

Dear SAP Appeal Committee,

I am writing to appeal my dismissal so that I can return to Columbia. This letter will detail some of the circumstances I faced during the 2024-2025 academic year, along with reflections which I hope will characterize them as context, and not excuses.

Background Information

I lived off-campus for the first time this year. This was supposed to be fantastic -- I was going to be roommates with my friends, other Columbia film students who had introduced me to a small network of artists just as dedicated as I was. We shot a music video and two short films over that summer. Easily the biggest projects I'd completed, and the most fun I'd had, during my time at Columbia. In the first week of classes, two of my roommates (who had been dating for a year) broke up. My apartment became the center of drama everyone wanted to avoid, and I found it impossible to connect with any of my friends outside of my position on a crew. I did pretty well commuting to my classes, but there were days I woke up late and decided it wouldn't even be worth it to try.

I've been on antidepressants since 7th grade. I ran out in February, and didn't refill my prescription. I started consistently microdosing THC before classes to help with anxiety. This helped me work faster in a lot of cases, but the quality of my writing and ideas started to decline, along with my overall memory.

I'd been seeing someone during most of this semester and the previous one. They were a free-spirited but dedicated multimedia artist who had dropped out of Columbia in 2022. In March, they lost their job and started to suffer severe mental distress from missing rent payments on an 81 square foot, roach-infested apartment. They stayed with me for the next two months, while preparing to go home and work at their old high school job over the summer. They left on May 7th, then broke up with me over the phone on the morning of May 8th.

I've been talking to a therapist via telehealth for the past three years, but it's become clear that there are things I haven't processed. In early October of 2023, I found out my grandfather hit his head and died, just as I was leaving for class. A month later, I slipped in the shower, hit my head, and suffered a brain hemorrhage. I mostly just considered myself lucky because I had time to recover during the strike. I participated in a toxic, bullying clique during that year because I didn't want to be the next person to get ousted from the group chat. I was in a disorienting, codependent, polyamorous "situationship" with two people from that group during the winter of 2023-2024, and I never told my therapist that I called the crisis hotline when it ended. When I lived at the Dwight Lofts, there was a window in the 12th floor communal space that had been dubbed the "suicide window" because the stoppers were broken, meaning it could swing out to create a massive opening. I'd sometimes sit there and hang my head and torso out, over the street. Eventually I reported the window to the building's management, they got it fixed, and I never felt the need to really think about that period of time.

This semester, spring 2025, I failed World Cinema because I fell behind on the weekly assignments. These were to watch a movie and hand-write a brief response in class. For the majority of those classes, I was there, and just didn't do it.

I decided to withdraw from Scriptwriting II after the professor told me I needed to remove a fundamental part of the story I'd been working on in order for my grade to improve. He maintained that he wouldn't accept any corrected assignments, and that it was very unlikely I'd be able to recover my grade at all. I also became frustrated with him for recommending that I use generative AI to help write the story. I truly enjoyed the course and his style of teaching, but his creative feedback demanded increasingly closed-minded cynicism, and I felt I couldn't satisfy it without disregarding my own voice and taking more time away from my other classes.

Changes & Improvements

Reconnecting with My Motivation

Towards the end of the 2025 spring semester, I started becoming noticeably, unbearably stressed out, and my now-ex-partner would often ask me why I even wanted to be in college. In defending my choices, and deciding which ones I wanted to defend, I realized this: I love academia. I love writing essays. I love reading random articles on JSTOR. I love education, whether I'm absorbing it or gathering it, because I ultimately want to curate knowledge on very specific topics, in my own way, for others.

I spend most of my free time listening to political "infotainment" and long-form comedic journalism, and it's been a constant influence across all of my creative work. The topics interest me, but I'm equally fascinated by the structure of the writing -- the standard that's emerged for delivering important information to people my age. I have notes, more often than not. There are things I would change, jokes I would cut, rhetorical framing I'd adjust. I have plenty of fictional stories I want to tell in the future, but this is what motivates me to approach it from an academic perspective.

I spent last week recording footage of anti-ICE protests, in ways that other people couldn't, and it was a good reminder of what I really care about. Around 8pm on Tuesday, June 10th, I spoke to a Reuters journalist who said he was heading home because things were going to get "messy" at night. That stuck with me, because I had the same thought, but my response was to pack a second lens that would be better for low light. I stayed out and documented moments that might not have been captured otherwise.

Recognizing Specific Missteps

Looking back at Scriptwriting II, I recognize that there are more sustainable ways I could lose faith in my creative voice. I could have set aside the actual story, the interplay between characters and worldbuilding that I felt made it worth telling, and just written a version of it that the professor would accept. Like I said, I saw precisely and immediately how beneficial the course material was for me. I could have found a way to stick with it. I spoke to two other students in that class who both said that's what they were doing, and that they were disappointed, but it was just a grade.

I also watched another student copy and paste dialogue from a ChatGPT window, and thinking about that has given me an additional motivation: my writing could be amazing, but when it takes too long, it's nothing at all. Seeing how so many people can accept AI's half-decent writing as long as it's fast, I'm reminded that I could easily dump a hundred

words per minute into an assignment, and I can do it with research, logic, and personal values that a sentient product would never dream of.

This is similar to the issue I had in World Cinema. I desperately needed to close the gap between my work and the nature of the assignments. I could have written a pretty good response in 20 minutes, the same way everyone else did. That's all that was required.

This was so much worse during the fall semester. I spent all of my time on my Directing II film, mostly on rewriting the script, and ended up with a GPA of 0.4 along with a film that I absolutely hate. I got my GPA up to 1.75 this semester, and I would have improved even more if I had recognized just how much I was slowing myself down.

I've been letting loneliness cloud my judgement. This has emerged as a pattern where I knowingly serve a purpose, and get disappointed when I'm no longer needed. I lent my camera, lighting, and sound equipment (along with my knowledge of how to use it) to three different student films this year, just because I wanted to be around other filmmakers. These production crews were close-knit groups of friends, and I inevitably ended up sitting off to the side once they knew how to use all the equipment. I let that get to me on a personal level, not considering that it was effectively what I'd signed up for. Letting my partner move in with me was just another easy way to avoid being alone, and I prioritized keeping them in my life even when I knew we had a negative influence on each other.

Improvements in Practice

I've taken on a lot of responsibility in my internship at the Museum of Post-Punk and Industrial Music, and it's one of the things that have started to shake me awake from my obsession with all my projects being "perfect". I've been working closely with the museum's founder, who's actually a former Columbia professor. He's consistently reminded me how valuable an academic framework is to the creative world, while also encouraging me to balance it with the "gut feeling" that fuels any art.

I've started journaling this summer, which has had all the obvious benefits. It's a great outlet for my thoughts, and I've found a lot of comfort in the fact that I never hesitate to record the ones I avoid talking about. It's also been a way to make sure I practice writing in real time.

Academic plan

I'm trying to move back to campus next year. Living in the loop felt absolutely electric, and it gave me so many options for third places, which are crucial to how I handle my time, schoolwork, and social life.

I've registered for Fall 2025 classes, and confirmed with my advisor that I need a minimum of three C's and two B's to regain academic compliance. I'm also leaning towards TV-focused courses, realizing I've been fully neglecting my interest in TV. I am genuinely excited for the classes I'm taking. I'm confident that I'll be able to achieve the learning outcomes and regain my academic standing if I'm allowed to return for another semester at Columbia.