

# Graduate and Professional Student Assembly

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## Resolution 5: GPSA Recommendations on Cornell University's Disciplinary Actions Towards Graduate Student Worker Sriram Parasurama

**Abstract:** The Graduate and Professional Student Assembly recommends halting disciplinary measures against Graduate Student Worker Sriram Parasurama until due disciplinary procedures have been completed.

**Sponsored by:** Siim Sepp Biological Sciences Representative Voting Member, Srikanth Karaikal Physical Sciences Voting Member, Zong-Yan Liu Biological Sciences Voting Member, Dinesh Ghimire Biological Sciences Voting Member

**Reviewed by:** Executive Committee, 11/17/2024; Student Advocacy Committee 11/15/2024

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**Whereas,** the Graduate Student Worker Sriram Parasurama was temporarily suspended on October 16th, 2024 and de-enrolled on Wednesday November 6th, 2024 affecting his monthly pay and status as an NSF Fellow, on the grounds of participation in a disruption of the presence of L3Harris Technologies and Boeing in the Career Fair carried out in Statler Hall on September 18<sup>th</sup>, 2024;

**Whereas,** evidence for the claim that graduate student worker Sriram Parasurama constitutes a “danger to public health and safety” has not been made available to the student in question, yet used by the Administration to justify his temporary suspension;

**Whereas,** the [Student Code of Conduct Procedures](#) in Chapter VIII Title A states that a *temporary suspension may be imposed only when available less restrictive measures are reasonably deemed insufficient to protect the Complainant or the University community;*

**Whereas,** all appeals presented by the student in question to both Vice-President for Student and Campus Life Ryan Lombardi and the interim Provost John Siciliano along with support letters



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with 101 signatures from members of the School of Integrative Plant Science have been rejected as of November 6th, 2024;

**Whereas**, the above described events reflect no engagement in due process or just cause by the University Administration before application of disciplinary measures;

**Whereas**, the School of Integrated Plant Sciences (SIPS) has created a letter that approximately a hundred members of SIPS community have signed stating community concern over this case with the request of halting disciplinary measures on Sriram until a full investigation and hearing are completed. For a copy of this see appendix 2.

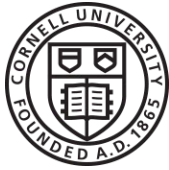
**Whereas**, the content of the protest Sriram engaged in is especially relevant to the interests of the Cornell Graduate and professional student body;

**Whereas**, [Resolution 7](#) from 04/22/2024 establishes the Graduate and Professional Student Assembly's (GPSA) duty to engage in items of importance to the graduate and professional student body, and that the University and its investments are of interest to the student body;

**Whereas**, [Resolution 1](#) from 09/05/2024 opened the GPSA to officially appoint at least one permanent representative to the Ad Hoc Committee on Cornell University's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) policies created by the undergraduate Student Assembly, showing a commitment from the graduate and professional student body;

**Whereas**, [Resolution 8](#) from 05/06/2024 on ESG recommendations on discussion of divestment from companies engaged in weapon manufacturing resolved to recommend that the University Administration, the Trustees, and the CSR-ESG Committee engage in immediate (Summer 2024) and formal discussions centered on the issue of divestment from the companies BAE Systems, Boeing, Elbit Systems, General Dynamics, L3Harris Technologies, Leonardo, Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman, RTX, and ThyssenKrupp engaged in weapons manufacturing;

**Whereas**, the [report A/79/363](#) of the United Nations Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, concluded *that the policies and practices of Israel during the reporting period of October 2023 to July 2024 were consistent with the characteristics of genocide and raised*



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59 *serious concerns of breaches of international humanitarian and human rights laws in the*  
60 *Occupied Palestinian Territory, including starvation as a weapon of war;*

