

**Tisch School of the Arts Asia Student and Alumni Body**  
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Feb 5, 2013

To The New York University Board of Trustees:

We, the Graduate students and alumni of New York University (NYU or the “University”) Tisch School of the Arts Asia (the “School”), reject the proposal to close Tisch School of the Arts Asia for these reasons:

The University [...] must continue to pursue opportunities and not lose sight that its preeminent task over the coming decades is to nurture its core as a great research university. NYU has built a solid platform, evidenced by its strong research profile, outstanding faculty, superb student body, distinguished professional and graduate schools, and creative programs. The Framework must give the highest priority to sustaining and developing this core of academic excellence and research. A great research university produces, preserves, and transmits new ideas, insights, and knowledge. Its basic research activities promote and nurture scientific progress, develop artistic and creative expression, and sustain an informed democratic society and its political life.

(NYU Framework 2031, Dated: June 24, 2008)

1. Bad Faith: The University commends Tisch Asia’s academic excellence, but is not willing to sustain the School. What this means is that NYU intrinsically favors profit over scholarship. This is contrary to the goals of the University outlined in its Framework, and this is contrary to NYU’s duty as educators municipally, federally, globally and most importantly, ethically.
2. Improper Termination: There are procedures for terminating a school program which NYU has ignorantly or even worse, willfully sidestepped.
3. Imprudence: If student education is paramount, NYU should have come back with a clear plan for the continuity of our education. They have had at least a year to figure it out, and possibly five, yet they still do not have a concrete transition plan.

## OUTLINE OF EVENTS

On Thanksgiving Day, November 23, 2011 we received word that Tisch Asia's head and founder Dr. Pari Sara Shirazi had been dismissed. This has resulted in lawsuits in which several members of NYU's leadership have been named - the same people who are currently in charge of Tisch Asia's future.

On December 13, 2011, during production period when most students were off campus working on their projects, a delegation led by President John Sexton and Dean Mary Schmidt Campbell came to Singapore for meetings. President Sexton, two miles away from the campus turned down our invitation for a meeting, instead, Dean Mary Schmidt Campbell accompanied by six members of President Sexton's leadership team came for a town hall meeting at Tisch Asia. In this long meeting full of contradictory information Dean Campbell informed us that Tisch Asia, a graduate campus, had been absorbed by the Global Network University and assured us that a new business plan was being designed which guaranteed the sustainability of Tisch Asia for the next "20-30 years." Dean Campbell left us with questions unanswered and the prospects of an insecure academic future.

After repeated invitations from Tisch Asia students and faculty, President Sexton on February 24, 2012, while on another business trip, came to the campus for a meeting to inform us about the future of our school and our education. He insisted that the school was financially "fragile" without directly answering any question we posed. President Sexton assured us that he and his staff were still making plans to keep the school financially stable and to flourish. In President Sexton's words, "It's not your task to worry about the fragility. It's ours to create stability where fragility might be." During these meetings promises were made by both President Sexton and Mary Schmidt Campbell that the school would stay open for at least 10-15 years, if not for longer. They promised that students and faculty would be routinely informed of any plans being made. As a matter of fact Dean Campbell promised "a bi-weekly update" of their plans to Tisch Asia students and faculty. However, none of these promises were honored. We were once more left in the dark, and remained extremely anxious for the entire year.

In November 2012, Dean Campbell came back to Tisch Asia during the same production period -- when a majority of students were once again away from school on film productions in Singapore and abroad, or in the midst of their end of semester projects. Contrary to their inflated promises of a new financial plan to stabilize the school and to keep us informed, Dean Campbell announced NYU's unilateral proposal to close down the school. Dean Campbell once again cited Tisch Asia's alleged financial distress, which if true, was extant for the last five years, and something which the leadership should have remedied before. Dean Campbell went on to say that closure was inevitable because the Singapore government had rejected the proposal to help the school, a misleading, half-truth.

## DISRUPTION OF EDUCATION

During this year we have witnessed several administrators coming to and from New York (at great expense) whose business was unclear and ineffective. We have spent numerous hours in meetings only to be told, once again, that there is no plan on how to properly continue our education and wind down the school. We have observed them making it up as they go and we are once again, left uncertain about our futures. The expenses of these visitors alone could have contributed to helping the school survive. We respectfully urge you to look into this unnecessary and unproductive expense. To watch this large amount of tuition money being spent by the administration when we are told we are financially fragile has been disheartening to say the least.

