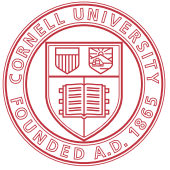Cornell University
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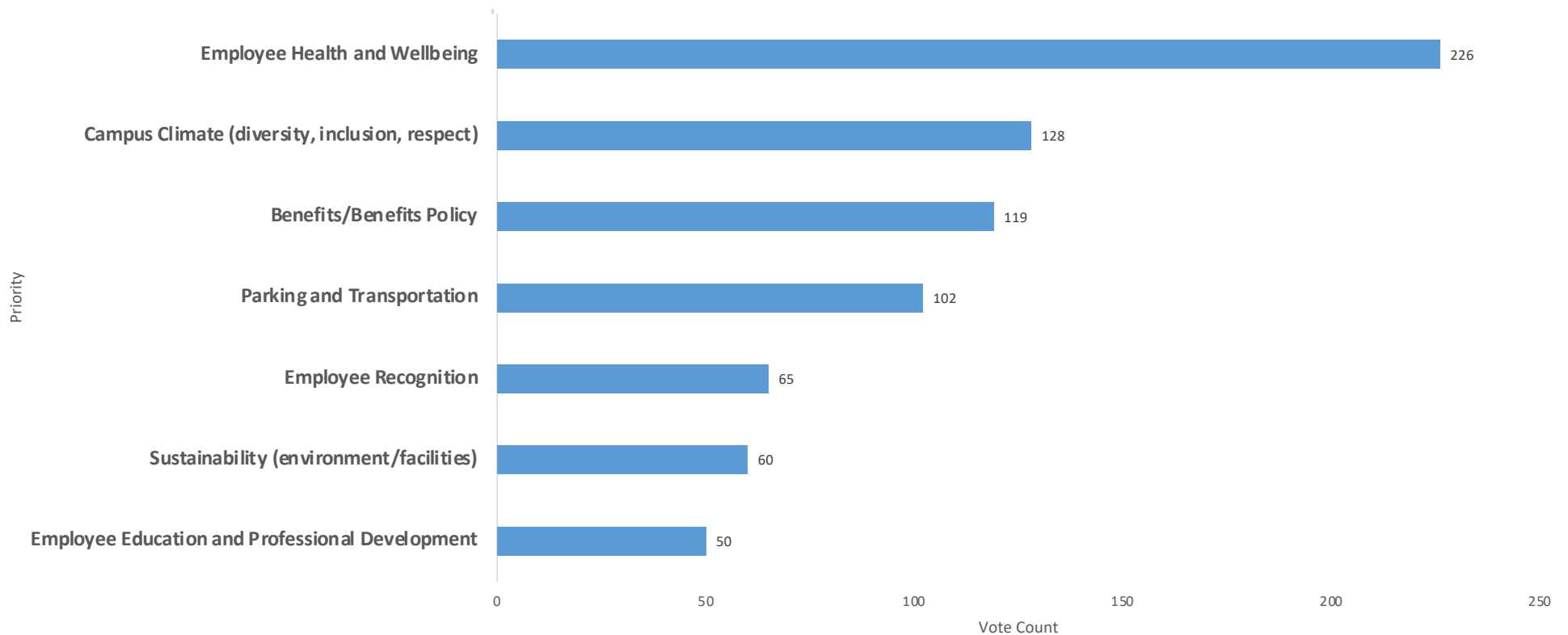
2020 Priorities Poll Summary Report
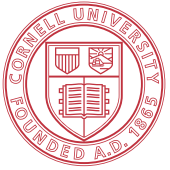
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EA Priorities Poll Results 2020
What do you think should be the Employee Assembly's top priority for 2021?

