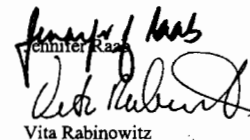


February 24, 2006

We are eager to work with you and look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,

  
Vita Rabinowitz

Dr. Joan Tronto  
Chair  
Hunter College Senate  
Room 1018E

Dr. Jason Young  
President  
Faculty Delegate Assembly  
Room 1414E

Dear Joan and Jason:

We write to follow-up on the discussion at the Senate about the report of the Select Committee on Academic Freedom. As we have both said publicly, it is untenable if even one person believes his or her academic freedom has been compromised. Indeed, we wish to investigate any charges that are outstanding, to right any wrongs that can be remedied, and to apologize for those that we cannot change.

More importantly, we are eager to build on this discussion to consider changes in policies and procedures concerning academic freedom to enhance the integrity of these policies at Hunter and the community's satisfaction with them.

The engagement and morale of the entire Hunter community are vitally important to us. Over the coming weeks and months, we and others in our administration will make ourselves widely available to groups, including the Select Committee, if so desired. We hope to engage in many discussions in many forums. We ask you, as respected community leaders, for your help in creating a variety of venues that are appropriate for the different tasks of helping us to vet grievances and to pursue broader discussions of academic freedom.

cc: **Members of the Senate Select Committee on Academic Freedom:**  
Thomas Angotti, Stuart Ewen, Nicholas Freudenberg, Dixie Gross, Barbara Hampton, Elizabeth Maglieri, Louise Sherby, Barbara Welter  
**Members of the Senate Administrative Committee:**  
Charles Blumenthal, Michael Turner, Jill Gross  
**Members of the FDA Executive Committee:**  
Lynn McCormick, Cynthia Degazon, Patricia Woodard, Claus Mueller

## AN OPEN LETTER TO THE PRESIDENT OF HUNTER COLLEGE

28 February 2006

Dear President Raab:

We have received your letter dated 24 February, addressed to Professors Tronto and Young (attached), in which you claim to be "eager to build on" the Senate's discussion of the Report by the Select Committee on Academic Freedom. While we are dismayed that it took so long for you to respond responsibly to concerns about the state of academic freedom at Hunter, we are happy to hear of your current willingness to work with the faculty and staff to try to ameliorate the situation at Hunter. This response is long overdue.

It is disappointing that your first positive response to this report arrived two months after it was issued and nine days after a Senate meeting in which you persisted in your policy of denial regarding the significance of the Report. Indeed, after the February 15th meeting, some of your supporters exulted when the Recommendations of the report failed to muster the majority required since the Perez ruling. In any fair person's view a 92 to 20 vote in favor of the Report's recommendations should be a resounding indication of the lack of trust enjoyed by your administration. It should have been a clear signal that administrative policies may be amiss. Still, the president's Counsel was seen "high-five-ing" her associates following the thwarting of the majority's will. This was hardly a sign of respect for the faculty, professional staff and students who overwhelmingly supported the Report's recommendations. It also revealed a lack of understanding of how seriously the alleged violations cited in the Report should be taken. This is not a "we win, they lose" situation. As long as your administration is perceived as insensitive to academic freedom, it has failed in the stewardship of the college. The garnering of respect, not fear, is what your administration should have been cultivating over the past five years.

We are deeply concerned, furthermore, that the letter you have sent to us, in which you promise nothing more than a kind of "listening tour" and perhaps the issuance of some apologies, still shows that at a fundamental level, you have not understood what the Report says. We are concerned that you seem to believe that matters of academic freedom only affect faculty. They also affect members of the professional staff and students. We are additionally concerned that you seem to think that the problems which are reported are only about individual violations of academic freedom. As the Report's Findings make clear, equally serious are the Administration's disregard for governance, secrecy about plans, interference in the processes of academic decision-making, and absence of transparency about policies. We cannot imagine, then, what "changes in policies and procedures concerning academic freedom" you think can be made to assuage people's widespread distrust if you fail to admit, in the first place, that there is a problem.

After stonewalling by the President, the Provost, and the presidential staff at the last several Senate meetings, your letter could easily be read as 'damage control.' It arrives as respect for your administration dwindles at Hunter, and only days after the president of Harvard was forced to resign his post due to his high-handed attitudes and behavior towards the scholarly community. Your sudden invitation to join in the creation of "a variety of venues...to pursue broader discussions of academic freedom" seems more like a PR ploy than a genuine appreciation of what has happened at Hunter under your watch.

In light of your past action, then, we need more than your promise for a discussion in the next several months. After all, your critics believe that your reaction to the Academic Freedom Report is symptomatic of the problems it identifies. While it may be late in the day, you will need to actively work to demonstrate that this is a college where criticism is not equated with disloyalty, and where there is an understanding that the faculty and students, far more than any president, are the College.

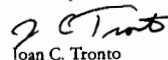
If you wish genuinely to move forward, there are several concrete steps that you can take.

1. You can support the adoption of the recommendations of the Report by the Senate Select Committee on Academic Freedom.
2. Other College presidents in CUNY (e.g., President Mellow at LaGuardia) have worked with their Senates to make the transitions to the changes required by the Perez ruling less difficult. You can declare that you will work with the Senate to implement the Perez ruling and not use it to disrupt the Senate's operations.
3. You can support the revision of the Charter that will make a permanent solution to the Perez issues.
4. You can disavow using your good office, or encouraging others in your administration, to freeze out or harm critics.
5. You can promise that your decisions about the allocation of resources will be based on sound academic judgments made through a thorough academic process, not on personal likes and dislikes or on the wish to do favors to those within or outside our academic community. You can make such decisions transparent and public.
6. You can promote the free flow of information to the College community by providing information and official documents from 80th Street to the Senate in a timely manner in order for us to make informed decisions about College policy.
7. You can promote the free flow of ideas by making public your priorities and goals and allow open discussion of them.
8. You can reduce the climate of distrust and silence by permitting members of the administration to discuss matters of concern publicly, for example, by ending the "gag order" on any official participation with Hunter-L.

Responding positively to these proposed steps may show that you are committed to leading the College in a way that engages and brings along the faculty, staff and students rather than view us as potential enemies. We need to believe that you are working with us to improve Hunter. Thus far, we are not convinced.

We remain committed to working with you and to restoring a level of trust in our College. We invite you to realize that these are the problems that need to be addressed here and to act accordingly.

Sincerely,



Joan C. Tronto  
for the Senate Administrative Committee

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