These annual announcements and absence of planning have been extremely disruptive to our creative learning environment. Students lost class time. Those who were supposed to work on their projects, had to adjust their rigid schedules to attend frequent meetings to discuss the administrative and financial problems of the school. They not only exploited the students' valuable time but also their mental energy and creativity. During this year and a half, rather than being students who are learning and creating, we have been burdened by the University administration's ineptitude, and remained anxious about our academic future. No students at Tisch New York or any other colleges at NYU have experienced what we have. We have paid NYU the same tuition and leave with an enormous amount of loan debt and yet we were not provided with a safe environment conducive to learning and essential to higher education.

## IMPROPER TERMINATION

Upon reviewing the New York University Policies and Procedures for Termination or Reorganization of Academic Programs dated 14 December 1981 (the "Implementation Procedures") which took effect pursuant to the Resolution of the Board of Trustees dated 10 December 1979, a copy of which is herewith attached as Annex "A", we found that the administration has violated the Implementation Procedures that apply to the entire NYU academic community. Paragraph A of the Implementation Procedures provides:

"When discontinuance or reorganization of a particular program is proposed, the entire matter is to be considered by an appropriate elected standing committee of the faculty of the school concerned (e.g. Policy and Planning Committee, Academic Affairs Committee, etc.) with the President of the Student Council of the affected school as an ad hoc member.

- The department concerned should have the opportunity to present a proposal for continuation and/or reorganization to the committee. Such a proposal should have the support of a majority of the voting members of that department, although minority reports should be admissible for consideration.
- The committee should have access to all pertinent information including, but not limited to:
  - a The reasoning behind the proposed termination or reorganization;
  - b The administrative history of the program, including what actions have been taken over the preceding five years which were supportive or non-supportive of the program;
  - c All recent academic evaluations of the program by both internal and external evaluators; and
  - d All financial data relevant to the program and related programs, including estimated costs for retaining it or reorganizing it as a quality program consistent with the standards of New York University, and the probable impact such expenditures would have on other programs in the school.
- The committee should also allow and encourage other appropriate members of the University community to provide further information and opinions, orally or in writing.

None of the above has taken place. Under the established Implementation Procedures, prior consultation has to be done with a committee composed of representatives of the faculty, the department and the students before any decision on the termination of an academic program may be finalized. It is only after the committee has concluded its study that their report is submitted to the dean and the faculty of the school for consideration. The faculty will then have the opportunity to vote on whether the program should be maintained.

At Tisch Asia, all the other stakeholders were not consulted and were given the chance to evaluate and confirm the reason behind the proposal to terminate the School's academic programs. We were merely asked to rely and accept the decision of the administration without due regard to what we may deem appropriate to address the School's alleged current financial situation. More importantly, if and when termination is inevitable, the other stakeholders (especially the faculty and the student body) would have the opportunity to decide with the administration on how the proposed termination should be implemented considering our respective interests and concerns.

Furthermore, last year, during a town hall meeting with President Sexton and Dean Campbell, the student body asked for the financial documents relevant to the then "fragile" status of the School. We have as yet to see any evidence of what this "fragility" means.

Clearly, the Implementation Procedures were disregarded by the NYU administration in dealing with the proposed termination of the School's academic programs. No consultation has been conducted among the faculty nor among the students. We, the most significant stakeholder, were not given the chance to evaluate the course of action unilaterally decided upon by the administration.

We believe that Tisch Asia could have survived and even thrived if it was allowed to have an undergraduate program, as is the case for all graduate programs at NYU. As Dean Mary Schmidt Campbell said in her meeting with the students on December 14, 2011 "Our graduate film program runs at a deficit in New York. What's different? We have twelve hundred undergraduates in film and so the aggregate, the aggregate if we combine undergrad and grad film then you have a fully supported program in both the undergraduate and graduate level."

The University's failure to provide this shows the lack of commitment by NYU for Tisch Asia and its survival. This administrative failure has nothing to do with students.

If indeed, there was a financial "fragility" one relevant point of inquiry is the fact that in his statement last year during the school town hall meeting on February 2012, President Sexton said,

"We don't believe that the school is in such a dire situation. The school and its programs are new and, as such, it had a rough road for a few years."

