

Office of Rules Administration Annual Report, AY2025-2026

This report provides information about the administration of the Rules of University Conduct (“the Rules”) during Academic Year 2025–2026. The activities of the Office of Rules Administration (ORA) during this year were very different from the foci of the previous academic year. The ORA devoted the lion’s share of its resources in AY2024–2025 to resolving an historically large number of cases involving charges of Rules violations and working with University partners to prepare for demonstrations in order to achieve the balance between free expression and achievement of the University’s academic mission that is central to the Rules.¹ The affirmative statement of the Rules avers, “[j]ust as all members of the University community have the right to speak, to study, research, to teach, and to express their own views, so must they allow others in the community to do the same. The right to demonstrate, for example, cannot come at the expense of the right of others to counter-demonstrate, to teach, or to engage in academic pursuits requiring uninterrupted attention.”

The Rules seek to protect both demonstration activity and the integrity of the University’s academic mission by delineating time, place, and manner parameters and providing certain respondent protections when members of the community are alleged to have not followed those parameters. The Rules Administrator is tasked with administering the Rules to achieve this balance.

There were fewer demonstrations in AY2025–2026 that took place at University facilities or University-sponsored activities, and none of those demonstrations led to charges of Rules violations. The ORA continued its outreach efforts to raise awareness of the Rules and to try to build trust in the revised Rules processes, as well as building new infrastructure to enhance its ability to deliver on its goals of fairness, efficiency, and transparency.

The Office of Rules Administration

AY2025-2026 marked the second year of the term of Rules Administrator (RA) Gregory Wawro. The Office of Rules Administration (ORA), which is housed in University Life, made staffing adjustments to maintain its commitment to its guiding principles of fairness,

¹ The Rules do not provide a definition of what constitutes a “protest” or “demonstration.” Nor are they defined elsewhere and the terms are often used interchangeably. The ORA does not try to distinguish whether an event is a “protest” or a “demonstration.” This document will use the term “demonstration” to describe events that fall under the jurisdiction of the Rules.

efficiency, and transparency for conducting its work and assessing its performance. The ORA continued to seek broader engagement with the community to improve understanding of the Rules and learn more about perceptions of the three principles and community expectations. Columbia's extensive commitment to free speech is embodied in the Rules. Affording broad protections of the right to demonstrate while also protecting the wide array of functions that make up the University's academic mission introduces a significant degree of complexity to the administration of the Rules. The ORA takes seriously the educational component of its charge and seeks to help the community better grasp the complexities in the Rules. A key part of these educational efforts is the ORA's [website](#), which seeks to provide easier access to information about the Rules and enables the RA to provide [updates](#) to the University Community about Rules-related matters.

Demonstration Activity

Whether or not an event constituted a demonstration and therefore fell under the purview of the Rules was determined by the ORA based on the totality of the circumstances, often including reviewing notices received from organizers and, in the absence of formal notice, announcements on social media or notification by Public Safety at the time of an unanticipated demonstration. For maintenance of strict content-neutrality, consideration of announcements from organizers, including social media posts, was not evaluative of content and purely for operational purposes, such as determining whether or not the demonstration will take place at a time and location that has already been reserved for another event. The ORA worked with University leadership, administrators, staff, and faculty to prepare for demonstrations in order to avoid disruptions to academic or other University functions and Rules violations. The ORA met regularly and on an ad hoc basis with stakeholders to determine how best to provide logistical support for demonstrations.

On any given day, there are typically a large number of academic and non-academic events planned for spaces on the University's campuses, many of which are scheduled well in advance. The University seeks to have organizers or sponsors of demonstrations provide advance notice of planned events by emailing eventnotifications@columbia.edu or filling a webform at <https://eventnotifications.columbia.edu>, so that any preparations deemed necessary for limiting disruption to academic activities and other planned events and for ensuring the safety of the community may be made by the relevant campus office(s). In several instances, the ORA worked with organizers to maintain the balance between University functions and free expression by providing information about how to conduct their demonstrations in ways that were consistent with the Rules. The University introduced a new policy requiring two business days (48 hours) notice for demonstrations on certain pre-designated days advertised to the community on the RA's [updates](#) web

page. The designated pre-notification days are those during identified periods of increased campus activities, especially when a large amount of campus space has been pre-reserved (such as graduation ceremonies and “family days”), or when there is a heightened risk of disruption to University functions. Demonstrations are still permitted to occur on those days but may face tighter parameters with respect to location and timeframe to limit interference with other events.

Notification of planned demonstrations is important because it enables the University to plan in ways that balance free expression with the achievement of its academic mission and performance of University functions without disruption, consistent with the time, place, and manner regulations delineated in the Rules. It is imperative that demonstrations not infringe on the rights of others to engage in University functions. It is also important for the University to provide equal opportunities for counter-demonstrations and a safe environment for all community members.

