



Cornell University Employee Assembly

Cornell Employee Assembly
Minutes of the September 18, 2019 Meeting
12:15-1:30 PM
Physical Science Building 401

I. Call to Order & Roll Call

- a. H. Depew called the meeting to order at 12:15pm.
- b. *Members Present:* M. Newhart, E. Ivory, B. Goodell, C. Wiggers, H. Sheldon, D. Hiner, A. Haenlin-Mott, A. Sieverding, E. Miller, A. McCabe, A. Brooks, B. Fortenberry, A. Miller, C. Sanzone, R. Lochner, H. Depew, K. Barth, K. Supron, K. Mahoney, J. Withers, L. Taylor, J. Creque, M. Benda, K. LoParco
- c. *Members Absent:* A. Howell, J. Michael, J. Cooley, T. Chams

II. Approval of Minutes

- a. Motion to approve the minutes of the EA meetings of September 4, 2019 – **approved** with no dissent

III. Business of the Day

- a. President's Address to Staff
 - i. H. Depew reported that the date, time, and location for the President's Address to Staff event has been distributed. She, along with A. McCabe, G. Giambattista, and S. Devalut-Feldman, went on a tour of the facility to get a sense of accessibility, where they could put signage, and how to get into the auditorium. They found that signage is very small, and a lot of students will be coming in and out as the event will be held during regular class hours. There may be an issue of helping staff get to the location, and she asked for EA members to volunteer. E. Miller will be distributing signups to usher people in and get people situated. H. Depew reiterated the importance of the event as one of the few opportunities the EA has to get the entire staff body to participate. She asked EA members to wear their red shirts for easy identification. She sent an agenda for the event to the President, and her staff has no issues with the items on the agenda. She is hoping to get out diagrams and pictures on how to access the auditoriums soon.
- b. EA Priorities Poll
 - i. H. Depew reminded that an email went out with the Priorities Poll. As of today, there are 470 responses to the poll. More information will be provided on results once it closes. She asked all EA members to participate in the poll and to share it with their constituents. The poll is a way for the EA to get a broad sense of what the challenges and feedback are from staff.
 1. E. Miller asked if there is going to be an email follow-up reminder.
 2. C. Sanzone replied she did not plan on it. There is an email usually sent out a couple weeks in advance of the President's Address to Staff. While they normally do not include other content, she will think about that.
 - ii. C. Sanzone stated she is working on a one-page flier to advertise the poll. She asked for the flier to go up around campus and target time clock areas. There will be a QR code and a short Bitly URL so employees can take the poll on their phones. The survey will be open throughout the whole month. The October newsletter will feature photos and coverage of the President's Address to Staff, as well as basic survey results and a summary.

IV. Committee Reports

- a. Communications, Outreach, and Recognition Committee

- i. C. Sanzone announced that their first newsletter of the year went out to 14,218 people, which is more than she expected. Distribution lists includes temporary and other subgroups and potentially NYC and Geneva. The email was opened by 4,358 people, amounting to a 31% open rate. In addition, there were almost 800 click-throughs, so she feels good about the engagement. C. Sanzone stated she hopes for about 500 responses. The intent is to push out a newsletter every month, and she will be sending out a call for content closer to the release date of the next one.
 - ii. C. Sanzone reported the committee is focusing on the President's Address to Staff event. It will be livestreamed on CornellCast and live captioned for accessibility. Employees can also submit questions in advance for the Q&A on CornellCast. Due to timing, lunch will not be provided but M. Benda is working on providing light refreshments afterwards. There will be a call for volunteers to work on signage, and she would like to have as many greeters as possible. The committee is working on a slideshow for the event and just received approval for digital signage advertisements. There will also be an email invitation to all staff. She also looks forward to having a prewrite in the Chronicle, and Chair Howell is working with VP Mary Opperman to send out an email asking supervisors to be flexible in allowing their staff to attend. At the Geneva campus, there will be a small satellite event for staff to gather and watch the live stream.
 - iii. C. Sanzone also announced that today was the last day to vote in the EA Appreciation Awards. The committee has received 22 votes so far. There will also be a change in format and all nominees will be recognized at the President's Address to staff. They will be announcing the winner at the event. She has written a letter to notify the nominees and invite them to attend. C. Sanzone will be reaching out to EA members who nominated a group to identify points of contact and ask them to cosign.
 1. L. Taylor asked if C. Sanzone reached out to the Cornell Tech campus.
 2. C. Sanzone replied she has not. Cornell Tech staff are not among EA constituents, but they could still advertise the event to them. There has been attempts to add a representative for the Cornell Tech campus, but currently, the EA only represents employees on the Ithaca and Geneva campuses. However, she can forward the information over and reach out to the Cornell Tech Communications Director.
- b. Education Committee
 - i. M. Benda reported the committee met last week. Members discussed Cornell history, class program, and challenges. C. Wiggers brought up the Military History Walking Tour that is scheduled for Sunday, September 29 and will begin at Barton Hall.
- c. Welfare Committee
 - i. K. Mahoney stated that the committee had its first meeting on Monday and discussed work-life balance, transportation opportunities, and sustainability. The second meeting is scheduled for October, and Director of Transportation Services Bridgette Brady will be in attendance to give an update on transportation initiatives.
- d. Benefits and Policy Committee
 - i. A. Sieverding shared that the committee met once. They went through a recap of last year's action items. Regarding a policy survey T. Chams had done last year, the committee decided to table moving forward with the discussion.
 1. K. Supron asked why the discussion was tabled.
 2. A. Sieverding gave some background on the issue. Last year, T. Chams was the Chair of this committee and conducted a survey regarding additional vacation. Employees currently accumulate the maximum vacation allowance after 14 years. He communicated with HR three options: giving all of that vacation allowance immediate upon employment, after five years, or after ten years. He gathered data from comparable Ivy League and local institutions and created a survey that was completed by all EA members last year. The vote choice that became apparent was that the EA was interested in an

