



Cornell University Employee Assembly

Cornell Employee Assembly
Minutes of the January 6, 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

- a. *Members Present:* S. Barry, J. Cannella, M. Cherry, J. Creque, H. Depew, J. Duong, B. Fisher, B. Fortenberry, B. Goodell, A. Haenlin-Mott, D. Howell, R. Lochner, M. LoParco, K. Mahoney, V. McAuley, A. Miller, E. Miller, M. Newhart, N. Siadat, K. Supron, K. Tannenbaum, L. Taylor, J. Townley, J. Withers, L. Zacharias
- b. *Members Absent:* E. Ivory, J. Michael, M. Podolec, K. Wilcox

III. Approval of the Minutes

- a. December 16, 2020 – **approved** unanimously.

IV. Business of the Day

- a. Discussion of EA R5
 - i. H. Depew noted that from the online vote, M. Podolec had motioned to suspend the vote and bring the assembly back to discussion and had stated that her vote would be in opposition to the resolution because she believed it was too soon to celebrate reinstatement of benefits. M. Podolec added that she appreciated the administrations hard work to keep the University on a positive course but would not support the resolution until the section about staff benefits was removed.
 - ii. E. Miller conveyed her opposition to the resolution noting that a resolution had been passed during the summer thanking the administration for providing information and a fast response during the campus closure and reopening proceedings. E. Miller added that she did not feel that another resolution thanking the administration was necessary.
 - iii. M. Cherry voiced agreement for the statements made by M. Podolec. M. Cherry added that being given an extra day off work was worthy of a thank you but in line with E. Miller and M. Podolec, compensation was an exchange for work done so thanking the administration for giving back that exchange would be strange along with the overall timing of the resolution. However, M. Cherry conveyed appreciation for the administrations openness and commitment to their schedule in determining whether or not the return of the staff benefits was possible.
 - iv. B. Goodell advocated for the resolution noting several reasons for his support. The first reason he stated was the administrations restoration of staff benefits and added that there was no guarantee the administration had to do so but did it in good faith. The second reason stated by B. Goodell was the administration providing an extra day off to staff and added that he thought it was commendable. Another reason B. Goodell supported the resolution was because the administration kept the healthcare premium at the same levels as the previous year. He noted that showing the administration appreciation for what they were doing and had done to help staff was worthwhile.

- v. N. Siadat echoed the sentiments expressed by M. Cherry and E. Miller noting that it did not have to be a zero sum decision.
- vi. K. Tannenbaum stated that she could go either way in supporting or opposing the resolution and asked if the resolution could be modified citing that it was nice to receive a thank you for doing a good job. K. Tannenbaum added that much of what was expected as just and fair treatment for employees was not ubiquitous across the country. K. Tannenbaum stated that one of the big fears when the administration was looking at cutting retirement benefits in June was the fear that the benefits would not return to their previous levels and the administrations follow-through to return benefits to those levels deserved at least some recognition.
- vii. H. Depew stated that the assembly could either vote on the resolution or table the resolution to work on within the committee and bring it back afterwards.
- viii. K. Tannenbaum moved to vote on the resolution with a passing vote indicating adoption of the resolution and a rejecting vote sending the resolution back to the Benefits and Policy Committee (BPC) to be edited. The motion was seconded by B. Goodell with no dissent.
- ix. H. Depew asked voting members to vote yes if they were in favor of passing the resolution and no if they were in favor of moving the resolution back to the BPC.
- x. E. Miller asked for the question to be repeated.
- xi. H. Depew stated that the vote was for Resolution 5 with a majority yes vote passing the resolution and a majority no vote moving the resolution back to the BPC for revision.
- xii. H. Depew asked G. Giambattista about the number of EA voting members. There was brief discussion on the number of EA voting members with the final count at 28 voting members.
- xiii. The resolution **failed** 6-15-7 (yea-no-abstained) pushing it back to the BPC for revision.
- b. Staff Forum Update
 - i. H. Depew noted that when the assembly last met, there was discussion about the future of the staff forum regarding topics like the inclusion of senior leadership, when the assembly members would meet to ask their questions, and what content would be particularly helpful. H. Depew stated that there was also discussion and support for a staff education forum that would include members of the employee degree program, CU Learn, and the School of Continuing Education. Members from these different staff education opportunities would be brought together to discuss resources available to staff, how staff could access these resources, and would allow staff to be involved in those discussions and ask questions. She noted that she would work in conjunction with J. Withers (Chair of the Education Committee) and they would meet tomorrow to discuss what the future of the education staff forum would look like. H. Depew added that in light of current events such as the vaccines, staff wellness, campus climate, and students returning to school in February, what members like to see in the future of the staff forums. She noted that she wanted assembly members to feel involved and engaged in the process. The hope would be to have an education forum, but the rest of the year had nothing significant planned and on the agenda.
 - ii. J. Withers asked if there had been discussion about a mid-level administration forum with staff from areas such as the University library to discuss topics like mental health rather than a forum with senior administration.
 - 1. H. Depew stated that those discussions had stemmed from the Cornell Wellness panel that was held and an idea had circulated amongst members about connecting