When organizers do not provide notification in advance of demonstrations, it complicates preparation tasks in a variety of ways. For University Delegates and other personnel to perform their critical roles as delineated in the Rules, it is important to know the expected size of a demonstration to determine the number of Delegates who need to be assigned (the role of University Delegates is further described in the “Delegate Usage” section below). If organizers do not provide notice with this information, it is not clear how many Delegates are needed. If another event is scheduled for a given space and time, it can be difficult or impossible to contact organizers who have not provided notice to inform them that their demonstration conflicts with a previously scheduled event or has a high probability of disrupting University functions. The University continues to consider improvements to the notification process to better balance free expression with minimization of negative externalities. The ORA does *not* use contact information provided by organizers as evidence of accountability for Rules violations.

During AY25–26, tens of thousands of events were held on Columbia’s campuses that involved prior reservations of indoor and outdoor space. On the Morningside Campus alone, there were 2,287 outdoor events that involved reservations of space. The ORA identified 21 total demonstration events during the year. Figure 1 displays data on the number of demonstration events by month during AY25–26. On average, 2.1 demonstrations occurred per month during the Fall and Spring semesters (the median value was two demonstrations per month). From August through May, each month saw at least one demonstration. October 2025 saw the most demonstrations with four. For purposes of comparison, AY24–25 saw an average of 9.8 demonstrations per month, with a

median of four demonstrations per month (the high average was driven by three months that had exceptionally high counts of demonstrations).

Delegate Usage

University Delegates remain a vital part of sustaining Columbia's tradition of vigorous debate, open inquiry, and freedom of expression. Delegates are Officers of Administration appointed by the President and/or the Rules Administrator. In accordance with University Statutes, "Delegates have authority for the enforcement of these Rules. They shall warn individuals and groups whose actions may violate these Rules and may declare their belief that the demonstration does not conform to the Rules of University Conduct. They shall, when facts known to them or brought to their attention warrant, file a complaint with the Rules Administrator against alleged violators."

Delegates attend University events as well as demonstrations to support the ability of all members of the University community to express their views — without regard to the content of the expression — while helping to maintain a safe environment and the normal functioning of University operations. Content-neutrality is foundational to the role: as the Rules affirm, "[e]very member of our community... retains the right to demonstrate... even when such expression invites controversy and sharp scrutiny."

Delegates do not have disciplinary authority. Their role is to document observations, provide guidance and warnings when appropriate, and submit reports of potential violations to the RA for further review.

During AY25–26, Delegates were deployed to 292 discrete events, a fraction of the tens of thousands of events held across Columbia's campuses during this period.

The assignment of Delegates to events continues to occur in a variety of ways. Event organizers can request Delegate presence for help managing a pre-planned event that is not a demonstration, but where a demonstration might occur incident to the event. Large-scale events, such as graduation ceremonies, have Delegates automatically assigned to them. If organizers submit a webform for a demonstration or announce one to the community, Delegates are assigned based on expectations of size and nature of the demonstration. When an unanticipated demonstration occurs, "on-call" Delegates are assigned in the moment, when available.

AY 25-26 marked an improvement of operational oversight of the Delegate program, including a more deliberate, event-by-event approach to Delegate assignments. This shift in approach accounts for much of this year's change in scale: total Delegate service hours declined by 51% (3,663 in AY 25-26 versus 7,492 hours in AY 24-25). The decline in

Delegate service hours is only partially due to the decline in the frequency of demonstrations, since Delegates support a wide variety of events that are not demonstrations. At least part of the decline is due to decreases in the frequency with which event organizers requested Delegates.

Delegate training was increased from 2 hours in AY24–25 to 12 hours in AY25–26, including a day-long training led by an outside expert in de-escalation and conflict resolution for a group of Delegates and expanded instruction on the Rules of University Conduct for all Delegates.

The quality of Delegate engagement with demonstrators changed meaningfully this year. Delegates were trained to engage early and informally: introducing themselves at the outset of a demonstration, establishing a visible and approachable presence, and communicating expectations in conversation rather than through formal warnings alone. The goal of this approach is to ensure Delegates are experienced by demonstrators as they are intended to be: a resource for de-escalation, dialogue, and support in exercising the right to demonstrate within the Rules.

Complaints of Rules Violations

The Rules state that the RA “shall accept and investigate complaints, file charges, organize informal settlements, and present evidence in support of charges to the hearing panels.” Complaints of Rules violations can be submitted by any member of the University community through the ORA website. Complaints can also be submitted directly by Delegates and by Public Safety. The ORA investigates all complaints of Rules violations, although the degree to which an investigation can be conducted depends on the nature of the complaint. For example, some complaints lack specificity, limiting the extent to which they can be investigated.

Of the 21 demonstration events that took place in AY25–26, nine (43%) were reviewed through the Rules process. The ORA received 32 reports where potential Rules violations had occurred in connection with events (some events had multiple reports associated with them). Delegates submitted 20 of those reports, while 12 came from other members of the University community. Of the 292 events covered by Delegates, they reported possible Rules violations for only eight (3%) of them. Not all the reports resulted in Rules investigations, but all investigations conducted were linked to at least one Delegate or non-Delegate report.

