



Cornell University Employee Assembly

Cornell Employee Assembly
Minutes of the May 16, 2018 Meeting
12:15-1:30 PM
405 Physical Sciences Bldg.

I. **Call to Order**

- a. C. Wiggers called the meeting to order at 12:15pm.
- b. *Members Present:* A. Haenlin-Mott, B. Roebal, C. Sanzone, C. Dawson, C. Wiggers, H. Depew, H. Sheldon, J. Kruser, K. Sheils, K. Mahoney, L. Johnson-Kelly, M. Mosereiff, N. Doolittle, P. Andersen, P. Thompson, S. Willcox
- c. *Members Absent:* A. Howell, A. Hourigan, B. Ayanfodun, B. Nicholson, C. Coates, D. Harris, I. Allen, K. Fitch, M. Carcella, S. Vaccaro, T. Gove

II. **Call for Late Additions to the Agenda**

- a. C. Wiggers made an addition for a run-through presentation he will present to the Board of Trustees next week so the EA can see the slides and stories he presenting. He would also like feedback.

III. **Approval of Minutes**

- a. Motion to approve the minutes from the meeting of May 5, 2018 – **approved** with no dissent

IV. **Business of the Day**

- a. EA R10: Improving Consistency in Retirement Benefit Accrual Policies
 - i. L. Johnson-Kelly said this policy has gone through both the Personnel Policy Committee and the Welfare Committee. They have also had discussions with people from HR and are open to suggestions on wording. The resolution began with an inquiry through B. Roebal and concerned a non-exempt staff member expressing happiness on achieving a two year work anniversary and beginning to receive retirement benefits. Many are not aware that for those on the endowed side of the university beginning as exempt members, the university does not begin contributing to retirement accounts until they work two years. An exception would be for those who had a previous position at Cornell in which they were benefits-eligible and already had an account. They would like to create a more fair and inclusive environment and they feel the current policy has an adverse effect on lower-earning employees.
 1. L. Johnson-Kelly said Senior Director of Benefit Services and Administration Gordon Barger sent an email about the history and there has been no changes made to eligibility guidelines on regular retirement programs since 1976. Early discussions seemed to have centered around the cost. Right now, on the endowed side, 10 percent of employees' salaries are put into their retirement accounts. An incentive to stay could be getting these benefits. When Associate Vice President of Human Resources Allan Bishop came to the Personnel Policy Committee, he said it was a good resolution that would prompt review of the retirement policies. They do not know if the administration will go for this, but they feel this is a fair policy.
 - ii. P. Andersen said when she began at Cornell, not only did she have to wait the two years, but she also could not contribute to her account herself.
 1. L. Johnson-Kelly said that has changed and employees can contribute now. Regarding the last line of 42-43, they do hope there will be more outreach to staff for not only having the university contribute to their retirement accounts, but also to understand that their financial security will be vastly improved if they contribute to their own accounts.

- iii. P. Thompson said she sits in the state side so Cornell does not contribute anything to her account. Looking at the resolution as a whole, if the aim to improve the consistency across the board, she questions why it does not address employees on the state side. If none of these have been looked at since the 1970s, a broader picture is to look at everything. Improving consistency is in the title, but they highlight only one argument.
 1. L. Johnson-Kelly said she included the state example to encourage employees to contribute at the one year mark. Cornell has no control over the state plans because it is based on the New York state. Those on the state side will get a pension if they work ten years, but some who have worked at Cornell for longer are at lower tiers and Cornell cannot do anything about that.
 2. L. Johnson-Kelly said in lieu of the pensions one receives on the state side, on the endowed side, 10 percent of salaries are put into accounts. There is no match.
 3. EA member clarified that for the state side, there is also the optional retirement plan which Cornell contributes 8 percent and based on salaries, employees do have to contribute a certain percentage.
 4. EA member said there is precedent for contributing to a state pension. If employees face retirement, and their retirement programs at the state discontinues, Cornell will contribute to TIAA accounts.
- iv. L. Johnson-Kelly said she has sent copies of this resolution to VP Mary Opperman and people in HR. She has received feedback from only two people. She apologizes for the delay as she was out due to family issues. They began sending this out to people in HR in January, who have had ample opportunity to give feedback. The administration is well aware of this resolution and they have not received any negative feedback.
- v. K. Mahoney said the most powerful action they have made as a body is the development of a task force based on a specific issue that engages the offices. This has generated much more positive movement than the resolutions itself. There was a resolution that asked for the comprehensive plan that landed on nothing. The task force instead has gotten employee voices into the consulting studies and has decreased the gap between operations and employee concerns. She wonders if this is an opportunity to take this concern and package it within a Benefits Task Force that they could partner with HR Benefits. They could understand from the university perspective what is appropriate and what is not.
- vi. C. Wiggers said he is surprised about the 1976 as there was an adoption agreement signed in 2008.
 1. L. Johnson-Kelly said according to the information G. Barger sent her, the last time eligibility criteria had changed was 1976. Adjustments to the policy in 2008 did not affect eligibility. However, they have anecdotal accounts of employees saying it used to be three years so she is trying to parse out exactly when the change was.
- vii. L. Johnson-Kelly said she has forwarded the resolution to VP Opperman as they have went through reiterations of it throughout the whole semester.
 1. C. Wiggers said they should have addressed this first as an assembly before taking it outside.
 2. L. Johnson-Kelly said they discussed at EA meetings to canvas the people involved when drafting resolutions and so she contacted people in HR about it.
 3. C. Wiggers clarified he meant not the resolution. If VP Opperman has seen it then it is on her radar and he does not think she is going to weigh in until they bring forth something officially presented at the assembly.
- viii. L. Johnson-Kelly said they may need to change the title. This is not to mean they should not review the state side, but this resolution is strictly addressing endowed employees. They are pushing for equity between staff of both classifications.
- ix. C. Wiggers wondered if skill sets or educational background was a consideration to keep in mind for benefits applied to some employees.

