Senate Column

Academic Freedom and Faculty Responsibility

By Thomas Mallon

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in an open-ended discussion on Nov. 19, the University Senate took a tentative approach to the dilemma at the core of the controversy over recent charges of intimidation in some Columbia classrooms. The Senate, balancing academic freedom and faculty responsibility to students. The Executive Committee chose to steer clear of the specifics of the case, and not to circulate a transcript of the recent David Plotkin film that details the accusations, or the rebuttals of two professors from the Department of Middle Eastern and Asian Languages and Cultures who were named in the film. Instead, the Senate discussion focused on grievance procedures available to students who claim they have been intimidated in the classroom. Procedures range from informal, confidential communication with the Ombuds Office, which sometimes results in mediation, to the more formal approach of the Office of Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity. Senator Officer Marsha Wagner and Associate Provost for Affirmative Action Valerie Goldberger took part in the discussion.

A good deal of attention was focused on the question of when to pursue an informal approach with a student and when to start a paper trail. Bolinger said that in his 50 years in the academic life, every complaint of this kind that he has heard has been addressed satisfactorily. He said he has found an informal approach to be the most effective, but he advised other opinions about whether that approach is still the best one for Columbia.

At the same time, the president stressed the need for vigorous debate. "I think we all want very much to have the university be a place where issues in the outside world [that] are bitterly contested—and may even be leading people to kill each other—then we think we need to ask ourselves how we can assist in making that happen, since it is so important to our values."

A Correspondent at the Faculty of Arts and Sciences about setting up a standing committee to the Senate on the preoccupation with the academic ethos as much as possible. To do that is very, very, very difficult, and as an institution, I think we need to ask ourselves how we can assist in making that happen, since it is so important to our values."

A recent study from the University Medical Center (CUMC) may provide insight into the disease's cellular origins, which may lead to new methods of diagnosis and treatment.

A recent study from the CUMC finds that stomach cancer originates from bone marrow-derived stem cells (BMDC) rather than from stomach cells, as was once thought. The study, "Gastric Cancer Originating From Bone-Marrow-Derived Cells," is published in the current issue of Science.

This was an unexpected finding, which may lead to a reevaluation of current assumptions about how all cancers originate," said senior author Timothy C. Wang, chief of the Division of Digestive and Liver Diseases and Dorothy L. and Daniel H. Silberberg Professor of Medicine at the College of Physicians and Surgeons. "The implications of this study may lead to new methods of diagnosis and treatment of many cancers—particularly those that have been linked to chronic inflammation such as stomach, esophageal, lung, and prostate cancer.

Stomach cancer is a grave problem in much of the world—especially Asia, Eastern Europe and parts of Latin America—where it's second only to lung cancer as a cause of cancer deaths. In the United States and Western Europe, the incidence of stomach cancer has declined dramatically over the past 50 years. However, it remains a very deadly disease while the survival rate is much more favorable when diagnosed early. It is often associated with lifestyle factors, often because of its symptoms—which include bloating, diarrhea, nausea, and fatigue—can easily be confused with other common conditions. The five-year survival rate for stomach cancer in the United States is approximately 22 percent.

A common assumption among cancer specialists is that most cancers originate from tissue stem cells—for example, the gastric stem cells contained in the lining of the stomach. However, the researchers suspect BMDC may contribute to the development or progression of cancer because they are frequently recruited to sites of tissue injury and inflammation—especially in cancer cells.