61 **Whereas,** the [Standard and Process for Board of Trustees Consideration of Divestment](#)  
62 [Recommendations](#) adopted on January 29th, 2016 by the Cornell University Board of Trustees  
63 state that *Divestment should be considered only when a company's actions or inactions are*  
64 *"morally reprehensible" (morally reprehensible activities include apartheid, genocide, human*  
65 *trafficking, slavery, and systemic cruelty to children, including violations of child labor laws);*

66 **Whereas,** L3Harris Technologies components are integrated into multiple weapon systems used  
67 by the Israeli military, including Israel's air-to-ground bombs as well as its main warplanes,  
68 battle tanks, and warships;

69 **Whereas,** Boeing manufactures attack helicopters, combat aircraft, missiles, bombs and  
70 battlefield laser systems for the Israeli army, as well as intelligence and surveillance systems that  
71 are used to surveil Palestinian civilians in Occupied Palestine;

72 **Whereas,** the [Student Assembly Referendum](#) (see summary as appendix 1) showed a majority  
73 (4,960/7,153 votes) in support of the following question: "Cornell has investments in companies  
74 supporting the ongoing war in Gaza, which has been deemed as a "plausible genocide" by the  
75 International Court of Justice in South Africa v. Israel. Should Cornell University follow their  
76 2016 Guidelines for Divestment and divest from the following weapons manufacturers: BAE  
77 Systems, Boeing, Elbit Systems, General Dynamics, L3Harris Technologies, Leonardo,  
78 Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman, RTX, and ThyssenKrupp?";

79 **Whereas,** the [response](#) to [Resolution 8](#) from president Martha E. Pollack on June 4th, 2024  
80 reiterated her [response to the Student Assembly President on May 30, 2024](#) on the [Student](#)  
81 [Assembly Referendum](#) and an email to Owen 'Gus' Dunn-Hindle and CSR-ESG on June 4,  
82 2024. This response states, "*Fund managers are independent third-party vehicles. The managers*  
83 *make independent decisions about specific investments. They serve many investors, not only*  
84 *Cornell, and the funds are typically comingled with those of other large institutional investors. In*  
85 *hiring these managers, the university is contractually prohibited from sharing information about*  
86 *a manager's portfolio of investments, because such information is proprietary and confidential to*  
87 *the fund manager. We are therefore unable to provide the information that you requested in your*  
88 *letter.*" For a copy of this response see appendix 2.



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91 **Be it therefore resolved,** we recommend that the University Administration halt all disciplinary  
92 measures until the evidence used is disclosed to the disciplined student Sriram Parasurama and a  
93 thorough, transparent investigation and hearing process are conducted as required by the Student  
94 Code of Conduct.

95 **Be it finally resolved,** we recommend that the University Administration clearly articulate and  
96 comply with a due process in fulfillment of the Student Code of Conduct for this and all future  
97 disciplinary measures.

98 Respectfully Submitted,  
99

100  
101 Siim Sepp  
102 Biological Sciences Voting Member

103 Srikanth Karaikal  
104 Physical Sciences Voting Member

105 Zong-Yan Liu  
106 Biological Sciences Voting Member

107 Dinesh Ghimire  
108 Biological Sciences Voting Member



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## Appendix #1 Response of Martha to ESG Committee

Dear Gus, and members of the Student Assembly Ad Hoc Committee on Cornell University's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) Policies:

Thank you for your inquiry. We are committed to working in partnership with your ad hoc committee and facilitating your work to the extent we can and within institutional, governance, and legal contractual constraints.

I attached a brief backgrounder on Cornell's endowment for you.

As you are aware, the Office of University Investment manages the endowment so that it will generate money to support the university's work (including importantly student financial aid, faculty research, and endowed professorships) in perpetuity. The Office does this virtually exclusively by selecting and hiring external investment managers. In fact, Cornell directly manages just two accounts: 1) the Cayuga MBA account (student managed) and 2) a fund that trades in index futures. The remainder of the university endowment is invested through the aforementioned external third-party fund managers.