with members of senior administration, recording a video, and then publicizing it. This would provide EA members the opportunity to be in touch with some members of senior leadership to have informative dialogues. H. Depew stated that one of the conversations was recorded; K. Mahoney was able to contact the Dean of Human Ecology and to have conversation around wellness. She added that the next step would be to decide how those recordings would look moving forward, whether they would be incorporated into the staff forums as a video clip or would be a separate series altogether.

- iii. M. Newhart said she wanted to add CLASP (Community Learning and Service Partnership) to the list for the educational forum since they had presented to the Education Committee before and the committee had been working with them.
 - 1. H. Depew said that she would discuss the guest list and the format of the forum with J. Withers tomorrow.
- iv. E. Miller noted that in general, she supported the staff forums the assembly had been doing. She added that she believed greater involvement from the EA body rather than just the Executive Committee would be appreciated and would like to see the Cornell community get to know each of the EA reps better.
 - 1. H. Depew voiced support for E. Miller's comment and added that she would like for EA members to feel engaged in the work that was being done whether that work was in the committee or through the staff forums. She also told members to feel free to contact her or speak up about their thoughts on potential staff forums, suggestions, and feedback.
- v. B. Goodell stated that employees receive emails from D. Billups about ongoing activities at Cornell and it would be interesting to have someone come to a meeting to speak about and provide resources available to staff while they were home. He added that he had just recently receive one of those emails and found the resources mentioned to be invaluable. In addition, he stated that it would be more effective to provide those resources in a forum fashion because he knew staff that did not check their emails often but would attend the forums and so having resources available in that manner would be beneficial.
- vi. K. Supron stated that many people do not receive the emails from D. Billups or the Wellbeing Newsletter because there were many places where the emails might not be sent forward.
- vii. D. Howell noted that the Wellbeing Newsletter only goes to HR and it was up to HR to send it to their units.
- viii. There was further discussion about the emails from D. Billups and the Wellbeing Newsletter with D. Howell stating that the email from D. Billups was sent to a public list, but the Wellbeing Newsletter was not opt-in and only went to HR staff. A. Haenlin-Mott stated that she was able to opt-in to the newsletter and D. Howell stated that she would check if she could do the same.
- ix. H. Depew stated that so far, the Educational Opportunities was the only agenda item for the staff forums, and she hoped it would occur sometime in January. She informed members to email her with ideas or suggestions for future staff forums. She also put out some ideas for future staff forums including discussing the budget or the process for students returning in February.

V. Committee Reports

- a. Executive Committee – M. LoParco

- i. M. LoParco stated that the committee had met on December 18th and discussed EA R5, some student resolutions, and the condemnation of hate speech and racism noting that a resolution was in progress.
- b. Communications and Awards Committee – E. Miller
 - i. E. Miller stated that the committee meeting prior to break had been cancelled along with the meeting yesterday. She noted that the committee was planning on putting out an EA Voice Newsletter tentatively for January 19 but that could change once a date was booked for the Education forum or any other important events.
- c. Education Committee – J. Withers
 - i. J. Withers stated the committee had not met and that there was a meeting scheduled for later in January.
- d. Welfare Committee – K. Mahoney
 - i. K. Mahoney said that the committee had spent the first part of the meeting in discussion with the chair of Veteran CMG, learned about their model for engagement, activities, initiatives, and possible future collaborations. K. Mahoney stated that the conversation lead into discussions of wellness, specifically mental wellness programming for the spring, with M. Artibee and R. Merle-Doyle and possible partnerships with both of their groups. She added that the committee also discussed the lack of employee work-from-home guidance promised by the University before November break and noted that as of Monday, there was no timeline on providing that guidance. The last portion of the committee meeting involved a brief update from Transportation around the suspension of some parking restrictions and additional support to some permit holders in the A-lot during the break and through the beginning of classes. She also noted that the committee would be holding a joint meeting with the BPC in February to discuss the results of the Belonging at Cornell survey.
- e. Benefits and Policy Committee – B. Goodell
 - i. B. Goodell stated that there were no significant updates except for the planning of the joint meeting with the Welfare Committee and revision of the EA R5.
- f. Elections Committee – N. Siadat
 - i. No Updates Reported

