

# COLUMBIA SPECTATOR

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Columbia Daily Spectator, Volume CX, Number 92, 6 March 1986 — Mullinix means 'committee' in Low  
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## Mullinix means 'committee' in Low

By STEPHEN WEST

Deans and students from schools today have more influence in University decision-making than two years ago, but many of the decisions continue to be made behind closed doors.

In the last year, Senior Vice President Joseph Mullinix has established a number of committees to advise him on questions ranging from AIDS to Residence Halls room rates, but the success of the committees has been mixed. Although deans say they are pleased with the input they have through a number of behind-the-scenes committees, at least one of the special issue committees of administrators, faculty, and students seems to have bogged down due to dissension among its members.

In addition, because the committees are only advisory, Mullinix can and does alter or reject committee recommendations.

In the past year, Mullinix has established "special issue" committees of students, faculty, and administrators to review and recom-

mend a policy of a number of controversial issues, including AIDS,

the recent rise of the drinking age, and security issues raised by October's stabbing of an East Campus resident.

Mullinix began meeting with groups of deans and administrators last year. These committees, which meet quietly with Mullinix to discuss the operations and budgets of the student and support service divisions, have a much greater influence on University policy making than the special issue committees.

Deans are generally pleased with the influence they can exert through the administrative committees.

Reviews of the special issues committees have been mixed. In less than two months, the Alcohol Policy Task Force last semester, has yet to recommend formal changes in University policy and has been criticized for its slow progress.

Assessing the performance of these committees is often difficult because the members are reluctant to speak about their work. In fact, members of the AIDS committee have agreed to speak about the committee's business only in specially arranged news conferences with Mullinix present.

The changes that placed student and support services under Mullinix's control began in October 1984, when University President Michael Sovern shifted these responsibilities from Executive Vice President for Administration Paul Carter to the office of Provost Robert Goldberger, the University's highest ranking academic officer. A vice provost at the time, Mullinix was appointed to the newly created position of senior vice president to oversee the student and support functions—residence halls, the dining and health services, and facilities and personnel management.

After a good deal of internal reorganization which included dismissal of several ad-

ministrators, many of the functions are now more efficient than in the past. Administrators and deans credit Mullinix's committees with helping to make the services more responsive to suggestions from deans and students.

One top administrator dismissed last year was Vice President for Student Services Robert Cooper, whose responsibilities included residence halls and dining and health services. Unlike Mullinix, Cooper seldom used committees of deans and students to recommend and review policy, and deans cited Cooper's failure to coordinate services with the schools as one of the reasons for his dismissal.

"When I became dean I found it impossible to convey the needs of my students to the central administration," Dean of Columbia College Robert Pollack said. "I no longer find that to be the case."

### **The Special Issue Committees**

Mullinix and many of the students and deans who serve on the special issues committees see them as a first step towards bringing students and deans into the University's decision-making process, and members of the committees say that students have played a deciding role on some issues.

But ultimately, the special issue committees are advisory bodies, and Mullinix leaves little doubt as to where decision-making power lies. He chairs most of the committees himself and retains the right to reject or modify the committees' recommendations.

"I said up front when I set up these com-

mittees that the responsibility for making the administrative decisions has to rest with me," Mullinix said.

Columbia College Student Council Chair David Lebowitz, who sits on the Alcohol Policy Task Force, said he believed administrators would have developed a more restrictive alcohol policy than the one finally recommended by the committee.

"I think a lot of what came out of the Alcohol Policy Task Force would have been different if there weren't students on the committee," Lebowitz said. "They only prohibited alcohol in Carman, and they also wanted to exclude Furnald [Grocery] from selling beer."

Lebowitz and others point to the Alcohol Policy Task Force as an example of a committee that worked fairly well. Despite strong differences of opinion, the committees managed to settle questions about alcohol in floor lounges, Furnald beer sales, and proctors at parties where alcohol is served. One important issue on which the committees' student representatives did not prevail was the question of drinking in public areas, including the Low Library steps. According to Lebowitz, the committee finally banned public drinking because some of the committee's administrative members choose to assert themselves on the issue.

But administrators also admit that the committees can sometimes prove to be an inefficient tool for decision-making. Mullinix acknowledged that the Alcohol Policy Task Force developed recommendations quickly because the Dec. 1 rise in the drinking age forced a deadline on committee members, and some deans and administrators say the other committees might also benefit from a deadline.

"I think a committee should set itself a deadline. The Senate's standing committees and committees like the COI [Committee on Instruction] will always have something to do, but a task force committee or an issue committee needs to set a date," Dean of the School of General Studies Ward Dennis said.

