Dean Janow started the meeting offering an overview of what SIPA has been involved in regarding Diversity & Inclusion during the current 2015-2016 academic year. One of the topics covered was faculty. Dean Janow mentioned the hiring of Prof. Rodrigo Soares, Alexander Hertel-Fernandez (American politics & policy), Ignacia Mercadal (energy), and The David N. Dinkins Professor of Practice: Mayor Michael Nutter. There are also three more ongoing searches, including one for a professor whose area of expertise is race inequality and social justice.

Urbano Garza commented on the events that the DTF has engaged in during the current academic year. In fall 2015, the DTF sponsored a school-wide event to foster community. The event was well attended. Later in the fall, the DTF participated in the Diversity Symposium, which is aimed at attracting students of color from the tri-state area. Approximately, 50 students attended. Regarding diversity/inclusion workshops, one was offered to the entering spring-2016 class. Also, during the months of March and April, 14 workshops were offered. The DTF is looking for an online option to engage students who were unable to attend. They will be required to complete the online option before mid-August, 2016. For students entering in fall 2016, diversity/inclusion workshops will be offered during Orientation. The will follow the same format of having small groups to guarantee interaction and engagement.

Prof. Ergas then presented the idea of valorizing those who were pioneers at SIPA, such as women and students from underrepresented backgrounds. She added that these students could tell their stories regarding SIPA. This would give us all an opportunity to celebrate those who broke barriers in the past. Prof. Ergas also mentioned that she has already been working on interviewing women who attended SIPA in the past. Dean Janow added that SIPA is in its 70th celebration, and that there is a microsite we all should look at since it presents some interesting stories (https://sipa.columbia.edu/70). Prof. Ergas continued by suggesting we look into SIPA’s role regarding issues such as equal justice and reproductive health. She ended by stating that we need to create and tell SIPA’s story.

One more suggestion Prof. Ergas offered was the creation of an “images campaign.” In other words, to curate a selection of images and captions that tell SIPA’s story, and that solidify an idea such as: “I am SIPA,” or, “One SIPA.” She will look further into this idea and look into potential curators.
Prof. Paul Lagunes said that strengthening SIPA’s finances would make SIPA more diverse. He suggested meeting with the Development office to have SIPA build scholarships for diverse groups. He added that oftentimes we have ideas but don’t know what concrete path to follow. Dean Janow responded that the SIPA’s Development team has been advised to find potential donors interested in supporting SIPA while being very conscious about diversity/inclusion. It hasn’t happened but it’s a work in progress.

Kiara Reid spoke about #whycbs as an effective mechanism to promote Columbia Business School (CBS). In terms of SIPA, she suggested that doing something like #IamSIPA could increase SIPA’s visibility.

Kiara also mentioned that while it is great that SIPA offers courses that deal with inequality and issues related to social justice, students must opt to take these courses. She suggested incorporating some of these dimensions into SIPA’s core courses. Dean Janow responded that SIPA is looking at Core courses at the moment. Ji Kwon-Min talked about having a core requirement in policy ethics. To this Dean Janow commented that based on students’ input the direction seems to be to have less, not more, core requirements. Ji added that another way to achieve it could be to add dimensions such as gender to the curriculum.

Kiara talked about learning more about course offerings in other concentrations. Perhaps SIPA could adopt a type of “theme of the year,” to steer students to look into courses that they wouldn’t typically look into since they get most of their information about courses from their respective concentrations; and these tend to be concentration-related.

Ji asked about need-based aid. Dean Janow talked about the need to have access to all potential sources of income, and that such task would be especially difficult given SIPA’s international population. It may be not be possible to verify information. To this Ji added that domestic students of color cannot afford to go to SIPA. Dean Janow mentioned that in addition to funding, the applicant pool is not big to begin with, and that another contributing factor could be that some may be choosing other fields, but acknowledged that the aid itself is insufficient.

Kiara mentioned that domestic students from underrepresented backgrounds come from a culture of financial aid in their undergraduate institutions. She added that there is a big disconnect between that known culture and coming to SIPA, which does not offer need-based financial aid. It creates a cycle where students who graduate have to pay big loans and are therefore unable to contribute once they come alumni. Assistantships become a problem because the work interferes with academics, looking for jobs, etc.

Meeting adjourned at 11:05 am.