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## STAFF EDITORIAL: Artists on Campus

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This October, thanks to the Columbia University Arts Initiative, Columbia will welcome Vaclav Havel to campus as an artist in residence. His time here ought to be an exciting one for the University-and especially for undergraduate students who normally would not have an opportunity to meet or interact with someone of his caliber. Havel was the president of Czechoslovakia and, later, of the Czech Republic. He is famous both for his role in the peaceful overthrow of communism in his country as well as for his work as an essayist and playwright. Unfortunately, Columbia administrators and faculty have taken his visit one step too far in putting his play, *The Garden Party*, on the Literature Humanities syllabus.

To its credit, CUArts has already made numerous efforts to ensure that undergraduate students have the opportunity to meet, interact with, and learn from Havel. All students will be given the chance to watch his plays-all of which are being performed in New York in honor of his visit, including one, *The Beggar's Opera*, at Columbia. CUArts recently sponsored a focus group to discuss the types of events students would like to see Havel participate in. He is also scheduled to give the Contemporary Civilization course-wide lecture this fall.

But placing Havel's play, *The Garden Party*, on the Lit Hum syllabus makes little sense. For better or for worse, Lit Hum is designed to be a series of selected literary works and Western masterpieces, presented chronologically. Regardless of its literary merit, Havel's work does not belong alongside the Greek classics. While demanding that first-years read *The Garden Party* will undoubtedly familiarize students with Havel's work, it will not make his stay at Columbia any more special for them.

Furthermore, by voting to add *The Garden Party* to the fall Lit Hum syllabus, the Literature Humanities Curriculum Review Committee made it seem like they were simply rewarding Havel for coming to Columbia. Intentional or not, the decision sets a poor precedent for future artists in residence-come to Columbia and we'll add one of your works to the Core Curriculum syllabus, regardless of its relevance. The Core is arguably Columbia's strongest asset-its curriculum should not be tampered with lightly.

All in all, Havel's visit is something everyone at Columbia is hopefully looking forward to and will benefit from. His mere presence speaks highly for the University. And if CUArts implements some of the focus group's ideas, Havel's residency promises to be an unmatched success. But the University will only make the most of his visit if it does not treat his presence on the Lit Hum syllabus as a substitute for actual student interactions.