The AIDS Committee, formed last October to review the adequacy of existing University policy to deal with potential cases of AIDS, had no formal deadline, and its only substantive actions in five months have been to distribute an informative pamphlet about the disease and to reaffirm existing infectious disease policies.

"I must admit to a certain amount of frustration with that committee, perhaps because the work of the other committees seemed so facile," said Edward De Carbo, dean of students at the School of Engineering and Applied Science (SEAS).

Mullinix said he had also hoped the committee could move faster, but attributed its slow progress to the conflicting views of the committee members. According to Mullinix, no pressing situation exists that would require the AIDS Committee to conclude its work more quickly.

Mullinix said his office has acted promptly when emergencies did arise. After the East Campus stabbing, new sign-in procedures were established the same day and a committee was formed to look at more long-term security problems, Mullinix said.

AIDS Committee members refuse to discuss the committee's work outside of specially arranged press conferences in Mullinix's presence, but some of the dissension among committee members became apparent last month when Mullinix refused funding to the Gay Health Advocates (GHA), an educational group coordinated by AIDS Committee member Michael Dowling.

Mullinix said the GHA would have to appeal for extra funding to University Health Services, but Health Services Director Richard Carlson said his department did not have the funds to grant GHA any more than the \$300 it had already given the group earlier this year.

Mullinix's rejection of funding for GHA's educational programs came only two weeks after the AIDS Committee had approved plans to distribute a pamphlet detailing facts about AIDS and University facilities available to vic-

tims of the disease. Dowling said he found the rejection upsetting because the committee had already declared a need for AIDS education.

Like the AIDS Committee, the Dorm Security Committee has moved more slowly than committee members expected. Columbia College Assistant Dean for Residence Halls Tracey Stewart, the committee chair, said the security group would not have a report ready by its early March deadline. Stewart declined to predict when the committee would issue a report.

Recently, Mullinix formed a committee of administrators and deans to develop plans for Columbia College's Schapiro Hall. No student representatives sit on the committee, but groups of students are meeting with Mullinix and Columbia College deans to discuss the layout and facilities of the building.

Mullinix and other administrators said the committee members hope to consult as many students as possible to avoid repeating what Director of University Residence Halls Harris Schwartz called the "disastrous" planning process that preceded the construction of East Campus. Built during Robert Cooper's tenure as vice president for student services, East Campus was designed primarily by architects who envisioned an apartment-style setting, and the only student input into the decision-making came through several large forums at which administrators discussed the building with students.

"There's already been more student input than there was in East Campus," Schwartz said.

Mullinix and others claim the committee process can serve a purpose even if the students on the committee do not always get what they want. By opening up the decision-making process to students, the committees give students a better grasp of the rationale behind decisions and allow them to feel that their voices were at least heard, administrators say.

“There may be a validation in a committee of a decision that could have been made centrally, but that consensus is important in itself,” agreed Columbia College Dean Robert Pollack.

### The Deans Committees

Although the special issue committees like the Alcohol Policy Task Force have attracted the most attention, the four committees of deans had administrators that quietly advise Mullinix are much more important in terms of University policy making. The deans sitting on these committees, especially the undergraduate deans, are among the biggest beneficiaries of the of last year’s shake up.

The committees, which Mullinix began establishing after he assumed responsibility for student services last year, are particularly important to Columbia College and SEAS deans because their students are the predominant users of residence halls and some of the others services Mullinix now oversees.

In the past, no formal mechanism existed for dean’s input into the student and support services administration. Deans said they welcomed the opportunity for a greater voice in the decision-making process and claim that Mullinix is willing to listen to their advice.

“We meet with Joe Mullinix to review things and to discuss issues,” Dean of the School of General Studies (GS) Ward Dennis said. “He uses us as a sounding board, and we’ve had a hand in reviewing some of the appointments he’s made.”

Several deans from the undergraduate schools form an Undergraduate Student Life Committee, and Mullinix has also set up two committees on support services and one on housing policy. Every three to four weeks, Mullinix reviews the budgets and operations

of the support functions with the deans committees. Residence halls and health services and dining services are budgeted separately from the academic expenses of the individual schools.

“When student services aren’t good, word gets back to high schools and prep schools and it can hurt your admissions,” Dennis added.

Dean of Columbia College Robert Pollack said student services are also an important factor in future alumni relations. Alumni tend to be more loyal to their undergraduate schools than to the graduate or professional schools they may attend later, and they are more likely to give to a school where they enjoy their stay. For decades, these facts have presented a problem for fundraising at Columbia, a research institution noted as a place where student life takes a back seat to academics.

“There are a number of areas where we’ve adjusted our budgets. Before those budgets went directly to the University Budget Committee,” Mullinix said.

