



## Cornell University Employee Assembly

**Cornell Employee Assembly**  
Minutes of the March 2nd, 2022 Meeting  
12:15-1:30 PM  
Zoom

### **I. Call to Order**

- a. Chair J. Withers called the meeting to order at 12:15pm.

### **II. Roll Call**

*Members Present* [24]: D. Barrett, M. Brooks, J. Chandler, M. Cherry, S. Coil, J. Creque, H. Depew, J. Duong, A. Durant, B. Fortenberry, A. Haenlin-Mott, D. Howell, K. LoParco, A. Mittman, E. Miller, S. Resue, A. Schafft, J. Stewart, K. Supron, K. Tannenbaum, J. Townley, J. Withers  
*Members Absent* [4]: M. Benda, J. Cannella, B. Fisher, B. Goodell, K. Mahoney, L. Zacharias

### **III. Land Acknowledgement of the Gayogho:nq (Cayuga Nation)**

- a. J. Withers stated the Land Acknowledgement.

### **IV. Approval of the February 16th, 2022 Minutes**

- a. Motion to approve the February 16th, 2022 minutes was **approved** unanimously with a note for quick amendments.

### **V. Business of the Day**

- a. Mary Opperman-- Vice President and Chief Human Resources Officer
  1. M. Opperman stated that life seems to be moving past COVID-19 and noted that the Bureau of Labor projected a multi-million level shortage of workers in the next 10 years, a shortage that has held true. M. Opperman stated that many older workers have left their workspaces, while younger workers are demonstrating reluctance to return to the traditional workspace, emphasizing that the future of employment will look different.
  2. M. Opperman noted that younger employees want to feel compelled by the values behind their jobs, which helps higher education, while there are challenges due to the resident, student-facing nature of many roles in higher education. M. Opperman also noted issues of exclusion and marginalization such as a culture of hierarchy that continually needs to be addressed, and that resistance to change and obsolete pre-existing structures should be recognized and overcome through efficiency and streamlining.
  3. H. Depew stated that the Welfare Committee met previously that day to address staffing issues such as retention and large number of openings that M. Opperman had just mentioned, discussing options to address staff concerns through which we

can garner information and further understand our staff population. H. Depew noted that differing opinions on remote work in comparison to in-person work are important to learn more about.

4. M. Opperman stated that on a recent call with other corporate leaders, there was a renewed interest reflected in the call to have employees return to the office, a desire that will cause interesting shifts soon, a desire stemming from expensive physical infrastructure to company culture. M. Opperman highlighted the necessity for conversation on the future of where one works. M. Opperman further noted a sense of fear and a desire of safety that has kept many to their homes, for whom which she is unsure how such groups will react to this conversation of work modality.
5. J. Creque stated her passion for process improvement and noted that her supervisors or higher-level managers who are themselves not doing the ground-level work often do not see the value of taking time to optimize processes and procedures through changes, noting her thanks for M. Opperman's acknowledgement of this concept's importance. J. Creque stated that many are afraid to make changes and be different due to a fear of failure, but that a culture where being wrong is okay should be emphasized and grown. Finally, J. Creque stated thanks to M. Opperman and President Pollack for demonstrating vulnerable leadership.
6. M. Opperman stated that there are so many inefficient processes that are held on to longer than they should be due to a sense of vulnerability and fear that they choose to avoid, but that through technology and understanding of a role's value can lead to greater change. M. Opperman noted that there is a generational gap between younger digital natives in comparison to older digital nomads should be acknowledged, but also that for many, particularly in middle-management, fear of failure will cause them to hold on to what they know works regardless of such a processes efficiency.
7. J. Creque noted, in response to M. Opperman, an opportunity for better language with job roles to make mistakes more acceptable.
8. M. Opperman noted the chat, where E. Miller and D. Barrett noted that process improvement is often not a continual facet of job roles and that there often feels like no time to instill such changes.
9. M. Opperman stated that there is a real possibility the many openings Cornell has will not be filled. M. Opperman stated that if inflation continues, the public continues to pressure higher education about tuition costs, and need-blind admissions continue, the press on resources may cause Cornell to be unable to pay all the currently open roles regardless of whether they are filled or not. M. Opperman noted that, when a group of staff must be slimmer due to such resource restraints, efficiency must be maximized for survival.
10. J. Duong questioned the seeming constant growth of high-level executives in comparison to the rank-and-file level where staff levels constantly seem to be shrinking as roles are cut.