Fund managers are independent third-party vehicles. The managers make independent decisions about specific investments. They serve many investors, not only Cornell, and the funds are typically comingled with those of other large institutional investors. In hiring these managers, the university is contractually prohibited from sharing information about a manager's portfolio of investments, because such information is proprietary and confidential to the fund manager. We are therefore unable to provide the information that you requested in your letter.

Regarding the Cornell directed accounts: The fund that trades in index futures, by definition, does not contain any equity or bond securities in defense companies. The Cayuga MBA account, which is managed by Cornell, has no investments in defense companies.

Regarding Environmental, Social and Governance policies: ESG policies are part of the DNA of the Investment Office. Several years ago, the office regularized systems and approaches to achieve the goals set out by these principles. Currently, 82.9% of Cornell's investments are handled by managers who are signatories to the United Nations Principles for Responsible Investment (UNPRI) or have another strong ESG/SRI framework in place. In approximately 6% of the investments the UNPRI and ESG/SRI frameworks don't apply—for example, with investments in U.S. Treasury securities or cash. The



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Investment Office continues to dialog with the few remaining managing firms who are not signatories to encourage them to adopt the UNPRI or a similarly strong framework. The Office of University Investments reports regularly to the Investment Committee, which also has set this as a priority, on progress in this area.

While we cannot release the information you requested without violating contractual terms related to the proprietary investment strategy of external fund managers, we want to work with you on what we can provide. We could, for example, provide annual updates on the proportion of our fund managers who are UNPRI signatories or have adopted an ESG policy or framework, subsequent to Office discussions with the Investment Committee.

Sincerely,

Martha E. Pollack

President, Cornell University

300 Day Hall

Ithaca, NY 14853

[www.cornell.edu](http://www.cornell.edu)



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## Attachment:

Cornell's Endowment

### What is the endowment?

- Cornell's endowment consists of gifts to the university that are invested to generate money that is used to support the university's work in perpetuity. The endowment fuels mission-critical priorities including financial aid and other student support, research, faculty salaries and stipends, facilities maintenance and upgrades, academic programs, and research activities. In fiscal year 2023, the endowment provided \$386 million toward these kinds of expenses — money that would otherwise have had to come from sources like tuition. Institutions without a strong endowment are far more reliant on tuition and fees, which in turn must increase at higher rates to fund operations.
- The Cornell endowment comprises more than 8,000 separate accounts, the vast majority of which are restricted by the donor and can only be used for the purposes specified in the gift agreement. Cornell is further restricted by New York state laws that require prudent management and diversification of endowed funds and prevent overspending from endowments.
- The Board of Trustees' Investment Policy Statement states that the board's first responsibility as fiduciary for the endowment is to ensure that the funds are managed properly and used for the educational and programmatic purposes for which they were donated.
- Cornell does not invest in specific companies as an individual might manage their personal funds. The Office of University Investments works with external investment managers to manage the Cornell endowment prudently. The vast majority of these managers adhere to principles of Responsible Investing and/or follow strong Environmental, Social, and Governance frameworks. The Board of Trustees provides essential oversight of the endowment and the work of private fund managers.
- Cornell's long-term investment orientation, sophisticated asset allocation, and portfolio structure generate considerable endowment success capable of withstanding unexpected



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changes in market conditions, so the aforementioned services can continue to be provided at the university in perpetuity.

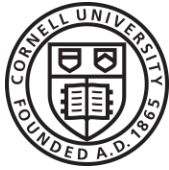
## The state of Cornell's endowment

- The university concluded fiscal year 2023 with a very respectable return relative to the economic environment and has returned an annualized 9.3% over the past five years. This solid performance is attributed to the Office of University Investments' work since fiscal year 2016 to diversify the university's investment portfolio and strategies, reduce fees and enhance liquidity and flexibility. Cornell's financial records and payouts are posted online and available for review.
- Cornell's endowment is significantly smaller, on a per-student basis, than many peer institutions due in part to our comparatively larger student body. Cornell ranks 71st in endowment value per full-time equivalent student among all institutions surveyed in 2023.