accelerated ten year rate of accrual. However, when the EA submitted the results, the HR office sent back a note stating it was not interested in addressing the issue and that it was not within its timeline to do so. A. Sieverding stated she was confused because she was under the impression there was some buy-in from HR.

3. K. Barth added that by the end of last year, HR was postulating. He pushed for figuring out what went wrong. The idea was to give new employees a work life balance. When employees were asked about the issue, it was not something people felt was causing them any trouble.
 4. A. Sieverding added that this is part of the rationale to add an affinity seat for employees who have been at Cornell longer. There is a sense of disgruntlement in allowing people who are newer to get their vacations. There is not enough recognition and perhaps they can do better in this area.
 5. H. Sheldon suggested going over the research again. There was a lot of work that went into it.
 6. K. Supron stated it does not seem like the recommendation was taking away from employees who had been at Cornell longer. Rather, it was about making Cornell a more competitive employer. She stated wanting to know why HR changed its mind.
 7. EA member added there were minimal responses from Cornell employees on the survey.
 8. H. Depew suggested collecting more information from the polls.
 9. L. Taylor added that some EA members participated in a focus group about retention. While HR is working on making Cornell a more attractive workplace, they have not identified this in its research.
 - a. M. Newhart added she was also in the focus group. It does not seem like benefits is on the table.
 10. A. Sieverding asked EA members to come to the next committee meeting or set up a meeting with her.
- ii. A. Sieverding stated the committee also discussed salary redlining and submitting a request for more information. They were notified the entire CIT unit redlined its employees this last period. A. Sieverding explained that units have the option on whether or not to implement giving a bonus instead of an salary increase to employees who have been in a particular pay band long enough to reach their salary band levels. This option affects salary increase and retirement. The committee is looking to determine how, why, and where this happens. A. Sieverding stated she has been trying to obtain the information since March unsuccessfully and is looking at pursuing other avenues. This year, the committee will look into clarity on how salary bands are arrived at and how market values are established. She plans to talk to Director of Compensation Kim Babuka for more background.
 - iii. A. Sieverding added the committee also revisited issues about the endowed formula for prescription drugs and drugs being available in a satisfactory time frame.
 - iv. A. Sieverding stated that she introduced last year a goal to add an affinity position on the EA for staff who have been here longer than 10-15 years. While there is a position for staff five years or less, their issues and concerns are different. She has sent an email to G. Giambattista about what the steps would be.
- e. Executive Committee
 - i. H. Depew provided updates to Chair Howell's email. The University Assembly Codes and Judicial Committee (CJC) is soliciting volunteers, and they do not need to be EA members. The CJC does a lot of work in interpreting and recommending revisions to the Campus Code of Conduct.
 - ii. H. Depew added that the committee is also seeking volunteers for the Lunchtime Sustainability Talk. A sustainability resolution was passed last year. The EA partnered with Executive Director of the Cornell Institute for Climate Smart Solutions Michael Hoffmann to promote literature around sustainability. She asked interested EA volunteers to email her.