11. M. Opperman stated that it is impossible for any employer to keep pace with the last 2 months of inflation, especially when Cornell is criticized for any tuition increase despite it being the primary source of revenue, but that recalibration will only be figured out as time passes. M. Opperman stated that management growth has actually lagged behind broader staff growth but acknowledged that some administrative areas are being forced to do more work with less staff due to openings or role cuts and that there are no easy solutions to such issues.
12. A. Mittman acknowledged J. Creque's sentiments and stated that there is value in taking calculated risks. A. Mittman acknowledged M. Opperman's statements on people wanting a sense of value and mission through their work and recalled back to "line of sight" used by Tylenol years ago. M. Opperman explained that after Tylenol accidentally found cyanide in their product, there was a renewed sense of purpose and mission found by all staff where they all felt they made impact.
13. D. Barrett stated that making a space for conversations around employment and employment concerns is important and expressed his interest in furthering efficiencies. D. Barrett stated his thanks for his predecessor and the documentation they left behind for him to step into his role and emphasized the necessity of proper and thorough documentation for quick adjustment to a role. D. Barrett asked for help on pushing for innovation and dealing with naysayers who only say what cannot be done.
14. M. Opperman stated that efforts cannot be made alone, and that the first step would be to find a metaphorical champion, noting how D. Barret's sentiments mirror those of leadership and that many will value his creativity and mindset. M. Opperman stated that one should rely on others to help them carry out innovation and overcome fear of change in other staff.
15. D. Barrett agreed with M. Opperman's statements and acknowledged the fact that many problems on campus are central to all, even though many units are decentralized.
16. M. Opperman stated her agreement with D. Barrett's statements on the benefits and drawbacks of Cornell's more decentralized model and drew into question the meaning of success. M. Opperman stated that a higher turnover and the ongoing evolution of Cornell's core mission will allow creativity and efficiency to be celebrated much more as time passes.
17. H. Depew stated her appreciation for D. Barrett's continued efforts. H. Depew noted that there were previously IRP all-staff surveys and suggested that these surveys be re-instated to collect thorough data that could help address questions and issues.
18. M. Opperman stated that leadership was asked if they were ready to re-instate these surveys in 2020, and HR did not feel they were ready to address feedback that would come back from such a survey. M. Opperman noted the question of whether these large comprehensive surveys would be better than smaller pulse surveys that could highlight specific issues in a much more actionable way.

19. H. Depew agreed with M. Opperman's words and acknowledged the sense in her words.
20. J. Creque stated that, in tandem with the conversation on perfectionism that occurred earlier, she has noticed that alongside this expectation of perfectionism is this bias on how people are held accountable. J. Creque hoped for the creation of a more standardized form of accountability and the normalization of therapy and other resources for help.
21. M. Opperman agreed with J. Creque's statements on bias and noted that diversity and age as one looks more towards the top of the workforce is smaller and older. M. Opperman, in response to J. Creque's comments on perfectionism, stated that a positive response acknowledging mistakes as a learning point rather than something to be punished for is something to be worked towards as a learning organization with a growth mindset.
22. J. Creque stated that often people feel the need to be solely responsible for their work, which is much more difficult than relying on others to share such work.
23. M. Opperman stated that developing a psychologically safe workplace is difficult but should be cultivated to help develop success in a shared way.
24. B. Fortenberry acknowledged the centralized and decentralized nature of Cornell and hoped for centralization that considers deviations and adaptations for different units, noting the struggles that he has seen in many different units and their fear to make progress forward.
25. M. Opperman acknowledged B. Fortenberry's statements as the primary issues Cornell has been having with efficiency and stated that, while there are many issues with centralized solutions that not everyone will be entirely happy with, these solutions are still inherently pushing change through these centralized systems. M. Opperman stated the need for the end of discussions on change that are centered around individuals needs that instead should be replaced with the question of why such changes are occurring. M. Opperman emphasized that changing a workplace's culture takes time.
26. B. Fortenberry thanked M. Opperman for her words and noted that there is a discrepancy where people often do not understand the thinking behind such decisions and changes.
27. A. Haenlin-Mott thanked M. Opperman for her presence and the insightful discussions that have occurred.
28. M. Opperman thanked the EA for the discussion and noted their unique position to make change in this time.

## **VI. New Business**

- a. No new business.

## **VII. Adjournment**

- a. A. Haenlin-Mott motioned to adjourn. B. Fortenberry seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 1:31pm.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Office of the Assemblies