

HEI HEI DEPEW: Welcome to the Employee Assembly COVID One Year Later Staff Forum. I am Hei Hei Depew, financial analyst for the College of Human Ecology and the chair of the Employee Assembly. We asked staff to submit feedback and questions via Qualtrics for today's staff forum. This content will help drive today's staff forum. But there's also an opportunity for you all to submit questions via the Q&A feature of this webinar. Please be advised, we will try to get to all of your questions, but time is limited. Questions for our panelists will be derived from both of the Qualtrics submissions and the live Q&A. I want to also note that much of the feedback from the Qualtrics was positive commentary on how senior leadership, President Pollack and her team, have handled COVID. There's a great recognition of the swift science based action, transparency via town halls, rethinking and executing of creative solutions to mitigate COVID impacts on the entire campus community. Staff have faith that this university has handled the pandemic in the best interest of the faculty, staff, and students, and it is very heartening to see that the numbers were relatively low in Tompkins County when compared to other counties.

That being said, I want to welcome President Martha Pollock, Vice President for University Relations Joel Malina, Vice President for Student and Campus Life Ryan Lombardi, and Vice President and Chief Human Resources Officer Mary Opperman to today's staff forum. The staff forum provides a great opportunity to engage with senior leadership, get answers and clarity on some growing questions from the staff community. During today's staff forum, we'll hear from senior leadership on their reflections on this past year and provide insight on the future. And we'll hear questions directly from staff. With this said, I will turn the floor over to President Pollack for opening statements.

MARTHA POLLACK: Thank you Hei Hei, and thank you to everyone for coming. We are just so, so happy to see everyone and really sort of surprised. I'm surprised that here we are. It's been a full year. And we're still dealing with this. Last March, when we closed our campus and we sent all our students home, as difficult and stressful as it was at that moment, most of us hoped-- certainly I hoped-- that it wasn't going to be too long before things pretty much got back to normal. And yet, here we are a full year later. We're still meeting on Zoom. But we're still together. And whether physically or virtually, we're all on a campus that is now in its second semester of a pretty successful in-person teaching. And we're all part of a community that continues to carry out and to thrive in our mission of teaching and engagement and research.

What all of you, what all of the staff, have helped pull together and really pull off over the past year, to my mind it's nothing short of amazing. And it's been even more incredible when taken in the context of how different our lives and of our work have been in just about every way. Look, no matter what your role is at Cornell, whether you've been coming into work, or whether you've been working from home, all of you have been coping with a host of new challenges. Maybe you're doing your job while supervising your children's virtual schooling. Maybe you're coming into campus while you're juggling caregiving responsibilities. Maybe you're working alone at home without your colleagues and your support network. And yet, while it's been hard for everyone, you found ways to keep going and really to keep this

wonderful university functioning. And I just cannot thank you enough. I cannot thank you and say how proud I am to be part of this community.

And so I'm really glad to have this chance to connect with all of you today, to take stock of where we are at this one year mark, and along with my colleagues, answer as many questions that you send us as we can get to them. So, thanks, and Hei Hei, back to you.

HEI HEI DEPEW: Thank you. Thank you President Pollack. So now we're going to go to Vice President of University Relations, Joel Malina.

JOEL MALINA: Thank you so much Hei Hei, and thanks to the entire EA for giving us this opportunity today. I also want to do a shout out to our staff in the Office of the Assemblies who helped keep all of this effort moving forward in such a collaborative fashion. I want to borrow from something that President Pollack just mentioned around community. And as I think back to our very challenging, but also really fulfilling, experiences over the last year, it's that heart of the community. And it's not just our campus community, but the work that we've been able to do in partnership with our greater Ithaca community friends, neighbors, and colleagues, from the critical partnerships with the Tompkins County Health Department and Cayuga health system, to our ongoing engagements with the leadership of the many municipalities, the city of Ithaca, the town of Ithaca, Village of Cayuga Heights, town and village of Lansing, village of Dryden, we can go down the list. Added as well, opportunities that we've been able to take to hear from community members in all of these regions. Hearing their concerns, their questions, enabling us to provide information reassurances.

It's really been an incredible, for me, validation of what we knew we loved so much about our community. But in practice, in times of stress, in times of crisis, that's really where that feeling of community is able to really come forward in its strongest fashion. So I'm appreciative for all of you. I'm appreciative for the community at large. And we're not yet through it, but we're able to see the light at the end of the tunnel. So it's an exciting time for us all.

HEI HEI DEPEW: Thank you, Joel. Vice President for Student and Campus Life, Ryan Lombardi.

RYAN LOMBARDI: Yes, thank you, Hei Hei, and thank you to the entire Employee Assembly for putting this event together. Really appreciate the chance to be with you all today. And let me just add my thanks to the Cornell staff community for your truly Herculean efforts this past year. We're on the Eve. It was March 13 last year when President Pollack sent out the message that said we were immediately suspending classes only to restart them after spring break. And so I've been quite reflective this week and have found myself filled with gratitude, not only for my colleagues in Student and Campus Life who have been extraordinary in every sense of the word, but really staff from all over campus, every corner, and nook and cranny. Again, as the president said, whether you've been on campus, whether you've been remote, whether you switch jobs, or surged into another space to help keep this campus going.

