



# Cornell University Employee Assembly

**Cornell Employee Assembly**  
Minutes of the October 17, 2018 Meeting  
12:15-1:30 PM  
401 Physical Sciences Building

## I. Call to Order & Roll Call

- a. C. Wiggers called the order to meeting at 12:15pm.
- b. *Members Present:* K. Barth, D. Hiner, K. Fitch, P. Thompson, C. Wiggers, H. Depew, E. Miller, A. Brooks, L. Johnson-Kelly, T. Chams, A. Howell, M. Benda, C. Sanzone, B. Roebal, K. Mahoney, K. Supron, A. Sieverding, A. Haenlin-Mott, A. Hourigan
- c. *Members Absent:* C. Dawson, K. LoParco, T. Grove, P. Andersen, H. Sheldon

## II. Business of the Day

- a. Senior Director of Benefit Services and Administration Gordon Barger gave a presentation on health plans and benefits.
  - i. Active Endowed Health Insurance
    1. Cornell has three endowed health insurance plans: Cornell Program for Healthy Living, Weill Cornell Medical Plan, and the Health Savings Account.
    2. The cost growth trend for the nation is 5-8%. Cornell has lower growth and fewer high cost claims. Optum rebates and discounts have grown. In 2017, there were fewer higher cost claims than 2016 and blending the two years together sees only a 3.9% increase. This increase translated into monthly dollar increases for staff are low.
    3. Cornell has worked to lower AETNA administration feeds that will save \$900k over three years.
    4. Cornell has increased the number of staff for 2019, and costs will go up by 3.9%. Staff contributions will grow in aggregate by \$700k, which is roughly 10% of the total cost. Cornell costs will grow in aggregate by \$2.7 million.
    5. EA member brought up concerns that individuals on the Empire Plan with the Contract College benefits program cannot find contract college doctors to participate in Tompkins County and the Ithaca area.
      - a. G. Barger said they do not have any real push on Empire to change their practices, but they can talk to New York state. Cornell do not have the option to not use their benefits.
  - ii. Active Endowed Dental Insurance
    1. Dental is a voluntary plan and there are three different insured coverages: A+, A, and B plans.
    2. For 2019, there is a decrease in staff contributions by 12%. His office went back to Ameritas this year and pushed back on fees. Ameritas responded and said it would be willing to reduce premiums going forward.
  - iii. Basic Life Insurance & Long Term Disability
    1. Basic life insurance is fully Cornell funded. They have had a fair number of deaths over the past three years, and Cigna sees Cornell as a risky population.
    2. Cornell is renewing Cigna for one year instead of the usual three. For 2019, there will be an increase of 3.7% as a one-year rate renewal. Cornell will continue to monitor claims and expenses for negotiating a 2020 and 2021 rate that is acceptable.
    3. For long term disability, there will be an increase of 8% as a one-year rate renewal for 2019. Cornell will continue to monitor claims and expense for negotiating a 2020 and 2021 rate that is acceptable.

- iv. Active Contract College Benefits
  - 1. The Contact College Benefits runs on a different schedule for renewals and works through New York State.
  - 2. There is an Option Transfer Period (OTP) that will likely occur in late November or early December. Limited health changes are allowed during OTP and are not as open as open enrollment.
  - 3. 2019 Health rates and Plan Design changes will be determined by New York State.
  - 4. Other benefits, such as Life, LTD, and voluntary benefits are offered by Cornell.
- v. The HR Services and Transitions Center is located at East Hill Office Building, Suite 110 and can be reached at (607) 225-3936 and at [hrrservices@cornell.edu](mailto:hrrservices@cornell.edu).
- vi. H. Depew said the EA received a question online from an anonymous source. The individual asked why staff can no longer go to Cornell Health. Cornell Health was a great benefit for those working on campus, and this type of change factors into the use of sick time.
  - 1. G. Barger said he does not represent Cornell Health. However, he does know that Cornell Health is only certified as a student health plan provider. Cornell historically has added some services, including prescriptions and Return To Work Certification for faculty and staff. They been working in the past year to look at what Cornell Health can and cannot safely offer. Cornell Health still has minimal Return To Work Certification, it is not a walk-in clinic. Student health, compared to faculty and staff health, has very different regulations, funding mechanisms, and requirements.
  - 2. G. Giambattista added that Cornell Health is regulated under the New York State Department of Education and not the Department of Health. It can receive any member of the community with an urgent need, but it is for students.
- vii. EA member asked about opportunities to have negotiations or conversations with New York State regarding the Contact College benefits. There seems to be disparities in access and benefits between the endowed and contract sides.
  - 1. G. Barger said Cornell is a small part of the New York State health system. It is one of only two not on the New York state payroll system. Sometimes, the Contract College gets forgotten and he does attempt to get communication from the state, but it hard and bureaucratic.
- viii. G. Barger said in regards to communication, there will be an enrollment guide and a cover letter to talk about the changes. For the most part, Cornell tends to not talk about percentage increases but rather dollar increases. He stressed the importance of prevention when it comes to health issues and connecting with Ithaca College and other local service providers to talk about opioids, mental health, and other issues. They do have to improve on their communication.
- ix. C. Wiggers asked the EA to direct any other questions to T. Chams.