## IMPRUDENCE

To further demonstrate the University's lack of proper planning and ineptitude, the University recruited new students for Tisch Asia in the Fall of 2012. Since the University was aware of the school's fragility, why did the administration decide to accept more students this year, and then come up with a closing year of 2014 - which is one to three years ahead of the anticipated graduation date for the first year graduate film students? Had it not been for a formal protest filed by the student body against this "plan", the decision would have been implemented. Additionally, the prospects of students finishing in New York or several of the other global sites was offered. Of course, New York would not be able to accept Tisch Asia students early enough to make the transition possible, and none of the other global sites even offer graduate programs, much less graduate film programs and the resources in equipment and support which film production demands.

In their dealings with Singapore's Economic Development Board (EDB), President Sexton and Vice Provost Joe Juliano presented an offer which Singapore had to refuse. President Sexton demanded

40 million US dollars upfront as a cash advance just to talk and discuss the possible collaboration with the National University of Singapore (NUS) on an undergraduate program. President Sexton also wanted all the expenses of the undergraduate program to be burdened by the Ministry of Education (MOE). MOE would also pay taxes to NYU for the use of their brand name. They were asking a hefty amount just to have NYU's presence in Singapore. For the graduate program alone, they asked for 8 million US dollars per year. The price tag for everyday expenses was so high (well beyond their budget) that EDB had to send their proposal to the parliament. Ultimately, the parliament rejected the plan.

These actions have led us to question the University's sincere commitment to the students' welfare, as well as, the administration's real motives for folding Tisch Asia suddenly into its so-called Global Network.

#### BAD FAITH

NYU Tisch Asia opened in 2007 to nourish and develop a small group of promising graduate film students who believed in the program and in the future of the School. Five years since, more programs have been offered and the Tisch Asia community has gradually grown. The achievements that the students have produced so far have been overwhelming considering the short span of time. The students at Tisch Asia have lived up to our end of the bargain. The success of the students at Tisch Asia undoubtedly surpassed every expectation. This proves the commitment of both the faculty and students to produce the best work ultimately contributing to the school's standing and legacy.

It has always been our understanding that if we kept the level of education and artistic work high, Provost McLaughlin would allow Tisch Asia to create an undergraduate program that would support the graduate school and even pay for taxes due to NYU. In light of the recent proposal to close, Mr. McLaughlin undeniably did not intend to keep this promise.

We are aware that other NYU Graduate Programs are facing financial challenges, including NYU Tisch New York. However, our deep concern stems from the fact that the School has so much potential to grow but isn't being given the chance to fully develop. Instead, the administration has unilaterally proposed to terminate the School's academic program and set up a watered down version of the NYU Tisch program in an outpost such as Shanghai, which may generate more revenue through quantity for NYU, but also dilutes the reputation that the Tisch School in Asia has successfully built in the region for the past five years.

New York University is going global. We are without question, the most academically and artistically successful NYU Global Network Site. Dean Campbell has repeatedly stated that "Tisch Asia has

been a model of artistic and academic excellence.” Why then attempt to shut it down? How can an educational institution place profit above scholarship so much that it disregards the basic obligations between educator and student? If profit is truly the dominant mission of the University, what public service is it providing? These are questions that pertain not only to the students at Tisch Asia, but to all students who expect and rightfully deserve accountability for the money they spend out of pocket and the Federal, State and private loans they, by necessity, acquire in exchange for the promise of a higher education.

In view of the foregoing, we reject the proposal to close Tisch Asia. We demand, as is our right, to an environment conducive to learning as befits an institution of higher learning and free of disruptions regarding operational failures. We demand that all closure related decisions and transition planning cease immediately and NYU enter into transparent consultation with the relevant stakeholders, including students and faculty in accordance with the Implementation Procedures.

To quote Dean Campbell’s words:

“So on the subject of transparency, we would like to communicate with you on a regular basis every two weeks or every month but something that keeps you abreast of developments as they happen because I so agree that transparency is important and it is important to you and important to me because they are decisions about your life.”

We appeal to the Trustees, to the greater NYU community and to the public at large to continue to sustain and develop the pursuit of academic excellence at Tisch Asia, in good faith, by supporting this petition.

Sincerely Yours,

Tisch School of the Arts Asia Student and Alumni Body

**For further inquiry or to respond to this letter, please reach us at: [tischasiastudentbody@gmail.com](mailto:tischasiastudentbody@gmail.com)**