I spent a lot of time with students, as you know and as you would expect, and I need you to also hear not only thanks from me, but thanks from them. I was with students the other evening on one of our wellness days. The good weather was good fortune, and there were many students out on the slope enjoying the sunset and just walking around talking with them. Students are so incredibly grateful for what you all have done to give them an in-person experience. It hasn't been a normal experience, and it hasn't been great all the times, but it has made a true difference in their lives. So many of our students rely on Cornell and this community and being on campus or surrounding campus as their safe place to learn, and to thrive, and to connect with others. And your willingness, your ability, your resilience has made a true difference for them, and I just want you to hear how much I felt that and when I speak to students just the other day and of course out throughout the entire year. So again, with my deep gratitude, appreciation, and admiration, thank you for everything that you've done and that you'll continue to do in these coming months.

HEI HEI DEPEW: Thank you, Ryan. Vice President and Chief Human Resources Officer, Mary Opperman.

MARY OPPERMAN: Thank you Hei Hei, and hello to everyone. I miss seeing you in person. And I hope that you're all doing well. A year ago, we were sending people home trying to understand what we were hearing from the state, and we really didn't understand what we were facing. And I am actually glad I didn't, to be completely honest. I think that the way this has unraveled and we have found ourselves in an evolving situation, it's been really challenging. And personally, I think I did better not knowing a year ago that we would still be in this today. But we, together, we stared down financial challenges, our fear of the unknown and uncertainty. And today, because of that, I think collectively we are really much better at dealing with ambiguity and unknowns. We've realized our interdependencies. We need one another. We may do different jobs. We may have different roles that we're playing. Our roles, as Ryan said, may have changed. We may have surged into doing something else. But we know we need one another. Over and over again you have pitched in and helped out. You volunteered for gigs and taken on different roles. So problems and challenges will remain, but we will continue to deal with them together as a community. And I just can't thank you all enough. I am so proud to be a colleague of all of yours.

Today, we'll do our best to answer your questions, but just as a year ago, you'll probably ask some that I won't be able to answer and others on the panel won't be able to answer, and we'll tell you that. Our goal has always been to be honest and as transparent as we can be. And just finally, a thank you to the EA. They have stepped up to be an incredible partner during this time. They didn't have to, but they did. And I hope through this you've seen the importance of our EA in guiding this university. So I'm going to turn it back to you, Hei Hei.

HEI HEI DEPEW: Thank you. Now we'll begin the Q&A portion of the staff forum for staff tuning in. Please feel free to enter questions into the Q&A segment of the webinar. We've asked a select few staff members who submitted questions via Qualtrics to join us today in asking their

submitted questions directly to senior leadership. So I will now turn the floor over to Ruth Merle-Doyle who will ask her question that was submitted via Qualtrics group.

RUTH MERLE-DOYLE: Thank you for letting me ask this question. So as I think about the last year and how strange and sad and weird and worrisome it's all been, I can't help but think that myself and my family have definitely found new ways of doing things and new ways of thinking that we'll continue to do after the pandemic settles down. And I'm wondering what Cornell will do in terms of innovation and new ideas and strategies moving forward that were born of the pandemic.

MARTHA POLLACK: So I think I will take this, if that's OK with my colleagues because this is actually something that I've thought about a lot, and it's something I talk with my colleagues a lot. In fact, if you think back to April of last year when we put out our guiding principles, one of our guiding principles was to seek new knowledge. And exactly as you say, we've learned a lot. And I think we've learned some things that are going to make us do things differently and do things better. Let me just mention a few-- I actually have a pretty long list.

When we think about our students, and we think about admissions, we now have a range of virtual engagement opportunities for prospective students. And also, we've made standardized testing optional. And these are both moves that I think have very positive implications for equity in our student body. And so we're seriously considering continuing them. When we moved all our classes online, it made us rethink many of the ways we've always done things. So we've always given prelims and final exams. Well, it turns out it's really hard to proctor an exam in a virtual classroom.

And during this pandemic, we also wanted to do things to reduce stress and anxiety among our staff, but also among our students. And a number of instructors moved to giving lower stake quizzes instead of a few high stakes exams. Turns out that this not only reduces the temptation to cheat, but it also encourages students to keep up a steady pace in learning. So we may continue that. We've also found that using online tools like virtual discussion sections-- that can be very beneficial to students in a number of ways. We found out that a lot of the work we used to travel for symposia, for collaborations, for department reviews, for site visits, you can do that virtually. Now we're still going to travel, but if we reduce and eliminate travel that isn't essential, it not only saves time and cost, but it also reduces our carbon footprint. And of course, we really care a lot about that at Cornell.