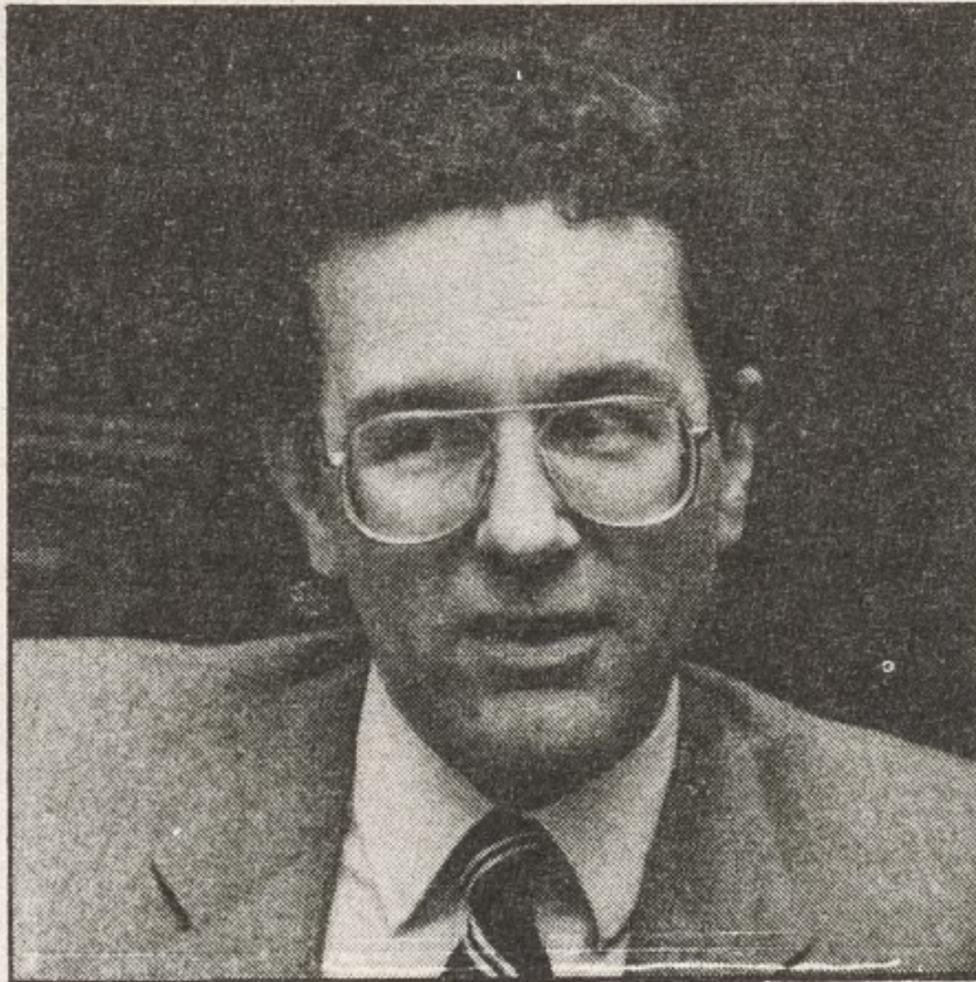
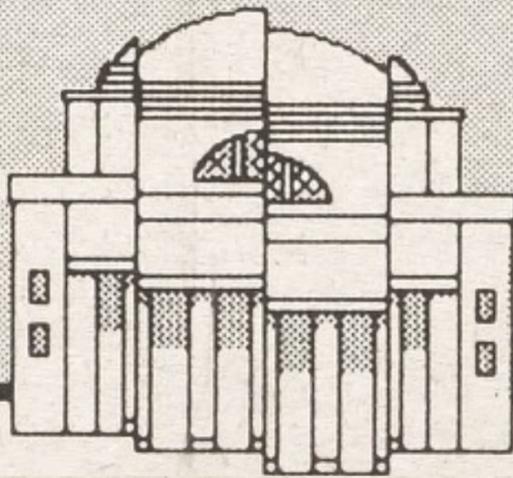
The deans’ increased role in University decision-making comes as no coincidence after last year’s administrative shake-up. Two years ago, Sovern commissioned a group of deans chaired by Dennis to prepare a report on student and support services. The committee reported back to Sovern two weeks before the president announced the shift of the support functions of the provost’s office. Although deans and administrators refused to disclose the committee’s specific recommendations, they acknowledged that its work sparked the restructuring.

“We had a discussion a while back and the problem we perceived was that the users didn’t feel the system was functioning very well,” Dennis said. “Some individuals were promoted as exemplary of the type of attitude we felt was important.”

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SPECTATOR PHOTO

Joseph Mullinix



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**Ward Dennis**