## What does divestment mean, and how does it work?

- In the context of an endowment, divestment means selling all investments in a particular sector or a particular company. Divestment cannot happen overnight: many of the investments in an endowment have longer gestation periods and so are "locked up," with requirements that they be maintained over a period of years. Thus, any divestment decision would have to take place over time.
- Divestment, in itself, may not necessarily achieve intended results in the way that more direct instruments of change such as political resolution, technological change, or self-directed corporate action may. The true impact of divestment from any company or sector, by any institution or fund, can be exceptionally difficult (or impossible) to calculate.
- The Board of Trustees has policies that specify when it will consider divestment, as well as standards that must be met for a divestment decision. Specifically, the board will consider a proposal for divestment from the Cornell community when either the President forwards a resolution supported by one of the shared governance assemblies, or all five of the assemblies support such a resolution. Once the board takes up consideration of



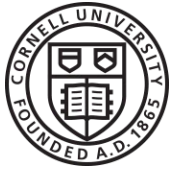


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divestment, the university will divest only when:

- a company's actions or inactions are "morally reprehensible;" and also
- the divestiture will likely have a meaningful impact toward correcting the specified harm and will not result in disproportionate offsetting societal consequences; or
- the company contributes to harm so grave that it would be inconsistent with the goals and principles of the university.



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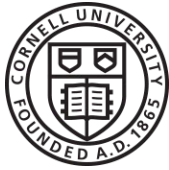
## Appendix #2

Dear Dean Christina Liang, SCL Vice President Ryan Lombardi, and Provost John Siliciano,

We write to collectively express our deep concern with the recent disciplinary actions against Sriram Parasurama, a graduate student in the School of Integrative Plant Science (SIPS) and a valued member of our community, for alleged pro-Palestine political activity on campus.

Sriram was issued an indefinite interim suspension and a 3-year *persona non-grata* status, banning him from campus and his research field sites. While called an “interim” disciplinary measure, **this suspension is disproportionately punitive, with permanent and severe consequences to Sriram’s life, research, academic progress, funding, and the broader SIPS community.** As President Kotlikoff stated in his email on Sept. 30th, the Student Code of Conduct specifies that only “the least restrictive measures necessary should be applied to protect the community from ongoing harm [...] until [a disciplinary] case is adjudicated.” Sriram does not pose an active threat to our community, yet until arbitration of this case — likely not until spring 2025 at the earliest — Sriram is obstructed from furthering his research. De-enrollment as a consequence of his suspension not only means months of lost research time but also jeopardizes his fellowship security, both of which threaten Sriram’s ability to complete his doctoral degree. Furthermore, his suspension prevents him from contributing to the SIPS community, of which he is an active and beloved member.

The disciplinary process that Sriram and other students have faced has been seemingly arbitrary and deliberately obscure, disproportionately impacting students from marginalized groups and students of color. During these proceedings, Sriram has been referred to as a “danger to public health and safety” and an “unwelcome person” (the literal translation of *persona non-grata*). This rhetoric weaponizes aspects of his identity to villainize him and justify the disproportionate discipline, drawing on implicit biases that often depict men of color as inherently violent. Due process is especially important to ensure the fair treatment of students during disciplinary proceedings, particularly when ad-hoc decisions can be influenced by the implicit biases of individual administrators.