Priority	Vote Count
Employee Health and Wellbeing	226
Campus Climate (diversity, inclusion, respect)	128
Benefits/Benefits Policy	119
Parking and Transportation	102
Employee Recognition	65
Sustainability (environment/facilities)	60
Employee Education and Professional Development	50

Priorities Poll 2020 vs. 2019

Chart: Priorities Poll 2020 vs. 2019 (Staff Votes by Priority)

| Priority	2020	2019
Employee health and wellbeing	226	135
Campus climate (diversity, inclusion, respect)	128	58
Benefits	119	68
Parking and transportation	102	136
Employee recognition	65	20
Sustainability	60	57
Employee education and professional development	50	84
Other		39
Not sure		21

PRIORITIES POLL FEEDBACK

Of the 750 responses, staff submitted 288 unique comments (hereinafter referred to as feedback). The feedback provides additional insight into why the respondent chose the priority, and in some instances indicated why they thought a different priority was more important than the one they selected (ie. a staff member selects Parking as the main priority but their written feedback indicates employee health and wellbeing should be more important). The respondents also provided suggestions for improvement. This report will highlight some key themes gathered from the feedback and provide some suggestions for improvement, as provided by staff.

*Please note, this Priorities Poll was initiated prior to the 11/17/2020 email announcement from President Pollack indicating the University will "**again begin providing full retirement benefits and salaries**, effective Jan. 1, 2021". Therefore, requests to return retirement benefits and salaries will be excluded from this report, as that has been addressed.
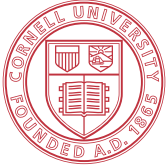
KEY THEMES IN EMPLOYEE FEEDBACK

Ensuring Safety / Focusing on Employee Health and Wellbeing

"Given the current health crisis, the switch to remote work and the struggles many of us are dealing with, employee health and well-being is critical."

"the pandemic is escalating and the workspaces in some places on campus are still frequently overcrowded due to necessary working conditions... please push for respirator access and training for ALL staff remaining on campus"

"Employee health and wellbeing as well as Benefits are the top areas I feel need EA's attention. Making sure each employee has adequate health benefits and safe and inclusive working conditions is very important."

"As the global pandemic is predicted to continue well into 2021, I think advocating for employee health and well being should be a priority, especially since cost-cutting measures may continue to fall to employees (e.g. lack of support for home office work, reduction in retirement match, etc.)."

"Equitable and safe vaccination plan for the entire Cornell community"

"I think Cornell is doing an amazing job at prioritizing employee health and wellbeing, but feel it needs to be kept in the forefront as we move through Covid and the different work model any employees are experiencing."
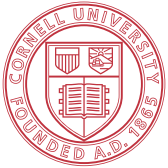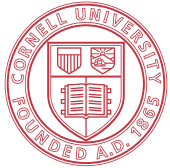
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EMPLOYEE SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Employee health and wellbeing:

- Ensure adequate health insurance coverage
- Provide more staff COVID safety training (social distancing, cleaning/sanitizing)
- Shorter working weeks, or else considerably more paid time off to balance the strain of powering through and sustaining the lift
- Consolidate wellness resources in one place so that they are easier for users to be able to access
- More specialized programs that allow for honest conversations on stress and related mental health issues tied to the pandemic
- Considering Post-COVID many staff members may continue working remotely. Provide more remote opportunities Post-COVID on wellness
- Provide more opportunities to recognize essential employees
- Expanded Counselling Services
- Increase access to staff for fitness centers, climbing walls

KEY THEMES IN EMPLOYEE FEEDBACK

Prioritize Diversity

"In light of the racial issues diving our country right now, and the new CU101 online programming, I think Cornell could be at the forefront of talking about and taking action to address Campus Climate."

"Given the general climate of our country, I think we need to be doing a whole lot more about diversity and inclusiveness on our campus and in our communities."

"Due to the national climate on diversity, inclusion and respect, I feel this should (continue to) be a top priority on campus."

"I am concerned that the various choices (financial and otherwise) forced on the University by COVID will distract from the important focus on diversity and inclusion initiatives, especially as they relate to staff. It is very important to me that the background / make up of Cornell Faculty and Staff are reflective of the background / make up of the US."

