

**Knowledge Diplomacy Through Educational Transparency:
The Columbia Global Center in Beijing**

Authors: Quinn Morris, Kelsey Wu, Tiffany Pham, Salima Barrow, Heidi Small

Edited by Avian Muñoz¹

Foreign Policy Center, Columbia Policy Institute
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¹ Quinn Morris, Columbia College '27, Kelsey Wu, CC '27, Tiffany Pham, CC '26, Salima Barrow, CC '26, and Heidi Small, Barnard '27, are all members of the Foreign Policy Center of Columbia Policy Institute. Avian Muñoz, CC '25, is the founder and director of the Foreign Policy Center.

I. Introduction

The philosophy of facilitating and engaging in global discourse drives many of Columbia's curriculum and initiatives, including the Columbia Global Center in Beijing. In a 2017 interview with People's Daily, President Bollinger discusses the way that rapid changing of the international system, particularly with China's growth, inspired his desire to expand Columbia's reach.² In 2009, President Bollinger led the ambitious development of the Beijing Center for the advancement of information about China that could inform viable solutions to contemporary problems—ensuring Columbia's place in contributing to future solutions on a global scale.

During the tenure of President Emeritus Lee Bollinger, 11 Columbia Global Centers were established with the vision of expanding Columbia's contributions under the Fourth Purpose.³ Consistent with the University's global strategy, these centers sought to utilize the expansive network of faculty, alumni, and students to engage with our time's most pressing global challenges. Established in 2009, the Columbia Global Center | Beijing (hereinafter "Beijing Center") is a self-proclaimed "important regional hub for the Columbia community in East Asia." The mission of the Beijing Center is to capitalize on innovative research and scholarship to equip scholars with a global perspective and bolster regional connections and intelligence. However, drawing on the information provided, it is uncertain whether the Beijing Center has achieved the lofty goals to which it has aspired.

This report calls for greater transparency surrounding the Center's internal operations. Now more than ever, the evolving US-China relations have a profound impact on the world, making Columbia's academic and regional stake in China all the more crucial to understand.

²<https://globalcenters.columbia.edu/news/president-bollingers-exclusive-interview-peoples-daily&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1712859998576338&usg=AOvVaw0USCwfUfJGPxs9qZaGGoZH>

³ <https://worldprojects.columbia.edu/fourth-purpose>

II. Education Transparency

A. *Academic Transparency Matters*

An Ivy League education is a globally renowned achievement. Attaining a degree from one of these prestigious universities can advance an individual's life and career in numerous ways. Elite institutions often have satellite campuses around the world,⁴ acting as a global extension of the rigor and prestige that the university carries. International locations of a university, though perhaps less known, remain accredited and respected institutions. The necessity of transparency in these institutions is no less important than their main campus. Sustaining academic transparency upholds the academic integrity attached to a school. Visibility of internal operations assures students and leaders alike of the legitimacy and authenticity of the institution. Provided with accurate and up-to-date information, students can make informed educational decisions pertaining to their resources, careers, and futures.

B. *Lack of Transparency in the Beijing Center*

The most prominent defect in the information provided by the Center is the lack of new and current data. The most recent prominent projects platformed by the Center is "Lessons from Notions of Sacrifice in COVID-19 Responses in East Asia" from March 2021⁵ and "Columbia China and the World Forum," from August 2021.⁶ With respect to Career Education, events are composed almost entirely of career panels. While the panel series is still ongoing, relevant news outputs have been stagnant and there is limited insight into the academic affairs of the Center. The infrequency and irrelevance of news available strongly undermine any attempts at transparency which requires a healthy press. The Beijing Center's website lacks direct communication through conduits such as open-access publications, data

⁴ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/quanzhiguo/2018/08/21/top-u-s-colleges-with-branches-overseas/?sh=5048ad185cb4>

⁵ "Lessons from 'notion of Sacrifice' in COVID-19 Responses in East Asia." Columbia Global Centers, 18 Mar. 2021, globalcenters.columbia.edu/news-beijing/student-seminar-lessons-notion-sacrifice-covid-19-responses-east-asia.

⁶ "The Columbia China and the World Forum." Columbia Global Centers, 25 Aug. 2021, globalcenters.columbia.edu/news-beijing/columbia-china-and-world-forum.

sharing, or peer review processes. What results is a need for clearly defined measures that showcase the Center’s methods for disseminating research, conducting academic work, and the student experience.