Let me just mention two more. One that is really directly relevant to staff, and Mary may want to add to this, but we've also found that for a number of staff, where appropriate and where consistent with their jobs and/or mission, remote work makes sense. And people like it. And we may try to develop ways so that at least some staff, at least some of the time, continue to work remotely. And then let me just mention one more. We made events like this town hall online, and we did it because we are forced to do it. But what we found, I'm looking at the bottom, here is that we have 1,200 participants here. I never spoke to a town hall that had 1,200 staff. Now, let me be honest, I look forward to resuming face-to-face interactions. They're not going

to go away, but I'm pretty sure we're going to continue to supplement those face-to-face interactions with virtual events like these because they do let more people be pulled in. I don't know-- I know that one thing that people are particularly interested in is remote work, and Mary, maybe you want to just add a sentence or two to that.

MARY OPPERMAN: Martha, I'd be happy to. We're looking now at-- first of all, we'll be sending out another survey to the people who are remote to see how that experience has gone and what the interest is going forward. As Martha said, not every job is a candidate for remote work. Our student experience really is a primary driver for us as we think about that, but we do believe we have jobs that can be done partially or fully remotely. And we want to try as best we can to align the interests that individuals have with the roles that will allow for that. So we're starting now with a couple of pilots to see how to do that. And we're taking a good look at our individual request process, also. So more to come, but it is, I agree-- it's a future direction that I think is actually very good for us and one that we hope to be able to utilize.

HEI HEI DEPEW: Now, I will turn the floor over to Claire Hubbard who will ask her question that was submitted via Qualtrics. Claire.

CLAIRE HUBBARD: Thank you for inviting me to ask my question. I've been very blessed to be working at Cornell for this last year and being able to work remotely. I've noticed, especially last week, states relaxing restrictions and opening things up. And the CDC and federal leaders are warning us to not release those restrictions because of the variants and the risk of COVID to them. Are we likely to be required to follow the lightening state restrictions because this is a state university, or will leadership make decisions for Cornell based upon the more federal guidelines. Thank you.

JOEL MALINA: I can handle that, Claire. Thank you for the question. One note of clarity, you notice that we're a state institution. We're actually 100% private. We do operate four of our colleges under contract with New York state-- our contract colleges. But putting that aside, we have done quite well following New York state's guidance over this very difficult year. We've always had a close relationship with the state, but I think in particular during this time of public health crisis, the state and their network of health departments-- I can't speak enough about our local Tompkins County Health Department-- for the most part, they have been pretty much in lockstep with CDC. There have been a few exceptions. I think there are certain states that are significantly moving in a more relaxed direction. I don't see New York as being in that type of a precarious position. I think we're going to continue to do, as we've done, which is to follow New York state. We think it will allow us to be in the best position to be careful to ensure to the maximum extent possible the public health of our community, while also ensuring that we are on pace to return to as much of a normalcy as possible once those public health concerns are no longer as apparent.

HEI HEI DEPEW: Thank you, Joel. The Vice Chair of the Employee Assembly Michelle Loparco and Employee Assembly Rep Lisa Zacharias will be asking questions derived from both the Qualtrics pre-submitted questions and the Q&A portion of the webinar. So if you have

questions, please feel free to submit the Q&A segment of this webinar. So now I will turn the floor over to Michelle and Lisa. Thank you all.

MICHELLE LOPARCO: Thank you all and panelists-- I'm going to take one of the questions that was submitted. This person requested to remain anonymous, so I won't read their name. And their question is, is there any program in place at the university level helping laid off administrative staff get rehired? And if not, are there plans in place for such a program? If not, why?

MARY OPPERMAN: Thanks for the question. So let me start by saying we've been very fortunate that we have had very, very small numbers of individuals laid off, but we have. And we have always had positions and through layoffs, we have a lot of grants, and it's something that we've always tried to minimize. And it's always been part of the way that the university moves. So we do have support for people who lose their jobs through no fault of their own. That begins with the local HR person who makes sure that they have all of the information that they need to connect them with their benefits. There is a transition team and the benefits office that works them through all of the layoff benefits, which are many, for them. And in terms of job search, the local HR person is there to assist with identifying roles that they can apply to. In addition, we have a partnership with a company called RiseSmart, and they offer an array of support, including case management, resume development, interview preparation, et cetera. So those combination of services have been extremely helpful for those that we have had to layoff

LISA ZACHARIAS: Thank you, Mary. So we have a few questions that are related. So it's like three questions altogether. The first one, will Cornell be a vaccine site? The second question is, will employees be required to be vaccinated to be able to return to campus when that time comes? And the third question is, will you require COVID testing into fall 2020?

MARY OPPERMAN: Those are all terrific questions. So let me tackle them. And this is just show you, I hope I can remember all three. Will we be giving vaccines on the campus? We don't know. Early on, when the ability to submit a request to be what's called a POT, a point distribution, we did put in an application. But we haven't heard back, and that's fine. I think the state is trying to manage the request for points of distribution with vaccine availability. So right now, we don't know. And we and we will keep you informed if we do move in that direction. I just want to say our community is extremely well supported by Tompkins County, but we do recognize that Tompkins County does what it can with the vaccines that it gets. They do send us to the state sites, and I am pleased to say that they are opening some more state sites. None in Ithaca, but they're getting closer. They'll be one in Corning coming up.

