On Campus

Valentini Named College Dean

Summer 2012



James J. Valentini, seen here chatting with students at the Dean's Scholarship Reception in February, earned high marks as interim dean of the College this past academic year. (Eileen Barroso)

James J. Valentini, a chemistry professor and former department chair who stepped in as Columbia College's interim dean following the resignation of Michele Moody-Adams last fall, has been officially appointed the sixteenth dean of the College and vice president of undergraduate education.

"This is the ideal job for me. I love this job," Valentini recently told the *Columbia Spectator*. "I love the students. I love the faculty. I'm going to try to live up to the expectations people have for me."

President Lee C. Bollinger, in an e-mail announcing Valentini's appointment on June 11, praised his "inclusive leadership style." He wrote: "Jim's many notable strengths as a scholar, teacher, administrator, and recognized leader of the College community made him the unanimous selection of an advisory committee that considered several very impressive internal candidates as finalists for the deanship."

Valentini, who grew up in the small town of Lafferty, Ohio, and was the first member of his family to attend college, has been a member of the Columbia faculty since 1990. An expert in chemical-reaction dynamics, he was previously a researcher at Los Alamos National Laboratory and a chemistry professor at the University of California, Irvine.

At Columbia, he has held many administrative roles. In addition to chairing the chemistry department from 2005 to 2008 and directing the department's undergraduate studies, he has chaired the Arts and Sciences Academic Review Committee and the College Committee on Science Instruction. He has also served on the Committee on the Core, the College Committee on Instruction, the Alumni Association Board, the Presidential Advisory Committee on Diversity Initiatives, and the University Senate.

As interim dean of the College this past academic year, Valentini earned a reputation for being remarkably accessible to students. Soon after being named to the post, he held town hall–style meetings, began writing a blog, and created a special e-mail account that students could use to send him ideas. He also embraced the nickname "Deantini," which was chosen for him by students in an online competition and is now engraved on a glass nameplate on his desk in Hamilton Hall.

"His open-door policy creating regular opportunities for students to express their views already has endeared 'Deantini' to the undergraduate student body and has energized this central part of the University community," Bollinger wrote.

Valentini's appointment was recommended by a search committee chaired by ecology professor Ruth DeFries. The committee also included professors Christopher Brown, Robert O'Meally, Cathy Popkin, Thomas DiPrete, Stuart Firestein, Christia Mercer, and Norma Graham; alumni Kyra Barry '87CC and Yale Fergang '87CC, '88SEAS; and students J. T. Ramseur, Mary Kircher, and Karishma Habbu.

"Jim impressed the committee with the depth of his understanding of Columbia College and the clarity of his thinking about the future of undergraduate education

here,” wrote the committee members in a June 11 letter to the University community. “We were struck in particular by his appreciation of the contributions of all members of the community — students, alumni, faculty, and administration — in making Columbia College a world-class liberal arts learning environment.

“Jim is also firmly committed to ensuring that all Columbia College students are able to avail themselves of academic opportunities, regardless of their financial circumstances,” the letter continues. “In his nine months as interim dean, Jim Valentini has set the highest standards for transparency and integrity in the governance of the College and of the Arts and Sciences. He has brought energy and creativity to every task.”



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