1. L. Johnson-Kelly said G Barger mentioned that at previous institutions he has been at, there have always been disparities in retirement benefits. Cornell has an institutional difference between state side and endowed, and perhaps not everyone feels making things equitable is something to be prioritized. B. Nicholson, B. Roebal, and her share the feeling that this is not fair.
2. C. Wiggers said he is not implying he is not concerned about people within Band A positions or equitability. G. Barger and A. Bishop are two key decision makers and some aspects will have to be considered, such as the price increase that will be significant.
- x. L. Johnson-Kelly suggested working within their existing committee structure. They already have some committees in place, and perhaps they could change the Personnel Policy Committee to the Personnel Policy and Benefits Committee. EA members can get burned out if they are going to too many meetings. They already have a policy committee and there will be some redundancy if they create a task force that runs in parallel.
 1. J. Kruser said suggested having existing groups focus on the issues. They are painting a very specific resolution to how this issue could be more consistent and it is one where one group gets more and nobody gives anything up. He would be more comfortable with a resolution asking for equitability instead and leaving the door open. This might mean some of us giving up some to become equitable. At some point, that money will have to come from somewhere.
- xi. H. Depew said it sounds there are a lot of different ideas with room for a bigger conversation concerning what is feasible and financially capable within a university that also has financial restraints on benefits. There has to be a reason why Cornell created these differences but she is concerned about how possible it is to get to equitability.
- xii. C. Dawson said self-censoring, by saying they are not going to get this, is a bad negotiating tactic if they want the most for the employees, which is an equitable solution. He pushed for a short focus and a strong ask for something.
 1. L. Johnson-Kelly said they have had previous conversations and drafts calling for a task force or a study of equity and benefits. The comments they are receiving is what C. Dawson is saying. If they will not asking for it, they are not going to get it. They want non-exempt to be treated the same as exempt. They may or may not get it, and it is not on the EA to make financial decisions. A. Bishop is the official designee to discuss this and he said this resolution would prompt a review. If they self-censor themselves, it may not lead to one. Even if they start a task force, there may be a delay.
- xiii. L. Johnson-Kelly said she asked several times for statistics on the breakdown of who and how many people would be impacted, but never received anything.
 1. J. Kruser suggested adding this as part of their ask.
- xiv. C. Sanzone said regarding the resolved clause line 34, there may be reasons why certain groups are offered different benefits and they have to respect that. It is a business decision but perhaps there is a way to make it equitable without it being the same. She would like to see this language leave open the possibility for differences but equitable in the end.
- xv. G. Giambattista said because they are talking about dollars that may impact someone's actual compensation package, she urged the EA to reach out to their constituent groups. Employees are hired with different backgrounds regarding education and experiences that sit on a spectrum. The compensations are commensurate with that.
- xvi. A. Sieverding asked what response, or percentage of approval, EA resolutions typically receive, whether they are being listened to, and how they know that.
 1. P. Thompson said the resolution before it is passed should not be sent for input as it was.
 2. C. Wiggers said he has submitted so far one resolution and they submit that through the OA to an action list that is then communicated to the office of the president. Once it reaches the president's office, the response will either be a rejection or acceptance. VP Opperman told the Executive Committee that resolutions should be the last step after

identifying stakeholders and communicating to constituents. He does not know if they are at the point where the resolution should come forth yet.