Right now, we are strongly recommending that when you are eligible, that you get vaccinated. We have not to date made the vaccine mandatory. We have not made that decision. But we are asking everyone when they become eligible, unless they have a reason and accommodated reason why they can't, to get vaccinated. It is the best way to keep our communities safe. And remind me of what the last question was, sorry.

MARTHA POLLACK: Testing in the fall.

MARY OPPERMAN: Testing in the fall, we don't know. Thanks Martha. We don't know yet, but again, all of what we've been experiencing, we drive our decisions based on science, based on public health and science. If there is significant virus left and based on the number of people who are vaccinated, we are not closing the door to continuing testing. And we have not decided one way or another, but it will depend a lot on the health situation at the time.

MICHELLE LOPARCO: Great, we'll continue in that same thread of questioning. Rebecca Vliet wants to know, once vaccinated, do I need to continue to surveillance test?

MARY OPPERMAN: Yes, for now you do.

LISA ZACHARIAS: Great, thank you. So Brandon Fortenberry has this question. The university will have an opportunity to recover in many ways from the financial impact of the pandemic, the investment returns that will bounce back with the economy, and similarly will our retirement funds. Would you ever consider a phased approach to salary recovery for employees who have been impacted by the university's freeze of salary improvements from this as well as the prior financial crisis of 2008?

MARTHA POLLACK: Mary, do you want me to take this? If it's OK, I know that there are a number of questions about finance more broadly, so maybe I can just take a couple of minutes and talk about the financial situation more broadly, including this question, if that's OK. Because I know I know a lot of people have been asking about that, and I want to bring you back to a year ago. And what we were looking at that time was a very difficult financial picture. We were looking at loss of revenue from canceled summer activities. We were talking looking at the temporary closure of the Statler Hotel. We were looking at the suspension of the campus to campus bus. We were looking at reduced dining and housing fees from the shortened spring semester. And then we looked ahead to the fall, and we knew we'd have another shortened semester. We were uncertain about enrollment. We knew we'd have high costs in keeping that campus healthy. I mean really, we were just looking at a pretty dire situation.

And as we looked at this, we really wanted again focus what are our priorities? We wanted the science and our priorities to drive our decision making. And we wanted to make sure our priorities were first, to keep our campus as healthy as possible, and second, to keep our university community together, and that meant ensuring both that our students could continue at Cornell even if their financial situation changed, and second that our staff could continue that to the greatest extent possible, we could avoid layoffs. So that's what led to a series of very difficult steps, including the ones Brandon alludes to. We had a hiring freeze. I know people are really-- it's very tough. I know many of you are doubling up on work. We had a salary freeze. We paused all the construction we could effectively pause. Some construction, like the North Campus residential, the new dormitories, we couldn't pause that. That was well underway, and that would delay more students adding to the revenue. But almost every place else we plus construction. We temporarily increased our endowment payouts. And then there was this very

difficult step of temporarily reducing retirement benefits for faculty and staff from the endowed units and salaries-- a temporary reduction in salary for those above a limit in the contract college. OK, that's all the background.

And we put those into place. And at that point I came to the EA and the Faculty Senate, and I promised we would track our finances and rescind them as soon as we could. And you know, I actually was quite relieved that we were able to do that on January 1st-- after five months instead of a year. So what changed? And again, I'm sorry this is so long, but this is all really important to get to the answer to Brandon's question. Well, a few things changed.

First of all, things worked. The hiring freeze and the constraints on non-personnel spending, that netted us about \$50 million in saving. That temporary reduction that was so painful on benefits and salary, that yielded us another \$20 million. And in addition, although we lost revenue in many of the ways we anticipated, and the costs were very high-- standing up that testing program, for example, is very expensive-- two things didn't happen. We didn't see a big drop in enrollment. Our students came back. And we didn't see a large increase in student financial need. Now in large part, that's because a number of our students-- I forget exactly, 15% or so-- enrolled at home. They were enrolled, but they were at home, so they had lower room and board costs. That may change over the next few years. We will probably see higher financial aid costs, but we're budgeting for that.

And the endowment is doing very well so far this year, but I have to caution that the market is extremely, extremely volatile. So what happens? You put this all together. We take these steps. It gets to January, and now we have a balanced budget. And we can say, OK, we don't need to have those cuts for the rest of the year. But it's not as if that money has recurred. I mean, we took those steps so that we could balance the budget. If we were, in the future, to sort of pay that back, what that would mean is we wouldn't have money for raises. We wouldn't have money to start hiring again. We wouldn't have money to get back to normal. I know that the hiring freeze has been a real stress. I'm very optimistic that we can begin rehiring this summer. And assuming our finances remain in reasonably good shape and we're doing everything we can to do that, we're going to be able to offer modest salary increases, that and continuing to avoid layoffs. Those are our real priorities. We can't go back in time, unfortunately, and undo what we needed to do to make up the gap for this year.

