



Cornell University Employee Assembly

Cornell Employee Assembly Minutes of the February 3, 2021 Meeting 12:15-1:30 PM Zoom

I. Call to Order

- a. Chair H. Depew called the meeting to order at 12:15pm.

II. Roll Call

Members Present [23]: S. Barry, M. Cherry, J. Creque, H. Depew, J. Duong, B. Fortenberry, B. Goodell, A. Haenlin-Mott, E. Ivory, M. LoParco, K. Mahoney, V. McAuley, J. Michael, A. Miller, E. Miller, M. Newhart, M. Podolec, K. Supron, K. Tannenbaum, L. Taylor, J. Townley, J. Withers, L. Zacharias

- a. *Members Absent* [6]: J. Cannella, B. Fisher, D. Howell, R. Lochner, N. Siadat, K. Wilcox,

III. Approval of the minutes from January 6, 2021

- a. The minutes of the January 6, 2021 meeting were **approved** unanimously.

IV. Business of the Day

- a. Discussion of EA R6: Support for Student Assembly Leadership from Racism, Threats, and Harassment – J. Duong
 - i. J. Duong noted that he had drafted the resolution after information came to light about the harassment SA leaders were facing. He noted that the resolution had already passed unanimously through the Executive Committee and added that the resolution intentionally focused on the harassment the leaders were facing rather than the issues of the resolutions they were working on.
 - ii. B. Fortenberry conveyed support for the resolution stating that it was important for the EA to show support to the SA in light of the circumstances. He expressed the extraordinary disappointment he felt in the situation. B. Fortenberry also recommended that the mention of three SA members on Lines 28 and 29 of the resolution be broadened to state multiple members noting that the harassment was not limited to just the three SA members. B. Fortenberry also suggested the resolution be adjusted where it stated “were bombarded with an overwhelming influx of violent messages and slurs from right-wing accounts” on Lines 28 and 29, by also acknowledging that the members were faced with violent, sexist, racist comments. Additionally, members had their names and photos published on prominent social media accounts and had articles sent about them with sources that had intentionally edited transcripts.
- b. Staff Forums Update
 - i. H. Depew noted that the Welfare Committee was currently working on planning a civil discourse panel discussion and still working on the details for who to involve. H. Depew also noted that plans were in the work for an employee finance staff forum that would bring together VP P. Streeter and EVP/CFO J. DeStefano to talk about the current financial state of affairs in preparation for a new fiscal year.
- c. Retreat Update

- i. H. Depew stated that the retreat would consist of 45 minutes with VP Opperman in the beginning including a 10 minute presentation from VP Opperman followed by questions. H. Depew noted that the question period would provide a great opportunity to engage with VP Opperman, especially in working through the points of the Priorities Poll and getting a better sense of what HR was already doing to address the issues. The questioning period would then be followed by the EA members collectively discussing and getting feedback on the points from the poll and then going into breakout rooms by committee to further discuss potential solutions. In preparing for the retreat, H. Depew encouraged members to read their breakout room committee report assignment and the priority and feedback related to their committee.

V. Committee Reports

- a. Executive Committee – M. LoParco
 - i. M. LoParco noted that the last meeting of committee was on January 28th and the discussion topics included the retreat agenda, EA senior leader interviews with the hope of discussing with K. Mahoney if the initiative would still be pursued, the George Peter Award, the next steps for the Elections Committee with G. Giambattista and N. Siadat, and the rollout of the upcoming EA elections.
- b. Communications and Awards Committee – E. Miller
 - i. E. Miller noted that the committee had met the day before and had a robust conversation. One topic included the January newsletter that had received positive reviews and how to go forward with content for the February newsletter that had a tentative February 15th distribution date. E. Miller noted that certain items that the committee was planning on including in the newsletter for February were a feature of Student & Campus Life employees and other employees involved in the move-in process, a feature on on-campus essential workers, a spotlight on B. Fortenberry, and information on the new Dining Recognition Program. She also asked members to contact her with any ideas they had about other items to include in the February newsletter.
 - ii. E. Miller also added that the committee had also discussed some events for March including a tech campus focused newsletter, discussion on the education benefits presented in January, the George Peter Award (for achievement) and the formerly Opperman Award (for advocacy), and the Priorities Poll results. She noted that their had also been a lot of discussion regarding what the committee could do to get recognition of employees back on the forefront.
- c. Education Committee – J. Withers
 - i. J. Withers noted that the committee had held the informative panel on Staff Education Benefits and discussed the profile of how staff and supervisors felt about the benefits.
 - 1. E. Miller asked about the number of individuals in attendance at the panel.
 - 2. H. Depew responded that it was 436 individuals.
- d. Welfare Committee – K. Mahoney
 - i. K. Mahoney noted that the committee had held a joint meeting with the BPC and hosted an HR administrator to discuss the Belonging at Cornell Survey and the thoughts of HR surrounding a transition to a hybrid work from home model. K. Mahoney also noted that she wanted to discuss the senior leaders interview with H. Depew to reconcile her understanding of it.
- e. Benefits and Policy Committee – B. Goodell
 - i. B. Goodell noted that the most recent meeting discussion had revolved around EA R5 thanking the administration noting that it was ultimately decided to not move forward

- with it, correspondence about the performance dialogue process, the process for campus reactivation, and correspondence about the vaccine process and who was eligible.
- ii. H. Depew noted that University leaders were in active conversation with representatives in Albany to get fair treatment for University staff as received by P-12.
 - iii. R. White stated that the major issues was not that of what the categories were but rather getting the vaccines noting that there were not enough vaccines in the county to fulfill the current demand.
- f. Elections Committee – N. Siadat
- i. No Update

