

August 25, 1967

Dr. Grayson Kirk  
President  
Columbia University  
New York, New York 10027

Dear President Kirk:

By now you will possibly have received, though equally possibly not yet have had time to read, my letter of August 16 concerning the Strickmann filter controversy. I would like now to offer this postscript by way of an effort to make a constructive suggestion to help Columbia University to recover its damaged esteem.

There is no doubt that there has been considerable misunderstanding about the implications of the University's relationships to the promotion of the filter. This in turn may have stemmed more from an inept choice of procedure than from any attempt to deviate from the highest standards of scholarly objectivity that society has the right to expect from a great university. In meeting what seemed like reasonable requirements imposed by the needs to protect the patent situation, the existing procedure also inadvertently deprived the faculty from participating in a conclusion with which they are nevertheless associated by virtue of the Columbia label.

I was for many years on the faculty of the University of Wisconsin, which derived great benefits from arrangements for the exploitation of scientific and technical discoveries not fundamentally different from those at issue here. However, the University and its president were never in the position of having to participate directly in the promotion of any of these products. Instead, the Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation was established as an autonomous corporate non-profit body. The charter of WARF stipulated that the proceeds were to be used for constructive purposes of the University or for further capitalization of WARF sponsored research and development. WARF made many individual arrangements with inventors and scientists both inside and outside the University that would have been quite comparable to the mutually advantageous proposals indicated by Strickmann. WARF was responsible for the development and exploitation of such important products as irradiated ergosterol for vitamin-D supplementation of milk, and warfarin, which is such an important rodenticide. At the time of their announcement these products were perhaps less controversial than the Strickmann filter, but in any case the University was well able to participate in the development of these products and to reap some of the financial benefits from this without being in the position of directly promoting them. Any pronouncements with respect to the efficacy of these agents came either from WARF or from

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individual professors at the University, without any imputation of corporate approval. In fact, a very happy de facto arrangement evolved over the years which engendered a very satisfactory level of mutual confidence between WARF and the University faculty. WARF also provided a very convenient vehicle for voluntary transfer of proprietary interests by professors and others who had made inventions that they were in no position to exploit.

It seems to me that it is by no means too late to consider the establishment of such a corporation for Columbia, and that doing so might provide for a graceful resolution of your present dilemma.

I am sure that you must have many acquaintances at Wisconsin, perhaps including President Harrington, who could give you useful detailed information about WARF's operations.

In distinction to my previous letter, this one need not be regarded as personally confidential.

Sincerely yours,

Joshua Lederberg  
Professor of Genetics