MICHELLE LOPARCO: Thank you. I'm going to ask a question that's probably been answered, but there may be people who might not have heard the answer having joined late. So Amy asks, have any decision's been made as to when, who will be returning to work on campus? And is a hybrid or in person, remote work being considered? And I know we've answered this in some way, but I thought it bears repeating for folks who didn't get on to hear the answer.

MARY OPPERMAN: Yeah, so let me answer it slightly in a fuller way than I did before. What the fall looks like and the extent to which we return to campus is in part driven by health, and in part driven by state guidelines. Keep in mind that right now we still have a de-densification requirement, and so we need to track that and know what that will be. But assuming that the

vaccine becomes widely available and taken, and cases continue to drop, we do aim to be ready to welcome our students when they return in the fall. That's what we hope. That's what we want. This means that we will work on our returning-- our fall plans throughout the summer.

Please keep in mind that thousands of your colleagues are already working on campus. Some have been working throughout this whole year. For those of you who are currently working remotely, some of you have expressed an interest in continuing a remote arrangement. I will be honest, others are very eager to return. So we will do two things. We are going to look organizationally at remote work possibilities and the jobs that are done with an eye towards our priorities which include the student experience. And we are also going to look individually, at individual's requests for remote. So more to come, but we know this is a high priority, and this is one of those opportunities where we are doing our best to blend individual priorities with our organizational priorities.

LISA ZACHARIAS: Thank you. Ryan Todd asks, now that many staff members are vaccinated completely or will be soon, the CDC states you can gather maskless amongst vaccinated individuals. Would vaccinated staff members be able to eat on breaks together now without the six foot distance?

MARY OPPERMAN: Well, we don't know. So let me just say that the guidance from the CDC is coming out slowly. So if you read the guidance, fully vaccinated individuals-- the example that they gave is that they can dine together in a private residence without their masks. The difficulty with the question-- it's a good question and one that's understandable, meaning you have to take your mask off to eat. It makes it very hard to try to eat with your mask on. And it is also really important for those who are here every day to have some socialization and not be alone. But we have some challenges with that because not everyone even can be vaccinated yet, and not everyone is vaccinated. So the CDC is still trying to understand the impact of not having our masks on even after being fully vaccinated.

So my advice, because we don't follow people around, my advice to you is once you're fully vaccinated, and if you're with others who are fully vaccinated, if you are someplace where you are alone, you should still maintain your distancing. You have to take your masks off to eat anyway. I would not gather in a large group, but if one or two people who are both fully vaccinated want to eat together, I certainly would still say stay at least six feet apart. The science is still progressing on what the vaccine does and doesn't protect you from. And we don't want to let our guards down too fast and find that we've missed something.

MICHELLE LOPARCO: Great, thank you. Carol Johnson-- I'm skipping down because I want to stay on this thread-- asked, will you, do you track who is being tested along with who has been vaccinated to determine if any people who are vaccinated test positive?

MARY OPPERMAN: So we do track testing, and I'm so glad you asked the question about vaccine tracking. It is our intention to permit anyone who is vaccinated to upload their information to us so that we have it. We should be coming out in the next week or two with

how we will do that. But you raise a really important point that one of-- the power of our testing is because we have the testing lab ourselves-- is that we are learning more about this virus. And those who do this, because that's all private and we all don't see that, if they have information about vaccination status, that would be extremely helpful for them to be able to know when somebody who has been vaccinated tests positive. So when we get that data, hopefully it will be helpful because that will help us with our safety. So more to come, but our intention is to provide a way for everyone who is vaccinated to give us that information.

LISA ZACHARIAS: Great, thank you. This question was sort of answered prior, but let's answer it for Carrie. For those of us that can work remotely but would rather be in the office, at least for part of the week, is there a chance that Cornell will require those of us that can work remote to continue to do so even after the pandemic is over in order to contain costs.

MARY OPPERMAN: Yeah, it's a great question. And I mentioned this, when we're ask-- we're talking to people around campus-- we are finding in the early days when people went out, we had a very high rate of people who were interested in full remote work. What we are beginning to see, and what we expect to see, in the survey is that people really miss the campus. They miss their colleagues. They miss the students. And so they are interested in flexibility. So more flexibility to maybe work at home sometimes, but less of an interest in having a fully remote job. And so again that's that blending I was talking about, really understanding the organizational needs and the individual needs and trying our best to meet both to the extent that we can. But that takes getting the information and trying to figure that out. So I'm glad you raised the question. It's one of the things on the list, and we're working our way through it.

MICHELLE LOPARCO: Wonderful. I'm going to get two questions answered with this. The hiring freeze, will it remain in effect? And there's been some announcements of new hires, but the last folks knew, we still have a hiring freeze going on and when might that lift? How do you address the inequity of some departments being able to hire versus others, essentially following the rules of a hiring freeze?