VI. New Business

- a. Open Discussion
 - i. EA Retreat Discussion
 - 1. M. LoParco noted that VP Opperman would not be available until February and asked the members of the EA if they would rather move forward with having the retreat and then having VP Opperman attend an EA meeting when she was available or wait until February to hold the EA Retreat.
 - 2. B. Goodell stated that his response would depend on what was planned for the retreat and how great the need was for VP Opperman to be in attendance.
 - 3. M. LoParco stated that from her understanding, the retreat would be roughly 3-4 hours long either in the morning or the afternoon.
 - 4. H. Depew added that she hoped to use the retreat for reviewing the Priorities Poll with each of the committees having a report of key themes and feedback on issues from the poll related to the work within that specific committee. She added that her hope would be for good discussion on the steps forward and what the EA should be doing based on the feedback from the poll. H. Depew asked if members would rather meet in January or wait until February for VP Opperman and added that in the past,

VP Opperman would usually show up for the first hour and provide feedback from her perspective as well as support for the EA. In addition, H. Depew stated that the EA could also meet without VP Opperman and find the date that worked best through a Doodle Poll given the changes in schedules in February as students returned and availability would be more limited compared to January.

5. E. Miller stated that members would need time to request off from their supervisors if the retreat would be a half day event so the date would need to be set in advance to give members a couple of weeks' notice. She also expressed that she would be satisfied with filling out the poll and holding the retreat whenever.
6. J. Withers expressed agreement with E. Miller and added that the EA was already well into the year so waiting until February for VP Opperman would delay the assembly and make the year shorter.
7. H. Depew asked members if they would like to bring the decision to a vote and send out a Doodle Poll for January and February dates or just January dates.
8. A member of the assembly motioned that a doodle poll with dates in January and February be sent out for a potential retreat. The motion was seconded.
9. The motion was **approved** 17-0-11.
10. H. Depew stated that the assembly would move forward with the poll to find the best date for the retreat with the goal of the retreat being review of the Priorities Poll data to help guide the work of the committees.
11. M. LoParco noted that she had received a message in the chat stating that a scheduled EA meeting could be expanded either before or after for the retreat. She added that she had never experience any supervisor taking two weeks to approve time off.
12. K. Tannenbaum asked if VP Opperman had ever attended an EA meeting to address members and K. Tannenbaum expressed that she would like to see VP Opperman address the assembly at a future meeting if possible.
13. H. Depew said that usually VP Opperman and President Pollack would come together once a semester to the EA. She added that both President Pollack and VP Opperman had attended an EA meeting in early Fall to give an update and had asked for committee reports. Therefore, it would be possible to have VP Opperman attend an EA meeting to discuss some things HR had been working on. H. Depew noted that she would prefer for the meeting VP Opperman would attend to have a robust agenda with topics of discussion for an effective conversation. G. Giambattista noted that VP Opperman used to attend the EA meetings by herself once a semester.
14. A. Haenlin-Mott stated that the only difference was that VP Opperman would also always come to the retreats and the difference between her attendance at the formal meeting compared to the retreats was that at the retreats, it was just assembly members which usually led to a different dynamic not experienced in the formal meetings. A. Haenlin-Mott stated that she did not believe it was wrong one way or the other but rather would just be a different dynamic in being a reporting vs. strategy meeting.
15. M. LoParco stated that the regular meeting on January 20th or February 3rd could be extended and then the assembly could go into an Executive session which would provide the retreat dynamic mentioned by A. Haenlin-Mott. M. LoParco added that in the context of the unusual nature of the year, the assembly should look for ways to be more flexible and having as much participation as possible.

