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Letter from MCC Faculty

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To: Jack H Knott- Dean <steinhardt.dean@nyu.edu>, Katherine.fleming@nyu.edu

Cc: Nicholas D Mirzoeff <nicholas.mirzoeff@nyu.edu>, Marita Sturken <marita.sturken@nyu.edu>, Rod Benson <rodney.benson@nyu.edu>

October 21, 2020

To: Dean Jack Knott and Provost Katherine Fleming

We, the undersigned faculty in the Department of Media, Culture, and Communication affirm the values of academic freedom. As faculty in a department that shares and fosters a deep value of critical thinking and analysis, we believe in the principles of discourse, debate, and consensus building. We also affirm that our role as professors in the classroom is above all to foster student engagement, analysis, and inquiry, and we are committed to maintaining the health, safety, and learning opportunities of MCC students and staff.

Professor Mark Crispin Miller is currently circulating a petition accusing our department of violating his academic freedom and conducting an email campaign against the department. Over the years, many of us have been distressed and concerned over the positions that Professor Miller has espoused on his highly visible website, where he prominently displays his title as a full tenured professor in our department. These positions include characterization of transgender surgery as a eugenic form of sterilization, direct mockery and ridicule of trans individuals, and denial of the Sandy Hook elementary school shooting. No matter how damaging these positions may be to the reputation of our department, Professor Miller has the right to his opinions. Academic freedom and freedom of speech are rights that we must uphold.

However, a defense of academic freedom is no excuse where Professor Miller's behavior constitutes discrimination, attacks against students and others in our community, or advocacy for an unsafe learning environment. For several years, students have complained regularly about Professor Miller's conduct in the classroom and the way in which he engages discussion around controversial views and non-evidence based arguments. In all cases the response of NYU leadership has been to state that the Office of General Council is aware and to tell students and faculty to file a bias complaint. Yet even when complaints have been filed (and many have been) to NYU's bias review boards, the Office of Equal Opportunity, and to school leaders, the situation has not changed or improved.

Recently on his public blog and on social media platforms, Professor Miller attacked a student who publicly objected to his criticism of mask usage in an in-classroom setting, and used his position of authority to intimidate students who choose to wear masks and abide by NYU policy, New York State law, and CDC guidelines. Professor Miller went on to repeatedly name and identify the contact information of this student, opening an opportunity for cyberbullying and threatening communication directed toward the student, which subsequently occurred and continues.

We do not condone nor will we tolerate intimidation of students, staff, and colleagues. We support our students, staff, and colleagues who choose to wear masks and follow NYU health protocols and New York

State law. We support the queer, transgender, and non-binary members of the NYU community. We support those in our community who are Black and Indigenous, people of color, and immigrants, and who come from marginalized and historically underrepresented communities, particularly those who have been targets of ongoing and systemic racism and violence. We unequivocally condemn white supremacy, anti-trans/non-binary bias, and any hate speech.

We call on Steinhardt and University leadership to publicly support the NYU community and undertake an expedited review, as per the Faculty Handbook and Title IV, of Professor Miller's intimidation tactics, abuses of authority, aggressions and microaggressions, and explicit hate speech, none of which are excused by academic freedom and First Amendment protections. If your review substantiates our claims, we ask that you publicly condemn his actions and take whatever further disciplinary measures are deemed appropriate. It is unacceptable to remain silent in the face of ongoing harm to our students. Further, we call upon the administration to establish stronger protocols and policies to protect students, staff, and nontenured faculty members from intimidation and harm.

Signed,

Arjun Appadurai, Paulette Goddard Professor
Deborah J. Borisoff, Professor
Stephen Duncombe, Professor
Allen Feldman, Professor
Alexander R. Galloway, Professor
Lisa Gitelman, Professor
Radha S. Hegde, Professor
Nicholas Mirzoeff, Professor
Susan Murray, Professor
Arvind Rajagopal, Professor
Marita Sturken, Professor
Aurora Wallace, Clinical Professor
Jamie Skye Bianco, Clinical Associate Professor
Paula Chakravartty, Associate Professor
Brett Gary, Associate Professor
Ted Magder, Associate Professor
Mara Mills, Associate Professor
Juan Piñón, Associate Professor
Natasha Schüll, Associate Professor
Nicole Starosielski, Associate Professor
Isra Ali, Clinical Assistant Professor
Laine Nooney, Assistant Professor
Whitney (Whit) Pow, Assistant Professor
j. Siguru Wahutu, Assistant Professor
Angela Xiao Wu, Assistant Professor