3. G. Giambattista said the purpose of the assembly is to be a communication conduit between the constituent group and the administration. The administration looks forward to receiving this information. The president will respond within 30 days. The authority of the assembly is just to make recommendations. It is important to remember that these are recommendations and the president receives them all.
 4. J. Kruser said looking at an approval rate of submitted resolutions would not give any answers. One of his resolutions that had the greatest impact was completely rejected when it was received. However, a working group was created, more research was done, and an idea was developed upon multiple departments. It made institutional changes. Rejected resolutions can have positive impacts.
 5. P. Thompson pushed for having a clear ask with possible solutions. They want to be included in the discussion and even if they reject the resolution, there are pieces they will perhaps pull out and give the EA a tool to move it forward. By not giving the administration clear, possible working conditions, it can leave the EA out of the conversation.
- xvii. J. Kruser suggested a resolution asking for the information that has been refused so that when this resolution does come forth, it can contain all of that information.
- b. C. Wiggers said he is not going to bring the resolution to the floor to vote. Under the rules, they are not allowed to vote the same day a resolution is brought forth.
 - c. EA R10: Improving Consistency in Retirement Benefit Accrual Policies is **tabled**.
 - i. As an action item, he would like to ask the committee to think of a way to articulate these thoughts and speak with constituents
 - ii. G. Giambattista said the assembly closes at the end of May. There can be a formal vote to request this information, and it is an action the EA can take.
 - iii. C. Wiggers put to the floor a request for a formal request for information to assist the employee welfare committee and personnel policy committee about EA R10 – **passed** with a unanimous vote.

V. New Business

- a. C. Wiggers' Presentation for Board of Trustees
 - i. C. Wiggers introduced himself as the Chair of EA. He is speaking as not only an employee, but the spouse of an employee and the parent of a current Cornell sophomore in the school of Hotel Administration.
 - ii. C. Wiggers introduced a gentleman who was an interpreter with the U.S. forces in Iraq. In 2006, he was combat wounded during an IED attack and C. Wiggers had the opportunity to work with him for a year. He told C. Wiggers his dream was to come to America and become a citizen. They started that process and six years later in 2013, he was able to immigrate to the U.S. and got employment at Cornell within building care. He is coming up on his fifth anniversary with Cornell and will become a citizen this October. His family has immigrated as well and he is an example of one of the many employees the EA represents.
 - iii. C. Wiggers introduced Sandy Kelly who recently retired from Cornell and still lives in Lansing. She started at Cornell in 1982 after a four year enlistment in the army and started working with the Naval ROTC. She was personally involved in the commissioning of 736 of naval and marine corps officers, which has a global impact for Cornell. She is an example of the retirees that the EA represents.
 - iv. C. Wiggers introduced Aaron DeBolt who came to Cornell in 1998 as a member of the Air Conditioning & Refrigeration within Zone Services. He is now his own facility manager within facility services. In February 2016, he made a decision to have a gastric sleeve surgery. At that time he weighed 340 pounds and was pre-diabetic with terrible sleep apnea.

- Since that date one year later, he has lost 140 pounds and has run twelve 5ks and two 10ks and is preparing for his first half-marathon this October. Six employees have also had this surgery since.
- v. C. Wiggers introduced Brenda Irvin who joined Cornell in 1982 as a Band A front line administrator. She grew up in Ithaca and represents someone who, through diligence and hard work, advanced up the ladder. She is still an employee and has worked in five different colleges and units, going from Band A to a Band G senior level management position.
 - vi. C. Wiggers highlighted that this is just a snapshot of four employees he has come in contact with in his only six years at Cornell. There are number of employees who also have special stories that the EA represents. They are fortunate to have an outstanding relationship with the OA who provides a lot of their administrative support so they can work our recommendations to the administration.
 - vii. C. Wiggers acknowledged the Employee Degree Program. They have had 103 employees receive degrees ranging from an Associate's degree to a PhD. That is made possible from the generous contributions from the university and the BOT. This past week they had 20 new employees graduate.
 - viii. C. Wiggers allotted the last couple minutes of the presentation for questions.
 - ix. C. Wiggers mentioned they also submitted their annual report with a lot more data. He wanted to highlight four people and draw attention. He asked for feedback, recommendations, and changes.
 - 1. EA member suggested including employees who graduated with the help of Cornell, such as those who graduated from other institutions including TC3 and Villanova.
 - 2. N. Doolittle said for the two photographs C. Wiggers has for the EDP, the top one is actually the Bartels Award and the bottom one is from Employee Excellence. She suggested C. Wiggers to either work that in there, or have groups photos for the EDP, which they take every year and are on file.
 - 3. C. Wiggers said he will talk about those two photos and thanked everyone for suggestions.

VI. Adjournment

- a. C. Wiggers and G. Giambattista thanked everyone for their involvement. C. Wiggers adjourned the meeting at 1:30pm.

Respectfully Submitted,
Catherine Tran
Clerk of the Assembly