16. H. Depew clarified for members that the assembly could vote to go into an Executive session which would remove non-EA members from the meeting and provide time for discussion between just EA members.
 17. K. Supron noted that with Executive session, members beyond the EA, including VP Opperman, could be invited to join the session.
 18. G. Giambattista expanded on K. Supron's comment noting that Executive session could be as long as the EA deemed fit. On the Zoom platform, the Executive session would be done through the use of Breakout Rooms for EA members and the conversation would be off the record.
- ii. COVID-19 Resources
1. B. Goodell conveyed his concerns about COVID-19 and noted that he was hearing about the disastrous impacts of the virus in his community and at Cornell and asked members if they knew of any resources such as support groups, for staff that were facing the loss of loved ones and other impacts of the virus.
 2. H. Depew noted that a member had written about FSAP (Faculty and Staff Assistance Program) as a resource.
 3. E. Miller stated that she did not have any resources but noted that this was an excellent to address with HR and Wellness/Wellbeing and follow-up on it.
 4. H. Depew asked if any members were willing to do outreach to HR to find out about existing COVID-19 support groups. K. Mahoney volunteered to do the outreach.
- iii. EA T-Shirts
1. L. Zacharias asked if the assembly would receive the EA T-Shirts before the retreat.
 2. E. Miller stated that she would follow-up with W. Treat from the Office of the Assemblies to see if the shirts could be ordered ASAP.
- iv. Student Assembly Resolution for Police Disarmament
1. H. Depew mentioned the Student Assembly Resolution for Police Disarmament and the events that led to its passing. She noted that the resolution had passed around the same time Chief Honan had attended the EA meeting to discuss the work of the CUPD. She also stated that there had been issues on the SA side with some SA members receiving racist and hateful messages. One of the SA members receiving these threats, U. Chukwukere, had been calling out to senior administration to support him against some of the online threats. H. Depew asked members for their thoughts and any ideas they had on what the EA could do.
 2. B. Fortenberry expressed agreement with H. Depew on the rhetoric surrounding the resolution being a topic of conversation. He expressed his shock with the reaction of members outside the SA, the social media attacks that occurred as a result of the conversation, and the resulting racist and derogatory comments. B. Fortenberry stated that he believed the EA should take up the conversation as well given that students of color specifically at Cornell had noted that they felt less protected by CUPD having weapons at all times and the amount of violence transpiring across the US involving people of color.
 3. K. Mahoney conveyed agreement with B. Fortenberry and added that the country was currently struggling with civil discourse and civilly discussing ideas that might not be in alignment with one's beliefs. She noted that she had not brought up her concerns with Chief Honan regarding how he was treated in the SA and noted that the EA needed to demonstrate civil discourse on campus. Additionally, K. Mahoney stated that she believed the EA could highlight civil discourse around concepts regarding vastly different beliefs while representing an anti-racist position.

4. J. Withers asked if anyone knew whether or not the EA represented the police and how that would effect a conversation the EA could participate in.
5. E. Miller and G. Giambattista stated that B. Goodell was the representative for the non-union University police.
6. M. LoParco stated that this could be an opportunity to host a forum on civil discourse and invite community members to have this conversation while learning about civil discussion. She also mentioned the three mandatory courses in CU Learn that needed to be completed by September, including Diversity and Inclusion, and noted that it was a great opportunity to learn from University leadership while expanding on their understanding of diversity and inclusion and how to communicate. M. LoParco added that the mandatory courses were a good place to start but a forum would provide the EA with a great opportunity to show support for underrepresented students, staff, and faculty.
7. H. Depew expressed agreement with M. LoParco's statements noting that the forum would be a way to support students while showing the right way to navigate these difficult discussion given non-union police were constituents of the EA.
8. B. Fortenberry stated that although both were important topics, he did not think the topic of disarmament needed to be lumped with that of civil discourse and each had its own merits and should be approached individually.
9. A. Haenlin-Mott stated that it seemed like members were talking about supporting the SA and the resolution rather than supporting the aspects of diversity and inclusion in the shared governance partners, which is the discussion the EA should be taking up. She added that if the EA were to take on the additional resolution of disarming the police, it would required a lot more conversation.
10. B. Fortenberry asked if the topic would fall within a specific committee citing that the purpose of the main EA body was not to have a long debate and go through the process. The opportunity for dialogue would occur in the committee conversations.
11. H. Depew agreed with B. Fortenberry stating that the Welfare Committee reviewed issues of diversity and inclusion, but the Executive Committee could also take up the topic.
12. M. LoParco added that the assembly could hold a joint Executive Committee and Welfare Committee meeting to discuss the ways in which the issue could be tackled without getting directly involved in the disarmament topic. She added that the goal of the EA should be to show support for the students and to show that the EA did not condone the malicious attacks. Additionally, M. LoParco noted that when conversation devolves to hyperbole and extremes, it was generally out of fear and ignorance so this would be an opportunity for the EA to work on how to civilly have the difficult discussions.
13. H. Depew stated that she would work with K. Mahoney to plan a joint meeting.
- v. Lack of University guidance around continued employee work-from-home support
 1. K. Mahoney asked members to share concerns being raised in their units around the lack of guidelines regarding continued employee work-from-home support. She noted that the Welfare Committee would continue to have discussions with HR about the issue and the impacts of withholding those directions and the guidance.

VII. Adjournment

- a. H. Depew motioned to adjourn the meeting; the motion was seconded by B. Goodell.

b. Chair Depew adjourned the meeting at 1:28pm.

Respectfully Submitted,
Office of the Assemblies