VI. New Business

- a. Open Discussion
 - i. EA R6: Support for Student Assembly Leadership from Racism, Threats, and Harassment
 - 1. B. Goodell asked if the language on Line 29 could be changed to “political extreme group” as to not marginalize right-wing groups and individuals.
 - 2. J. Duong stated that the wording on Line 29 was in quotes because it was the language used by the Cornell Sun in its article and including it was less about having the resolution marginalize groups and more about not doing a disservice to the students that suffered the harassment. J. Duong stated that he would not support the language change if an amendment was made for it.
 - 3. B. Fortenberry stated that he believed the phrasing could be better worded than it was in the Cornell Sun noting that the quote unnecessarily politicized the comments rather than directly pointing out their racist, misogynistic, and sexist nature. B, Fortenberry added that he understood J. Duong’s statement about minimizing EA influence in “watering-down” the situation but noted that the resolution was being put forward by the EA in an attempt to make a statement about the members perceptions of the situation.
 - 4. C. Tempelman expressed support for the resolution and the edits proposed by B. Fortenberry because off the greater context it provided to the situation and in acknowledging that the harassment was aimed at multiple SA members.
 - 5. J. Duong mentioned that he would be open to adding context of the racist and sexist remarks proposed by B. Fortenberry but noted that the resolution should quote the Cornell Sun in regard to “right-wing...” rather than remove it.
 - 6. E. Miller moved to table the resolution until the next meeting to continue the discussion offline. B. Goodell seconded the motion.
 - 7. B. Fortenberry dissented stating that the discussion could be resolved in the meeting and stressed the importance of passing the resolution rather than wait another few weeks. B. Fortenberry also said that the discussion could continue to provide J. Duong with feedback to revise the resolution and vote on it over email.
 - 8. H. Depew echoed agreement with B. Fortenberry’s statement stating that if the assembly waited too long, it would miss the window of opportunity in addressing the issue.
 - 9. M. LoParco also echoed B. Fortenberry’s statement of finishing the discussing at the meeting. She added that the Executive Committee had discussed keeping Line 28/29 as a quote, but she would be open to B. Fortenberry’s changes on it if a consensus could be reached.

10. M. Newhart echoed M. LoParco's comments and expressed discomfort with keeping the quote because of how it would politicize the issue. She stated that she would be in favor of substituting the quote with B. Fortenberry's suggestion.
 11. The motion to table the resolution proposed by E. Miller and seconded by B. Goodell **failed**.
 12. M. Newhart motioned to replace Lines 28 and 29 with "Whereas, Multiple members of the Student Assembly received an influx of violent, sexist, and racist comments, including the publishing of students names and photos on prominent social media accounts, as well as articles sent to news sources with intentionally edited transcripts and quotes to fabricate false narratives." The motion was seconded and **amended** with no dissent.
 13. The resolution, with the amendments, was **approved** with one abstention
- ii. University Response to Inclement Weather
1. K. Tannenbaum expressed disappointment with the Universities lack of response on the previous day's inclement weather noting that the University should be posting updates on the website regularly.
 2. J. Withers also echoed frustrations with the response noting that as a co-sponsor of the resolution addressing the Universities response with the snowfall from the February 2020, they had asked for a report from the administration and did not receive it. J. Withers noted that the response from the administration was that a review was conducted and asked if any member knew of a way to receive the review.
 3. H. Depew provided information on the resolution along with the feedback from President Pollack on the resolution.
 4. J. Duong stated that it seemed as if the decisions on closure were being made in a vacuum without taking into account the stress of things such as finding childcare during a period where the entire county was closed.
 5. B. Goodell noted that the University should be releasing statements informing the community on either the reason it decided to stay open or the reason it decided to close. He added that he did not want the administration to not use the mentality of community members being remote to justify staying open.
 6. K. Tannenbaum stated that she had not received any University-level information on the storm and added that even if the focus was on facilitating Move-In week, she did not understand why needing staff essential for move-in would necessitate all staff to be on campus.
 7. B. Fortenberry stated the decisions the University made on whether to open or not were based on the amount of snow fall per hour and the ability of the ground crew to clear the snow and added that the University had made the decision to stay open because it was determined that the ground crew could clear the snow. However, he did agree with K. Tannenbaum and previous speakers acknowledging that the University could have done a better job in communicating their decision.
 8. A. Miller noted that the University should keep community members informed on the final decision. A. Miller also added that the University could control the roads on-campus but had no control over the rest of the county and stated that community members should use their best judgment in deciding whether or not the roads were safe to get to work.
 9. L. Zacharias expressed frustration with the Universities lack of closure and stated that the University should based their decision of closure off of the status of

Tompkins County and other counties and the weather warnings they were being placed under.

10. M. Podolec stated that the Universities communications about inclement weather were part of the larger discussion regarding how remote work would work.
11. A. Haenlin-Mott stated that the Universities communication about the delayed opening of COVID testing sites was a good example of the communication they should have with inclement weather issues in general. A. Haenlin-Mott added that although it was not necessary to receive hour-by-hour updates, updates on the operating status and the progress of the ground crew's work would be helpful.
12. K. Tannenbaum expressed agreement with A. Miller and stated that there was something to be said about the decision to stay open despite Tompkins County being in a state of emergency.
13. M. Cherry noted that although it was important to use one's judgment to make a decision, the decisions were never made in a vacuum and took into account many other things. She stated that the real benefit of having Cornell communicate clearly and close when appropriate was that it would take all of the additional input away when deciding whether or not to go to work and allow staff to prioritize their safety.
14. H. Depew encouraged the committees to take up the issue and discuss how it could be addressed.
15. L. Zacharias also added that she did not think it was right for the University or schools in general to close the physical space and still expect for work to be done remotely.

VII. Adjournment

- a. The meeting was adjourned at 1:27pm.

Respectfully Submitted,
Office of the Assemblies