Dear prospective students and families,

Welcome to Columbia University! Colleges across the country are under intense public scrutiny for mishandling sexual and dating violence. Our school is no exception: despite ongoing pressure from survivors and activists, Columbia has failed to take concrete action to make this campus safe for students. Columbia and Barnard are both under investigation for violating Title IX by failing to protect students and sweeping cases of gender-based violence under the rug. Adjudication processes retraumatize survivors, fail to hold perpetrators accountable, and do not deliver justice. The campus resources available for survivors are underfunded and difficult to navigate, and the current prevention education programs are completely insufficient.

Instead of working with students to address these urgent concerns, Columbia has treated this as a public relations crisis. President Bollinger, Executive Vice President Suzanne Goldberg, and other administrators continue to make symbolic but meaningless changes and prioritize their image over the wellbeing of students. This week, Columbia launched a new education program to prevent gender-based violence on campus. This program is poorly designed and demonstrates a willful neglect of empirical evidence and student feedback. It will not prevent sexual or dating violence.

A taskforce of students convened by the administration has done exhaustive research on best practices for prevention education. Studies unequivocally demonstrate that “brief, one-session educational programs… are not effective at changing behavior in the long-term.” The White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault reported that the absolute minimum amount of programming necessary to prevent sexual and dating violence is between 6 and 10 interactive workshops. Columbia’s new program clearly ignores these findings, instead allowing 8th-grade level homework assignments to take the place of meaningful, participatory education. Each school can choose whether their students are required to participate. The program allows students to fulfill the requirement by simply watching a TedX Talk and writing a brief reflection.

In order for this University to live up to its values and effectively prevent gender-based violence on campus, President Bollinger, Executive Vice President Suzanne Goldberg, and Sexual Violence Response must immediately enact an education program that meets the following standards:

- Comprised of interactive prevention education workshops about gender-based violence that all students are required to attend at least twice per semester
- Explicitly addresses dynamics of gender-based violence affecting disabled, international, LGBTQ, immigrant students, and students of color and other marginalized communities
- Reflects the collective input of survivors and student advocates
- Includes mandatory sensitivity training for all faculty and staff at least once per semester

Implementing comprehensive, ongoing, and mandatory prevention education is a critical step toward creating a safer Columbia. Students have been calling on the University to institute such programs, but administrators continue to ignore these concerns. Colleges have a responsibility to educate students as responsible global citizens and keep us safe; part of this responsibility is effective prevention education. There is no excuse for continued inaction and half-baked efforts to combat rape culture at Columbia or any other school. As prospective students, we know you care about attending a college which prioritizes your safety. We need your help to hold all colleges accountable, and urge you to demand information from Columbia and other schools you visit about what they are doing to keep students safe and address gender-based violence on campus.

Signed,
No Red Tape Columbia
Here are some questions that concerned students and parents can ask Columbia representatives about consent and prevention education:

Research indicates that 6-10 interactive educational workshops are the minimum necessary to effectively teach students about healthy relationships and sexual and dating violence. Given this information, why does Columbia require consent and prevention education only once a year? Why does Columbia allow brief videos and ungraded reflective essays to replace meaningful, participatory education?

Columbia raises millions of dollars each year and currently has a $9 billion endowment. Why can’t Columbia afford to pay trained professionals to develop and lead ongoing, mandatory prevention education workshops?

Given the diversity of Columbia’s student body, why do workshops fail to address the dynamics around sexual and dating violence experienced by queer students, students of color, international students, immigrant students, and students of other marginalized identities?

Here are some questions that concerned students and parents can ask Columbia representatives about sexual and dating violence issues:

Columbia continues to hand down egregiously weak sanctions for students found “responsible” for gender-based violence. Just this academic year, they have sanctioned students who committed rape and domestic violence to 1 and 2 semester suspensions in multiple cases. Why does Columbia want rapists to remain on campus?

Countless survivors at Columbia have been denied the accommodations, resources, and support they need to heal. Survivors are regularly asked to leave the University and have lost financial aid due to taking time off from college. Why does Columbia systematically fail to support survivors?

Students found “responsible” for gender-based violence are allowed to be resident advisors, teaching assistants, and orientation leaders for first year students after returning to campus from suspension. Allowing perpetrators to hold these leadership positions is a direct and ongoing threat to student safety. Why does Columbia allow rapists to be?

Will I be safe on this campus?

As you continue to research and visit colleges, we encourage you to ask college representatives about these issues. Ineffective prevention education programs, lack of resources, and opaque and unjust adjudication processes are not Columbia’s problems alone. Finding out what colleges are proactively doing to end sexual and dating violence on their campuses is an important part of figuring out which college is the best choice for your future.

If you have any questions about this program or No Red Tape, please email us at NoRedTapeCU@gmail.com.

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