us? What do we have left worth fighting for, if not our academic freedoms and our commitments to fostering a diverse and welcoming community? We must not submit to the threats that face our community, now or in the future. We can, and we must, hold firm in our commitments to our shared values. We call on you to take action now and stand up for education and your community.

Signed,

Student Workers of Columbia, UAW Local 2710

10 signatories:

Columbia Postdoctoral Workers, UAW Local 4100

Students for a Democratic Society, Columbia University chapter

Columbia University Apartheid Divest

Columbia Housing Equity Project

Columbia University Jewish Voice for Peace

Columbia Palestine Solidarity Coalition

Ballet Folklórico Mi Gente at Columbia University

Columbia University Native American Council

Columbia University Student Union

The 10 signatory groups oppose President Trump's policies on DEI, the carrying out of forced deportations, and threats to cut federal funding to Columbia University.

To respond to this op-ed, or to submit your own, contact opinion@columbiaspectator.com.



Mahmoud Khalil is my friend. Columbia targeted him, then the U.S. government abducted him.

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