"It will never be a "good" or "convenient" time to address systemic injustices that exist in our community; however, in some ways, this issues is related to all of the other issues named in the survey. By prioritizing this one, it can be come a lens through which to view all the others. I believe that a land-grant institution like Cornell has a moral obligation to be a publicly engaged force for positive, inclusive social change - and the past six months have laid bare the need for racial justice."

"I put Campus Climate first, but what I meant is much more specific. I mean that the EA's top priority should be addressing policies that disproportionately harm Black, Indigenous, and Trans people."

"We need to continue to address racial disparity at Cornell, and actively work to recruit, retain, and support BIPOC faculty and staff at every level. Cornell should be an example of inclusion and equity."

"Please keep momentum on the subject of promoting an inclusive campus climate. Acknowledge areas where faculty and staff members of color can be supported and discuss active steps we can take to address retention rates - particularly ones for women of color."

"I greatly appreciate the required diversity & inclusion trainings that have recently been launched. Our nation is SO divided right now and it seems like the very most important place upon which to place our concentrated efforts."
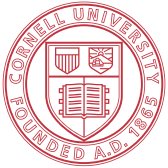
EMPLOYEE SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Prioritize Diversity:
- *"Based on what we have experienced globally with the pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement, I can see that there is a lot of tension on campus. Things are not being addressed and a book club does little to effect change. We need to be able to talk about how everyone at Cornell is being impacted and implement change where needed. We do not need to se up committees, but rather groups that are willing to take action."*
- *"We need to recognize the moment we're in as a community and a country: it is important to actively support DEI initiatives on campus. This includes a focus on recognizing the value of our diverse community members, celebrating successes, and supporting those that are underrepresented, through the the creation of support and mentorship structures. We also need intentional and comprehensive training at all levels of the search, hire, and promotions process."*
- Create programs or opportunities to teach staff members to have respectful conversations with those of different viewpoints
- Provide more programs and opportunities to offer assistance to staff who are under duress as a result of COVID
- Create more programming geared specifically for Staff to learn about DEI.
- More opportunities for staff to be involved in DEI conversations
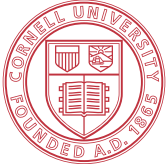
KEY THEMES IN EMPLOYEE FEEDBACK

Mental Health / Staff Burnout

"Employees' mental health is especially important given the advent of living through a collective trauma (C-PTSD), resulting from anxiety, stress, anticipated and present grief/loss, etc... Additionally, folks who are at higher risk for COVID and their families are most likely experiencing more stress, anxiety, etc., related to the presence of COVID and the politics being played with their lives, especially folks of color, LGBTQ+ folks, folks with disabilities, and folks living in New York."

"Employee health and well being should be a top priority. This also includes mental health as some of us have been on campus and working as "essential" employees since the beginning of the Covid scare. These are the employees that have been taking the risk and dealing with day to day issues without much recognition or notice. There are staff that have been worked tirelessly to have things ready and available for the return of students, professors and even co-workers. These employees I feel are the backbone of the operations and deserve some type of recognition or a thanks at the least.This list includes everyone from building coordinators to custodians to laborers to shop crews, grounds workers, and more. A mental health day isn't always enough for some these employees to get back on track."

"The Cornell current response to Covid etc. lacks a healthy mental environment component. This is especially true for those of whose jobs, research or personality require interaction with others. It's time somebody recognizes that seeing talking heads on a computer screen is not even close to being equivalent to one's ability to work through an idea or problem with other real live human beings."

"I believe, especially with the recent pandemic, the mental and emotional health of employees are a priority. Our campus needs more balance between work and home. Too often our work crosses over and sneak into our time with friends and loved ones."

"While I recognize that not all are "in the same boat," many staff are working harder than ever, under challenging circumstances, and typical rewards are not possible at this time. Nor is the current pace sustainable, for those currently overwhelmed. I'm deeply worried about the mental health and well-being of our staff (and many of our faculty). I do believe Cornell leaders are doing A LOT to demonstrate empathy and understanding of the situation, but it just feels like a breaking point may come soon."

