

SWARTHMORE COLLEGE
Swarthmore, Pennsylvania

Office of the President

8 April 1971

To all members of the College community:

I had assumed that all of us recognized what constituted proper relations with those individuals and agencies, public and private, off-campus and on-campus, with whom members of the College community come in contact. It is unreasonable to assume that there will be no contact; the College cannot try to be a secret society, and it would be as impossible, as it would be unwise to try, to enforce such an expectation. We cannot presume that members of the community will remain on all occasions silent about the college life they are a part of. The College needs to be in contact with the "outside world" on such diverse matters as the certification of student enrollment and achievement, the availability of fire and police protection, the visits of scholars from other institutions, and the presence of neighbors and friends at social, cultural, educational, and athletic events, etc.

But all of us must recognize that at times we have access to information about individuals and groups at the College because we are specially privileged to be members of the College community. We all have an obligation to be responsible and discreet about how we communicate this information. The recent publication of a spate of documents allegedly stolen from the FBI suggests the possibility that some individuals have gone beyond the limits of reasonable cooperation, by supplying information which is especially privileged - private to individuals or the College.

For the past week, I have been investigating every allegation that has been published, 'phoned in, or shown to me or my associates that implied that persons in this community - students, faculty, members of the staff - have given out information that was confidential. I have refrained from acting on the basis of anonymous information, and I have avoided, and will continue to avoid, any use of surreptitious informants, eavesdropping, or any other kind of one-sided surveillance. I don't believe that a college can remain a college and indulge in such activities. I have not yet found any conclusive evidence that any member of the College community has been guilty of wrong-doing in this respect.

Yet I feel obliged to make perfectly clear to all members of this community that they must exercise intelligent restraint in divulging information, except that required by law or by college policy and practice, to any individuals, public or private, outside the community. Not to heed this injunction is to put in jeopardy one's right to further participation in the community. Where doubt exists about the propriety of communicating information (however obtained) about the community to individuals or agencies outside the community, the individual should consult in advance with an appropriate officer of the College.

I may add that I have made vigorous representations to public authorities - federal, state, and local - protesting alleged invasions of the proper autonomies of the College community. Our major recourse must be, however, to the self-discipline exercised by each of us.

I am also designating a committee, made up of faculty, students and members of the administration, to advise me. Included are Mr. Mark Breibart; Mr. Lewis Cook; Mr. Frederick Pryor; Miss Dorothy Robinson; Mr. David Smith; Mr. Jerome Wood. Its major responsibilities will be two-fold: to cope with the present situation, alleviating in every way possible harm unjustly done to the reputation of those given notoriety in the documents. Secondly, I hope it will help formulate guidelines that will be as explicit as possible about safeguarding of confidential information. I must make two points explicit. This group will not constitute a court, but rather a committee or commission - a kind of collective ombudsman for the College community. Second, I must reserve the responsibility and obligation for action which would be called for, or be implicit, in the recommendations of this committee.

Robert D. Cross