MARY OPPERMAN: Yep, so let me start by saying, yes we do have a hiring freeze. It has an exception process. We use the exception process when the roll really must be filled. So we have had some jobs that we have gone ahead and approved for refill. And I know that that's difficult to see if you are struggling with a couple of jobs. And so all of us have jobs that we're holding on to as we try to understand the budgets. We are looking now at what to do post July, whether we will continue to have a hiring pause, or whether we will move to something else. But let me be honest and say, we will have increased rigor about jobs that we replace. And the reason for that is not just the pandemic. It is that when we have made cuts in the past, and then we have held down hiring, when the hiring restrictions have been removed, we have grown bigger-- bigger than the budget really allows. And that cycle of growth and cut and growth and cut is not a healthy cycle for people. So our intention is to align our staffing to our funding and then do the hard work if we need to of stopping some of what we do in order to remain at a healthy, financially healthy, workforce size. Martha, I don't know if you wanted to add to that.

MARTHA POLLACK: No, no. I mean, the only thing I would add is I'm down people in my office. We've had-- I have a tiny little office and we've had a retirement, and we haven't refilled it because of the freeze. And so I understand the stresses that people are under. But I think that the last point you make is incredibly important. It's not healthy to grow really big and then have to cut and grow really big, and the trajectory we were on was not sustainable. So we're probably below where we need to be now, but we're going to have to be cautious and thoughtful as we fill places-- fill slots back in.

LISA ZACHARIAS: Great, thank you. These are two similar yet different questions, but I'll do a part one and part two. The first question, will students be required to have both COVID vaccines prior to returning to campus in the fall? And the other part, are there plans to loosen current restrictions on visitors to campus for the summer and/or fall?

MARTHA POLLACK: Ryan, do you want to answer the first part?

RYAN LOMBARDI: Yep, sure, I can do that. So we haven't made any decision on whether or not students will be required to have a vaccine. We do know, though, that we won't be able to make such a requirement even if we wanted to until there are enough vaccines available for all students to be eligible. And so we are discussing this, and we're obviously thinking forward to the fall and what that might look like, and we'll consider this closely as we get a better sense of how vaccine availability increases in the coming months.

MARTHA POLLACK: And then I think more generally, with respect to visitors and travel and all these things, we are proceeding now with the same strategy that I think has served us pretty well throughout the pandemic. We have our epidemiological modeling team modeling where things stand, looking at different-- they project, well what if the variants go in this direction? What if the vaccination uptake rate is this amount? And we're trying to make decisions slowly and thoughtfully based on the science. So as of now, there is not any change in our guidance with respect to visitors and travel. I imagine if for example, that we get the kind of vaccine availability that the president talked about in his address and then and then there's actual uptake, that that will change quickly. But the last thing we want to do-- all my friends who are epidemiologists say this is a critical moment. And this gets to the answer Mary was giving a bit ago about whether you should keep wearing your mask when you're with other vaccinated people, this is almost a moment to be more careful because everyone's inclination is to jump ahead. And if we can just hold out a little more, we'll be beyond this. I mean, I'm not the expert in epidemiology, but my colleagues who are say, if we move too quickly, it's just going to greatly extend the period of time until we're after the pandemic.

RYAN LOMBARDI: And maybe, if I can just add on there, Martha, I agree with all of those points very much. I will share with the community that we are extending-- I'm sorry, we are accepting consideration for things later in the summer, programs later in the summer. Of course that emphasizes the point the President Pollack made. We need to stay very diligent, very focused now, and in hopes that we do so and get through this semester successfully, we are going to

entertain the possibility of some in-person activities on campus this summer. So if those are of interest to your department or to you, they need to come either through me, if they're residentially based programs, or through the provost if they're solely academically based programs.

MARTHA POLLACK: I have to say, I'm clinging to President Biden's goal where we're all having 4th of July barbecues, right? That would be amazing. But we've all got to do the hard work now so that we can get to that.

MICHELLE LOPARCO: All right, I'm going to take two questions because they're very similar. Are we close to making a decision on commencement? And that's basically, what is the status-- if not in person, would virtual be considered? So a couple of questions came in about that.

MARTHA POLLACK: In a way, I just want to say ditto to what I said before. We did decide that we had to go completely remote for reunions. And the reason we had to make that decision early, it's very complicated, but basically we have volunteers out there, lots and lots of different volunteers. And the logistics of planning for both an in-person and an online reunion was incredibly, incredibly complicated. When it comes to commencement, we have not made a decision. We're proceeding very, very cautiously. We're hoping that with the pick-up in speed in vaccine rollout, things will be better. But then there's the contagion's variants. We simply don't know.

And of course, it's not just what we want. It's also what the New York state guidelines and requirements are with regard to big events. Short of a miracle, I don't think that by May, which was when commencement would be, we're going to be in a world in which we can safely have ten of thousands of people sitting elbow to elbow in a stadium. That seems unlikely. And so a traditional commencement weekend with everything that entails is probably not in the cards. We've told families we haven't made a decision, but we don't advise anyone right now to make non-refundable travel reservations. Best I can tell you is we're hoping, fingers crossed, that we can have some kind of in-person event on campus for the class-- for the class of 2021-- that would be consistent with state guidelines and yet, allow us to celebrate all of our students' achievements. We hope to have that decision-- I guess we're going to have to have that decision no later than sometime this month. Mary, I don't know if there's anything you want to add to that.