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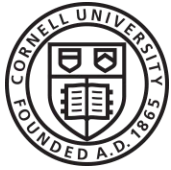
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We write to request your immediate attention and support to ensure Sriram’s fair treatment and to prevent permanent repercussions imposed without due process. **Specifically, we ask you to delay Sriram’s de-enrollment and the federal reporting of his suspension until his case has been fully reviewed.** Otherwise, Sriram is at imminent risk of losing his prestigious fellowship before having a chance to fully appeal the temporary suspension. **Additionally, we advocate for Sriram to be allowed access to campus to complete research and other tasks necessary for continued academic progress.**

The proceedings of Sriram’s disciplinary process have already had ripple effects on our whole community, **creating a restrictive intellectual and social climate where scholars worry they may have to compromise their free expression to protect their professional standing.** As a diverse team of scholars, we are united in our conviction that the advancement of scientific knowledge exists in the context of social and political movements. Therefore, we are committed to protecting freedom of thought and civic engagement for all individuals in our community. We remind this university of its obligation to foster a sense of belonging for all scholars, which is contingent upon freedom of expression. The precedent set today will have a lasting impact on whether the Cornell community and academic institutions across the nation believe Cornell’s administration will safeguard freedom of speech during scholars’ future socio-political engagement. **We urge you to consider our demands and to remember that to maintain a community of belonging you must ensure every scholar’s access to public engagement and inquiry does not come at the cost of their education.**

In solidarity,  
Members of the SIPS community

|  |                         |                                |
|--|-------------------------|--------------------------------|
|  | PhD student, 5th year   | Plant Breeding and Genetics    |
|  | 2nd Year PHD            | Plant Pathology & Microbiology |
|  | 3rd year MS/PhD student | Horticulture                   |
|  | PhD Student             | Plant Biology                  |



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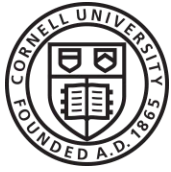
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|--|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
|  | PhD candidate, 4th year     | Plant Biology               |
|  | PhD student                 | Horticulture                |
|  | PhD student                 | Plant Biology               |
|  | PhD Student                 | Plant Biology               |
|  | PhD candidate               | Plant Breeding and Genetics |
|  | 4th year PhD Student        | Horticulture                |
|  | PhD student                 | Plant Breeding and Genetics |
|  | PhD student                 | Plant Breeding and Genetics |
|  | PhD student                 | Plant Breeding and Genetics |
|  | ms/phd student              | Soil and Crop Sciences      |
|  | PhD                         | Plant Breeding and Genetics |
|  | PhD Student                 | Horticulture                |
|  | Masters student, First year | Soil and Crop Sciences      |
|  | PhD Candidate               | Soil and Crop Sciences      |
|  | MS/PhD student              | Soil and Crop Sciences      |
|  | PhD student                 | Soil and Crop Sciences      |
|  | PhD student, 4th year       | Soil and Crop Sciences      |
|  | First year PhD student      | Plant Breeding and Genetics |
|  | PhD student                 | Horticulture                |
|  | 1st Year PhD Student        | Plant Breeding and Genetics |
|  | 4th year phd                | Plant Biology               |



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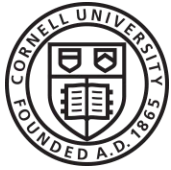
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|--|----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
|  | First year PhD student                 | Plant Breeding and Genetics               |
|  | 1st year PhD student                   | Plant Breeding and Genetics               |
|  | MS/PhD                                 | Horticulture                              |
|  | PhD candidate                          | Plant Breeding and Genetics               |
|  | PhD student                            | Plant Breeding and Genetics               |
|  | PhD, 4th year                          | Plant Biology                             |
|  | 2nd Year PhD Student                   | Plant Pathology & Microbiology            |
|  | PhD student, 4th year, PPPMB, Heck Lab | Plant Pathology & Microbiology            |
|  | PhD Candidate, 5th year                | Plant Biology                             |
|  | PhD student                            | Plant Breeding and Genetics               |
|  | 2nd year PhD student                   | Soil and Crop Sciences                    |
|  | Second year PhD student                | Plant Pathology and Plant-Microbe Biology |
|  | Masters                                | Plant Breeding and Genetics               |
|  | PhD student                            | Plant Breeding and Genetics               |
|  | 3rd year PhD student                   | Plant Breeding and Genetics               |
|  | Phd Student                            | Plant Pathology and Plant-Microbe Biology |
|  | PhD Student, 4th year                  | Plant Pathology and Plant-Microbe Biology |