For the nine distinct events that were ultimately associated with Rules investigations, none of the investigations resulted in charges being submitted to the University Judicial Board (UJB). Complaints were dismissed for six of them because investigation revealed

insufficient evidence to support charges of violations. For one event, the ORA did not pursue charges because other disciplinary processes were deemed more appropriate after careful consideration and because of a desire to avoid putting individuals through multiple disciplinary processes. For two events, the ORA sent letters to those identified as being involved to inform them of concerns, and for one of these events, the RA met with individuals at their request to discuss their concerns and answer follow-up questions.

We analyzed data on the length of time to resolve Rules proceedings. The average length of time between the date the ORA received a report of potential Rules violations and the date of resolution was approximately 5.5 business days (with a standard deviation of 7.5 business days). For cases that were dismissed, the average resolution time was approximately 4.4 business days (with a standard deviation of approximately 8.5 business days). For the case where the ORA did not pursue charges because other disciplinary processes were deemed more appropriate, it closed the ORA investigation within 3 days.

Sanction Implementation

The ORA worked with the UJB and the Rules Clerk to implement sanctions imposed by the UJB in connection with findings of responsibility for Rules violations in the previous academic year. This required engaging with a variety of University partners, including advisors, deans, housing, dining, and the registrar's office, to handle administrative aspects of sanction implementation. The ORA built infrastructure to maintain consistent and thorough communications with respondents and students returning from serving disciplinary sanctions, including by conducting a large number of in-person and remote advising sessions for the latter.

Outreach

Given the uniqueness of the Rules, the ORA continued to work on improving engagement with the community over the Rules and the activities of the ORA. The balance the Rules seek to achieve is possible only if there is broad understanding of the Rules and if there is trust in Rules processes. The RA sought to enhance understanding of the Rules throughout the community and improve trust in processes by increasing transparency, beyond the development and expansion of the aforementioned website. To that end, the RA and ORA staff met with the General Studies Student Council, the Arts & Sciences Policy and Planning Committee, the staff of Undergraduate Student Life, and the Council of Deans. ORA staff delivered presentations and answered questions asked at student orientation sessions and sessions around commencement planning. The RA participated in several Listening Tables sessions sponsored by the Trust Collaborative and met with a group of students in a "Fac' to Table" session organized by Undergraduate Student Life. The RA

participated in several meetings with the Provost's and EVP of University Life and Well-being's Advisory Committee on Conduct and Accountability and with the University Senate Rules Committee to discuss suggested changes and clarifications to the Rules and areas where more information would be helpful to the community. The RA regularly attended Senate plenaries and answered questions about reporting policies during the May 29, 2026 plenary. The RA sat for an interview with Columbia News to discuss the AY2024–2025 Annual Report. The RA also met one-on-one with students, staff, and faculty to discuss concerns. Regular lines of communication were maintained with deans of students and other student support professionals to provide clarification of the Rules and increase transparency about the progress of Rules processes. The ORA intends to maintain such meetings as frequent occurrences and to expand outreach efforts to more stakeholders in the community.

Areas for Improvement and Growth

The ORA continually seeks to improve Rules administration at Columbia and is constantly considering areas for improvement and growth. Education and outreach efforts will continue to be expanded to promote transparency of Rules processes. If additional changes are made to the Rules, it is important for the ORA to provide clarity on these modifications. The ORA has produced a video tutorial to enhance the community's understanding of the Rules and plans to make this tutorial available to all members of the community in the coming academic year. The tutorial will be accessible through the Rules Administration web page, as part of a general redesign effort to make the site easier to navigate and the information there more accessible. The FAQ section of the website will be expanded to provide further clarity about various aspects of the Rules that may not be apparent from the text of the Statutes, especially with respect to details about internal administrative processes.

When the UJB issues sanctions for respondents, the implementation of those sanctions involves working with the respondents' schools and other University offices. Following successful engagement with deans and deans of students around sharing essential information, additional efforts will be directed towards all relevant student-facing staff to enhance the efficiency and transparency of sanction implementation. The ORA will continue to develop positive working relationships with each school, especially for the purposes of helping individuals understand and navigate sanctions that arise from Rules processes that may impact academic work. The ORA will continue to work with University partners to streamline implementation of sanctions to avoid inefficiencies and confusion.

The central role that Delegates play in administering the Rules requires that they continue to receive excellent training and guidance when observing demonstration activity.

Delegate training will continue to focus on conflict resolution and de-escalation, along with emphasizing educational approaches in Delegate engagement. We continue to consider ways to improve the Delegate program, such as through the designation of lead Delegates who have additional training and can provide guidance to larger Delegate groups. The ORA also continues to explore ways to enhance the community's understanding of the Delegate role. An important part of a Delegate's role is to provide advice during demonstrations on how to hold a demonstration that complies with the parameters established by the Rules. It is essential that Delegates be treated with respect and that interactions between demonstrators and Delegates remain civil. Delegates work with Public Safety in their roles administering the Rules and thus it is important that both Delegate and Public Safety directives be respected. The ORA hopes to continue to partner with others in the University to ensure that every member of the University community is treated with respect while performing their duties.

Figure 1. Count of demonstrations by month, AY25-26