MARY OPPERMAN: No. I just say the same thing. We're doing lots of planning, and the poor president keeps saying all different kinds of plans and she keeps saying, yep that's possible. And the circumstances are changing fast, and there's a lot of interest in different models. But I know it's difficult, but the president's been really clear about wanting to wait as long as possible so we make the best decision possible. And I think by doing that, we have opened up the possibility of some interesting options, that if we had made this decision back in February, we wouldn't have even considered so more to come.

MARTHA POLLACK: Yeah, two other quick points. One thing to remember about commencement is you're bringing in lots of people from around the country. And I want to make sure-- we've been a really good partner to Tompkins County and the surrounding counties, and they've been a good partner to us, and I don't want to do anything that would potentially put our staff and faculty who live in the community, but also are non-Cornell neighbors at risk. The other thing to keep in mind is that while President Biden says by May he really wants there to be availability of the vaccine for every American over 16 or 18 or whatever it is. Once it's available, it still takes a lot of time to get all those shots in arms, so even if there were enough vaccine May 1, it's not like May 2 everyone would be vaccinated and immune. You've got to get them in the arms, and you have to get the second dose, if it's not Johnson & Johnson, then you have to wait two weeks. So it's going to be a while. It's still going to be a while. But it's not going to be forever, right? I mean we're at a moment of more hope than I've felt in a year.

LISA ZACHARIAS: Great, thank you President Pollack. So I think it's a perfect time to switch things up. This is from Michelle Artibee, and I think we can all echo this first sentiment, "I am so grateful for all that our leadership has done to keep people safe this past year and imagine it has been quite the challenging experience for each of you. What have you learned about yourselves throughout this and how has your approach to leadership been forever changed?"

MARTHA POLLACK: Oh wow, that's a great question. One thing I've learned, not so much about myself but just about humanity, is how resilient people are. I mean absolutely everyone in their own way is dealing with a different challenge. And there's no question that the challenge for some people is much harder than the challenge is for others. And it's different. I mean I keep saying, Oh my God I'm so glad my kids are grown. I can't imagine how people are coping with children at home. And then I remind myself that at the beginning of the pandemic I brought in my 86 year old dad, and I was coping with elder care. So we were all-- is that harder? Is it less hard? I don't know. But I think I have learned how resilient people are.

And I think what's changed is I think I will never again underestimate a community. Our students-- everyone said, absolutely everyone said-- and I can't see Ryan on my screen, but I know he's glaring at me here because he didn't say this, but everyone but Ryan said our students will never behave in the ways we need them to to keep the community safe. And you know what? Our students did behave, overwhelmingly, not everyone and not every moment and I know it's getting hard and the weather is getting warmer, but our students did what they need to do. Our staff-- I can't tell you-- I have. I've been trying to tell how proud I am of how much everyone has kept. Our faculty, at a moment's notice, with only a little bit of grumbling around the edges, quickly did everything they needed to do. They pushed their research aside, and they came out for our students. So I just will never underestimate what a community can do for the greater good ever again. And if anyone wants to add to that.

JOEL MALINA: I'll jump in with some thoughts. In terms of what I learned about myself, and I guess it's a little lighthearted, I've learned that I can have a productive day with two cats

interrupting me. I'm hoping that we can have a pets in the office policy, Mary, once we are back.

MARTHA POLLACK: I'm bringing my four cats, and they're going to outnumber your two cats.

JOEL MALINA: Oh, we're going to have some fun times, I'm sure. In terms of what won't change, and this is a real great thing that was just by necessity and it comes from the part of my work that deals with communications, for so long people just assume such a large decentralized university-- this pandemic really bolstered the spirit of collaboration, the spirit of collegiality, so that even though we've got all of these disparate communications offices and all of our wonderful academic and administrative units, what will never change is we're not going to go back to what, in some instances, was kind of a siloed approach. I think there's this integration that we've all recognized benefit from, that we've learned from each other so well over these trying times. So I think that's a positive change for the long term.

RYAN LOMBARDI: Maybe I'll jump in too if we're being reflective. And Mary, you have to do this too. I think we all have to. I mean, I think there's so much to reflect on from this time, and there are a lot of things that I would think about. But I would say a couple of the things that have resonated most for me, one, to be easy on myself. I have messed up more than I care to keep track of counting, and every time I thought that we knew the direction we're going, we had to pivot and do something differently. And the grace that the community and that each other and then our colleagues that we've shown each other in this time, has made such a difference. And I've seen, what I would call, some of the sharp edges dull a little bit on campus, in our communities, among staff, and I really appreciated that-- to see that collective community that I think Martha was referring to a little bit earlier.

The other thing that it really reinforced me about leadership in general, which I have tried very hard to practice but not always been successful at, is that empowering the staff who are doing the work is critical. You come into a moment like this, and there's no conceivable way that, example of me, that I could have directed the 1,200 person organization, every decision, every step, everything that had to happen. I had to trust the team that they knew the direction we are headed. That they could execute and deliver and do what needed to happen, and they did it resoundingly. The team was incredible, spectacular in every sense of the word. And so I encourage all leaders, whether you're leading a small team of two people, or whether you're leading an entire university, to really think about how you empower your team. Give them the skills necessary to be successful and to make decisions that advance the good of this institution.

