

BARNARD

BARNARD COLLEGE · COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY
3009 BROADWAY
NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10027 USA

April 14, 2019

Dear President Beilock and Provost Bell:

We write to you to express our collective, grave concern about the behavior of Barnard Security personnel on Thursday evening in the lobby of the Milstein Center. Alexander McNab (CC '19), an African-American student at Columbia University, was verbally and physically assaulted by persons whose job it is to ensure the safety of all students on campus. As the video evidence makes quite clear, security personnel not only held him down as he did nothing to resist; they also continued to harass him and tried to remove him from the building *even after they had his CU ID in their possession*. This is a clear example of the racial profiling of an African-American student on our campus.

Our department has a long, storied, and ongoing commitment to developing understandings of human difference that challenge racist thought and action. We train our students to analyze social, cultural, and political life in ways that recognize racialization processes. We write not only because Alex McNab is one of our own, but because all students have a right to enter our campus, use our library, and purchase a cup of coffee unobstructed and without harassment. The policies and laws of the College should be applied to students evenly and consistently. Mr. McNab refused to show his ID because he recognized that he was unfairly targeted and, more broadly, that the policy itself was unevenly and unfairly implemented. We teach our students that they can and should identify, question, and reject instances of structural oppression. Our own College must do so as well, especially when the structure at the center of such oppression is us.

Concrete actions need to be taken now to address this and related incidents of racial profiling and harassment on campus. The response of the administration to date has failed publicly to acknowledge or address the seriousness of the event: The Letter from the President did not acknowledge what had actually happened at Milstein, and the follow-up listening session seemed to be more attuned to containing the problem than addressing it in any serious or substantive way.

The College should immediately issue a public apology to Alexander McNab for the harassment to which he was subjected. In addition, the Security Department at Barnard needs to be investigated and overhauled, both in terms of its protocols and its personnel. Members of the faculty need to be appointed to the review process. We have no faith in the officers involved in the incident—those who directly held down and harassed Mr. McNab, or those who stood back and allowed their colleagues to continue this behavior. We cannot continue to put the safety of our students in the hands of individuals who displayed such poor and racist judgment on Thursday night, nor, more generally, can we continue to put their safety in the hands of a security force whose protocols and actions threaten both the rights and well-being of our students. The department's leadership must also be held to account.

Sincerely,

Lesley A. Sharp, Department Chair & B. Chamberlain & H. Chamberlain Josefsberg '30 Professor

Nadia Abu El-Haj, Professor

E. Mara Green, Assistant Professor

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