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James Comey to Teach at Columbia Law

Comey will teach a spring semester seminar called "Lawyers and Leaders" as a "Leader in Residence" at the law school.

By Karen Sloan | December 03, 2020



Former FBI Director James Comey testifies about his firing by President Donald Trump during a Senate Intelligence Committee hearing on June 8, 2017. Photo: Diego M. Radzinski/ALM

Columbia Law School has landed a big name to teach next semester: Former FBI Director James Comey.

The school announced Tuesday that Comey will be a “Leader in Residence” as part of the school’s Reuben Mark Initiative, which each year brings two corporate executives, law firm leaders, and high-level government workers to campus to teach, advise students, and participate in law school programming. Comey is being joined by former Facebook general counsel Colin Stretch, who will again teach a spring semester seminar called “The Role of General Counsel in the Modern Economy.” (Stretch, who left Facebook in 2019, was also a Leader in Residence at Columbia last spring.)

The Columbia post is also a return of sorts for Comey, who spent several months in 2013 as a senior research scholar and fellow in national security law at the Manhattan school before his FBI appointment by President Barack Obama. He’s not an alum of the school, however. Comey got his law degree from the University of Chicago Law School.

Comey led the FBI from 2013 to 2017, and in 2016 received the ire of Democrats for reopening the investigation into Hillary Clinton’s handling of emails when she was the Secretary of State, just weeks before the presidential election. Trump fired Comey in May 2017 after he ended that investigation and opened one over potential Russian interference in the election. Mere days after his firing, Comey arranged for a memo he had drafted after early meetings with Trump, which describe Trump attempting to get him to pledge loyalty and pressuring Comey to back off an investigation of Trump associate Michael Flynn, to be leaked to the press.

During a lunchtime talk (<https://www.law.columbia.edu/news/archive/james-comey-urges-students-enter-public-service>) held at Columbia Law in February, Comey said he regretted how that memo was leaked and said he should have done it himself. Comey also spoke about his handling of the Clinton email investigation, telling students the decision to reopen the inquiry was the best of several bad options.

“I hope to God it had no impact on the election,” Comey said during that talk. “It was a terrible decision. It was just better than the alternative, which was simply awful.”

Comey also urged students to pursue public service careers during his visit earlier this year. He held several high-level posts within the U.S. Department of Justice during the administration of George W. Bush, but left the department in 2005 to take a series of general counsel roles in the private sector, including at Lockheed Martin and Bridgewater Associates. Beginning in January, he will teach a seminar course at Columbia called “Lawyers and Leaders.”

Comey is due to release his second book, titled “Saving Justice: Truth, Transparency, and Trust,” in January.

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