MARY OPPERMAN: So, yes to everything that I've heard. And I guess I would say as myself, one of the things I've learned is just to say I don't know when I don't know. It's hard if you feel like people are looking to you for an answer, but I've found that it was very hard for me. I feel like I owe people when they ask me something to have an answer, and the pandemic was an awakening to realize there are times when you don't know when you're better off not to guess.

The other thing personally is I have had to forgive myself, my mistakes. As Ryan said, you know, I did a lot of swirling and stumbling, and I had never dealt with anything like this before. And I just had to give myself-- you know, Martha's always really good about saying let it go, let it go it is what it is, let it go, but it doesn't come from someone else. Forgiving yourself comes from yourself. And similar to what Ryan said, I've learned that good ideas come from everywhere. They might be from someone who's doing the work, and I couldn't agree more that the reason we've gotten through this is not, although I appreciate the kindness towards the leadership and I think we have had a role to play, we have gotten through this because of the amazing work of everyone on this campus. Owning a time and an effort in a way that just makes me so so proud. But I have gotten amazing ideas like sideways from places, people doing very different work, and just thinking about something and coming up with an idea, and it has been really motivating.

And then the last thing on leadership that I would say is, I realize the importance of checking in with people and giving each individual that I check in with space to be-- just to say how they feel without my feeling like I have to fix their problem. And it's really been a great way to connect differently with people than I have done before. So a lot of learning.

HEI HEI DEPEW: Well on that note of reflection, I want to end the Q&A portion, but also allow some time for President Pollack and Mary Opperman to provide any closing remarks.

MARTHA POLLACK: Sure. I can go. I just want to say a few things. First of all, for a year now, I have closed almost every set of comments that I've given by saying, please wear your mask. Please stay socially distanced. Please follow all those public health guidelines, and that's all still true. But I am so excited also to be able to say please, please go get vaccinated as soon as it's your turn. We're at a moment of hopefulness. I am more hopeful than I've been in a year. We can't get ahead of ourselves, but I can certainly see the light at the end of the tunnel. So that's the first thing.

Secondly, please keep being kind to each other and to yourself. I think that's what I heard amongst my colleagues when they talked about leadership, more than anything. I think what's gotten us through this year is remembering to be kind to ourselves and forgive yourself when you get something wrong, and be kind to each other because we all need each other. And then finally again, on behalf of the whole administration, I just want to say a deep thank you to everyone on the staff. We so appreciate all you've done over the past year. And the next year is going to be so much better. I promise you. Well, no, one of the things I've learned-- I shouldn't promise. Who knows what's coming? But I sure hope the next year is going to be a whole lot better. Mary.

MARY OPPERMAN: Me too. So ditto on the thank yous and the appreciation. And I do want to say that we solve our problems better when we focus on solutions as opposed to blaming. That's true for anywhere and everyone, and I have been so amazed at-- I get a lot of email-- even people who are struggling, have I think, really worked hard to put their concerns into a

constructive forward thinking way. And I think that's part of the reason why our community is doing so well.

And then on the more pragmatic, things are starting to move fast. So what we thought we knew yesterday has already changed between the CDC and the federal government and the state. We are going to continue to do our very best to tell you what we know. We have vaccine updates and all sorts of things that we try to do, that we keep the web up and Joel's group is fabulous in this space. But things are going quickly. So even though I know you're probably sick of getting emails from us, read them because they could have something in them that is really important to you. And it may be that something we say on Tuesday has shifted again on Thursday, and that's OK. And if you hear something and you think we may not have heard it, let us know because this is a quick moving period in the pandemic.

And finally, just my deep thanks to all of you, to the EA, and to the people behind the scenes who make things happen. Sometimes we-- I think this is a moment for us all to see one another. So all of the individuals on campus who have kept our animals safe, who have done the testing and the diagnostics, who have been in dining and food service, and I always worry I'm going to miss somebody, and our utilities folks, and our safety folks, and everybody who has kept on for a year-- for all of you who are dealing with stresses in your life, and for Zoom fatigue and isolation, we see you. Please take care of yourselves. We're getting there. Please take care of yourselves. Use your days. I know most people think of vacation as going away. Sometimes the best thing you can give yourself is a day with a book. Just use your time and take care of yourselves, and know we're here for you. Thank you.

HEI HEI DEPEW: Thank you. On behalf of the Employee Assembly, I want to thank you all for your time from senior leadership to the 1,200 staff members logging in today asking questions, being engaged with us, I cannot stress enough how helpful it is to hear directly from senior leadership. This transparency, this partnership, this willingness to be front-facing has help provide guidance, assurance, helpful clarity, for myself personally, and based on the staff feedback, I thank the staff as a whole. So I want to just express all the gratitude for senior leadership and for everybody here for all the work in keeping this university running. I hope you all will be able to go outside and enjoy the sunlight. I want you to all take care and have a wonderful weekend. Thank you.