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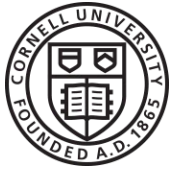
|  |                        |                                           |
|--|------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
|  | PhD Student            | Plant Breeding and Genetics               |
|  | Postdoctoral Associate | Soil and Crop Sciences                    |
|  | PhD                    | Plant Pathology and Plant-Microbe Biology |
|  | 1st year PhD           | Plant Pathology and Plant-Microbe Biology |
|  | Staff                  | Horticulture                              |
|  | PhD Candidate          | Plant Pathology and Plant-Microbe Biology |
|  | MS/PhD student         | Horticulture                              |
|  | PhD student            | Plant Breeding and Genetics               |
|  | PhD student, 3rd year  | Soil and Crop Sciences                    |
|  | PhD                    | Plant Breeding and Genetics               |
|  | 4th, PhD               | Plant Pathology and Plant-Microbe Biology |
|  | Staff                  | Soil and Crop Sciences                    |
|  | PhD                    | Plant Breeding and Genetics               |
|  | PhD student            | Plant Breeding and Genetics               |
|  | PhD student, yr 2      | Plant Breeding and Genetics               |
|  | PhD student            | Plant Breeding and Genetics               |
|  | 5th year PhD candidate | Plant Biology                             |
|  | PhD student            | Horticulture                              |



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|  | Staff                             | Plant Breeding and Genetics               |
|  | first-year PhD student            | Plant Pathology and Plant-Microbe Biology |
|  | Masters, 1st year                 | Horticulture                              |
|  | affiliate, USDA; Alum, MS, Pritts | Horticulture                              |
|  | PhD student                       | Horticulture                              |
|  | Postdoc                           | Horticulture                              |
|  | Alumnus, MS Plant Breeding, '21   | Plant Breeding and Genetics               |
|  | 3rd year PhD Student              | Soil and Crop Sciences                    |
|  | PhD student                       | Plant Biology                             |
|  | PhD candidate                     | Plant Biology                             |
|  | Staff                             | Horticulture                              |
|  | PhD, first year                   | Horticulture                              |
|  | PhD student                       | Soil and Crop Sciences                    |
|  | PhD Student/Laboratory Technician | Plant Breeding and Genetics               |
|  | 3rd year PhD student              | Plant Pathology and Plant-Microbe Biology |
|  | Postdoc                           | Plant Breeding and Genetics               |
|  | PhD Student                       | Plant Biology                             |
|  | Staff                             | Plant Breeding and Genetics               |



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|  |                                   |                                           |
|--|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
|  | PhD Student, year 3               | Plant Pathology and Plant-Microbe Biology |
|  | Postdoctoral Associate            | Soil and Crop Sciences                    |
|  | research scholar                  | Horticulture                              |
|  | Postdoc                           | Plant Pathology and Plant-Microbe Biology |
|  | Alumni                            | Plant Biology                             |
|  | Postdoctoral Associate (2nd year) | Plant Pathology and Plant-Microbe Biology |
|  | Alum, Phd                         | Plant Breeding and Genetics               |
|  | Staff                             | Soil and Crop Sciences                    |
|  | Postdoc                           | Plant Breeding and Genetics               |
|  | Post-doctoral associate           | Soil and Crop Sciences                    |
|  | postdoctorate                     | Plant Biology                             |
|  | Postdoc                           | Plant Breeding and Genetics               |
|  | Undergraduate research assistant  | Soil and Crop Sciences                    |
|  | Staff                             | Horticulture                              |
|  | Postdoc                           | Soil and Crop Sciences                    |
|  | 2nd year PhD Student              | Plant Biology                             |