"I think it's important to talk about wellbeing for over-worked employees and ways to support those employees. Personally, my understaffed team has been working at at least 150% since March, and there's no end in sight. There's so much on our plates that we are hesitant to even take one day off, because making up for that time off can take a lot of time. How can we be supported, and support ourselves in the long-term?"

"Employees are feeling truly burned out, but still pushing to get their work done. Majority of us have not had a break and keep pivoting to accommodate the many changes to keep the university running at top capacity. I think employees should also have the wellness days off in March and April just like the students. Or maybe we can have the days during the summer."

"Our team is overwhelmed with work. We struggle to find a balance right now with the increasing work load."
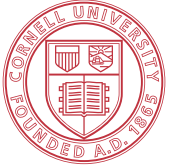
EMPLOYEE SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Recognize Staff / Addressing the Hiring Freeze / SIP for the Upcoming Fiscal Year

- Revisit benefits and see if any improvements can be made
- Set a target date for ending the hiring freeze, so that staff can get a sense of relief on the horizon
- Plan a more robust 2021 SIP
- Provide additional opportunities to recognize staff in the face of financial restrictions
- Find ways to improve staff morale in the face of great duress, mental stress and anxiety
- Many staff members are on the frontlines and taking health risks as part of their job, we should try to find ways to show our gratitude for those essential workers
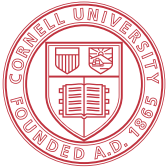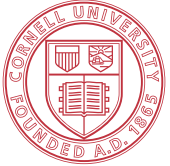
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KEY THEMES IN EMPLOYEE FEEDBACK

Parenting

"As a working parent, Employee Health and Wellbeing is extremely important as I try to balance home school and work on top of the stresses of the pandemic and uncertainty."

"Right now, with COVID, our health and well-being is so important. Dealing with kids learning from home, helping elder parents, etc. is overwhelming. Feeling valued is so important to keep an good employee- so parking, recognition, help with professional development are so very important."

"We are months into a mismanaged response to the pandemic; staff are exhausted and scared (and more and more are grieving), and we are heading into winter. If K-12 goes online and/or daycare closes again, families will once again be struggling with childcare while balancing work. Things have been hard so far but they may very well get harder over the next few months."
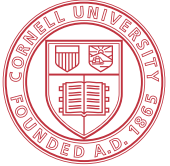
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EMPLOYEE SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Remote Work Post COVID
- Encourage remote work post-COVID
- Increased remote work will address other issues: sustainability, parking, transportation, employee health and well-being

"Working remotely has been a huge gift. It has completely changed the working dynamic in a positive way in my department. There are far less interpersonal conflicts as there are far fewer personal interactions. I accomplish so much more work, I am far less stressed, and any previously strained relationships with colleagues have been transformed so that we are able to focus on the work that we do and the mission of our organization without the need for people to have to engage socially/personally on personal matters with colleagues they would normally choose not to due to "water cooler" situations... I hope that the employee assembly will work with management to re-envision the way we work and the need for people to be on campus given that the rest of the private sector world is doing that."

"In my remote work environment, I feel less stress and more productive, and have truly enjoyed the ability to work at home during the pandemic. Within my department, remote work was never widely accepted and I'm hopeful that senior administrators will now see and understand that individuals can be just as, if not more, productive and happy working remotely. And honestly, it seems that if more individuals worked remotely, it would aid Cornell in many of its missions including sustainability, parking and transportation, and employee health and wellbeing."

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Next Steps
All feedback, unedited, is made available for EA members to access via the Box.

Each committee will get a report on the key themes from the Priorities Poll which are related to their work. During the EA Retreat, we hope to ask Committees to talk about the findings, work amongst themselves and bring the ideas to the larger group to discuss. There is no expectation that the EA will address every concern, and implement all the requested change, this information only serves as a starting point and helps to better inform and guide or work.

Questions/Comments?