### III. Approval of Minutes of the October 3, 2018 EA Meeting

- a. L. Johnson-Kelly made a motion to amend the Committee Reports section. She was reporting on the Retire Plan Oversight Committee and not the Elections Committee – amended
- b. Motion to approve the minutes of the EA meeting of October 3, 2018 – approved as amended with no dissent

### IV. Business of the Day (continued)

- a. Staff Conversations
  - i. C. Wiggers thanked everyone for their participation at the President's Address to Staff. Going forward, there will be feedback points the EA can learn from. A bullet list of thoughts and feedback points will be compiled and distributed.
  - ii. C. Wiggers gave a presentation on the Staff Conversations.

1. VP Mary Opperman, Senior Director in HR Strategy Reginald White and C. Wiggers had their first Staff Conversation at the Vet School. It was attended by about 40 people, including lab technicians, administrators, communicators, and HR personnel. He feels positively about this and there was good feedback from the staff community.
2. The long term goal after visiting the 10 different sites is to collate that information, identify prevalent themes, and pinpoint action areas to start making changes.

## V. **New Business**

- a. No new business.

## VI. **Committee Reports**

- a. Communications and Awards Committee
  - i. C. Sanzone thanked everyone for contributing to the President's Address to Staff. There were technical difficulties with the live broadcast, but there is a complete recording now posted on Cornell Cast with captions and a transcript.
  - ii. C. Sanzone asked EA members to see if they can attend any future Staff Conversations dates. They would like at least one person from the Communications Committee to attend each event, and any number of EA members can attend any events.
  - iii. The committee is also working on a survey to staff about communications preferences and priorities.
- b. Education Committee
  - i. A. Hourigan said the committee met on October 9 and talked about committee priorities last year, as well as concerns and initiatives. She is doing background research on the Employee Degree Program and the committee will meet again to pinpoint initiatives for this year.
- c. Welfare Committee
  - i. A. Haenlin-Mott said she had a tough time hearing back from previous members on the committee on whether or not they wanted to continue. There have been a number of people who cannot continue and she has been in contact with people who have reached out with an interest in the committee.
  - ii. A. Haenlin-Mott has also been working on figuring out the best place to hold meetings. They considered having the first meeting over Zoom, but she feels it would be better to meet face to face.
  - iii. C. Wiggers said he and SA Chair Varun Devatha discussed mental health issues. He asked the Welfare Committee to take a look at that area and how staff might be able to support the student community on mental health issues.
  - iv. G. Giambattista brought up that the current week is Mental Health Awareness Week for students.
- d. Transportation Committee
  - i. K. Mahoney said she has been in contact with Director of Transportation Services Bridgette Brady.
  - ii. The transportation survey has gone out. K. Mahoney requested EA members to fill out the survey and push their constituents to do so as well.
  - iii. The committee will be meeting twice before Thanksgiving. B. Brady will be presenting the survey results at the second meeting in mid-November.
- e. Benefits and Policy Committee
  - i. T. Chams said the committee is meeting tomorrow at 2pm. He announced they have about 14 members.
- f. Executive Committee
  - i. C. Wiggers said at the committee's next meeting with VP Opperman, they will talk about the feedback from the President's Address and refinements regarding the Staff Conversations.
- g. Elections Committee

- i. Nothing to report.

## VII. Open Floor

- a. C. Wiggers acknowledged extra time and opened up the floor for questions or concerns.
- b. A. Sieverding asked how the notes from the Staff Conversations could be accessed.
  - i. C. Wiggers said the notes will not be made publicly available until they have had all ten sessions. They will then funnel the compilation of notes through HR. There is nothing classified in them and EA members can access them in Box.
  - ii. C. Wiggers added that points brought up at the Vet School conversation included concerns about the lack of connectedness with Cornell and the lack of flexibility around the 24/7 animal support requirements. They also talked about identifying areas within workplaces where they can create senses of community.
  - iii. P. Thompson said they did have some non-Vet School individuals attend the event. The conversation was not only Vet School oriented, and some of these individuals echoed same concerns of possible isolation from the central campus. They had conversations around engagement and how the EA and Cornell can reach out and connect.
  - iv. H. Depew said it was a great opportunity for those who do not get many chances to have contact with VP Opperman to meet and talk to her. VP Opperman seemed very receptive to some of the ideas and will bring these concerns back to her office.
- c. K. Barth gave an update on the UA meeting of October 16, 2018.
  - i. K. Barth said the revising of the Campus Code of Conduct was a dominant topic. President Pollack was in attendance at the meeting. There is a report finalized currently going through the CJC to improve the code by making it more readable and educational. They are addressing concerns of vague language, lack of examples in some areas, and overlapping policies.
  - ii. K. Barth said the north campus expansion is another big topic. There are climate and sustainability scientists as well as retirees who are having discussions about how to make sure Cornell meets its carbon neutral goal. Some ideas they have brought up include introducing technology in the short term until earth-based source heating can be brought online, which is currently about 15 years out. There is a disagreement on whether Cornell should buy energy from the grid to have the lowest carbon emissions, or install heat pumps. Provost Michael Kotlikoff agreed to have an outside expert weight in.
  - iii. The UA is still working on filling out their committees and seats.
  - iv. C. Wiggers encouraged the EA to look at the final report of the Working Group on Hate Speech and Harassment that was just put online. It is going to the CJC next.

## VIII. Adjournment

- a. C. Wiggers adjourned the meeting at 1:30pm.

Respectfully Submitted,  
*Catherine Tran*  
Clerk of the Assembly