Furthermore, biographical information on the administration of the Center is sparse. Regarding the members of the Faculty Advisory Committee and Advisory Board, however, there is robust information on these individuals. The Faculty Advisory Committee features prominent members including the Dean of Columbia Engineering, Shih-Fu Chang, and Columbia Professors Lydia Liu and Qin Gao. But under “Our Team,” there is a notable shift in notoriety.⁷ At first glance, there are only 5 listed individuals—a noticeably short staff list for any organization. Among them, these individuals occupy the roles of Deputy Director, Communications Director, Operations Manager, and Program Coordinator. For example, the biography of Miaomiao Bai, Senior Operations Officer, is a mere 5 sentences on her role, background, and skills. Thus, in addition to the lack of information surrounding academic affairs, there is slim information on the administration. Taken together, neither the operations nor the personnel of the Center are evident. There is a glaring lack of educational transparency surrounding the Beijing Center.

A focal point of rising academic and political interest shared between the U.S. and China is AI. AI as a field has grown to be a point of competition between the two countries.⁸ Within both countries, Generative AI has become a field of exponentially growing academic and policy interest . It garners a concern that the Columbia Beijing Center has not produced any discussion on how the two countries are not working together but rather emerge as competitors within the AI field.

III. Call to Action

Partner campuses have been a fundamental asset in expanding international ties across many college campuses and universities. In the aftermath of the pandemic and as geopolitical tensions rise

⁷ <https://globalcenters.columbia.edu/content/beijing-team>

⁸ “The U.S.-China AI Race: Where Do Both Countries Stand?” Edited by National Committee, *NCUSCR*, National Committee on U.S. China Relations , 3 Aug. 2023, www.ncuser.org/podcast/us-china-ai-race/.

between the United States and China, the 21st century has seen a new epoch of transnational educational challenges. Columbia University, a self-proclaimed leader in global learning, has a steep responsibility to contribute to positive relationships, seeking to de-escalate tensions that could hurt productive dialogue. For the progression of academic scholarship and longevity of transnational innovation, the operations of a global campus or center must prioritize a dynamic mindset and diligent initiative to enhance current relationships. Although there are immeasurable challenges, including differences in government regulation of censorship, rights to freedom in academia, and technological uses between the United States and China—we hold steadfast that the investment in powerful intellectual exchange is a necessary precondition to peace. 6,813 miles may divide Columbia University’s New York Campus and the Columbia Beijing Center, however, by fostering deeper transnational diplomacy and dialogue, and facilitating extensive leadership ties from New York to Beijing through regular evaluation, Columbia can and *must* be an agent in ensuring stability and peace in the educational sphere.

Dialogue must remain at the forefront of the agenda of the Columbia Beijing Center. The rapid development of technology—especially AI—can easily lead to antagonism between the two powers without nodes of transparent and neutral dialogue. Academic scholarship on AI is likely to be at the forefront of informing policy-making decisions around AI usage. Dialogue between universities and Global Centers is an urgent discussion that must take place to guard against abuse. Columbia Beijing Center leaders should begin using their resources to work toward a framework for academic modes of engagement with forefront issues of U.S.-China relations. Additionally, the formation of partnerships with Chinese universities and scholars leads to the establishment of forums for the collective advancement of AI. We thereby advise the Columbia Beijing Center to work alongside Tsinghua or Peking University—two top-ranked universities in China for computer science—to center dialogue on how to bridge two vastly different countries’ values and vantage points on education customs.

As an academic institution, the Columbia Beijing Center should try to strike a dialogue amongst its students to bring to attention the concerns behind how AI, even as an extremely beneficial educational field, can be used as a mechanism of antagonism between the two countries. Specific mechanisms can include the leaders of the Columbia Beijing Center drafting a response to the use of AI being a field of competition between the US and China. It's important to perhaps establish some forums with university professors outside of Columbia, like elite technology universities such as Tsinghua or Peking University, the two top-ranked universities in China for computer science. The Columbia Beijing Center ought to work toward establishing some modes of dialogue to bring to light unnecessary hostilities surrounding academic areas of knowledge. This will promote cooperation and bridge the knowledge between both countries in an increasingly intertwined academic space.