- iii. H. Depew announced they are trying to ensure that individuals have the necessary tools to coordinate with individuals across campus for productive meetings. The feedback last year was to have more open conversations, which is something they are trying this year.
 - f. Elections Committee
 - i. J. Withers announced the committee met for the first time last week. They are looking to recruit for the remaining open seats. There will be a two-week solicitation period, and they are looking to begin that with the President's Address to Staff. The committee also decided to work by email for this semester and hold regular meetings in the spring semester for the May elections. As of now, there will be no meetings and interested EA members can join in the spring.

V. New Business

- a. Open Discussion
 - i. [Dr. Eells former Director of Cornell CAPS](#)
 - 1. H. Depew stated that one feedback last year was there was not enough time to have conversations on issues around the Cornell community. She has opened this segment to focus on this. Dr. Gregory Eells, who was working at the University of Pennsylvania and was formerly the Director of Cornell CAPS, has passed. He was at Cornell for 15 years, working with students around mental health and mitigating student suicide. As they discuss issues that impact the Cornell community, H. Depew noted that mental health and the stigma surrounding it is important. Surveys have shown that mental health is an issue that concern the staff. It is worth discussing steps forward and things they want to explore. From what she read in the news, Dr. Eells was a great member of the Cornell community and provided a lot to both the student and staff populations.
 - 2. L. Taylor said she knew him pretty well and worked with him on and off for most of the time he was at Cornell. His family is still in the area. Cornell Health staff are having a number of meetings dealing with the situation. CAPS is great about getting out in the community, including hosting satellite stations around campus with counselors. While they do not work with staff, they refer and connect staff members to the Staff Assistants program.
 - 3. A. McCabe stated while there is an awareness for student health, there are opportunities to create more awareness about staff. He suggested having a forum, but staff members in distress may not attend. About 900 people a week in the U.S. commit suicide, and it is a huge issue. He asked the EA what they can do to be proactive on the issue.
 - 4. K. Mahoney added that last term, the EA met with Assistant Director of the Faculty and Staff Assistance Program Gabriel Tornusciolo. She suggested revisiting the conversation as this is not the first staff-related mental health generated crisis she is aware of on campus this past term.
 - a. L. Taylor added that G. Tornusciolo's staff will come out to conduct talks to different groups. They do not have many therapists, but they do connect those who come in.
 - 5. A. Haenlin-Mott also highlighted the lack of parity for staff mental health. She pushed for continuing to examine services, which is what J. Kruser was working on. However, he was hesitant about trying to promote too much as they do not have a lot of staff to meet needs.
 - 6. A. Sieverding shared she personally found their services inadequate and did not feel her needs were being addressed.
 - 7. L. Taylor shared she found them very helpful and suggested it may depend on the nature of the crisis.
 - 8. A. Sieverding stated there may be room for developing alternatives.

9. C. Wiggers said that EA members as leaders on campus have the ability to make a positive impact on colleagues. He pushed EA members to be genuinely compassionate and concerned for colleagues as a starting point.
10. A. McCabe asked what individuals could do and whether supervisors have received training on observing behaviors of employees who may be stressed.
 - a. J. Withers responded that she attended a workshop in March 2018 on unpacking mental health in the workplace. Her notes included a lot of information for supervisors. She reiterated C. Wigger's point and asked for a more caring community.
11. A. Sieverding questioned whether outreach, empathy, and friendliness, although valuable, is the answer to mental illness. There are times when people need clinicians, physicians, or medication. It is a great start, but more needs to be done in terms of services.
12. K. Supron stated she understands the rationale for having a set of services for faculty and staff separate from that for students. She shared that her endowed healthcare policy has the most generous mental health coverage she has ever seen for her and her family, and would be shocked if there was no parity on the state-side.
13. A. Haenlin-Mott emphasized the significance of Dr. Eells' work on suicide prevention. His impact reaches beyond CAPS and Cornell Health to many areas outside of student services. She noted the issue is not between treating people nicely vs. services, as those are all valid components of the discussion. They are kicking off the 3-year disability strategic plan, which includes a significant component dedicated to mental health and its stigma. It is a comprehensive plan, but it takes understanding for it to be successful. She would like to continue the conversation on this and it is something the EA could help with.
14. H. Depew volunteered to be a resource to anyone who wants to chat. She asked for the EA to be supportive and reiterated continuing the conversation and work on mental health.
15. C. Sanzone noted that on mental health and wellbeing, a recurring theme in staff feedback is sources of stress. She consistently hears staff talking about having to do more with less. Other sources of stress include hiring practices, attrition, unfilled positions, and stress from being a temporary worker. She stated her willingness to put work in these issues.
16. C. Sanzone read a question from R. Lochner: What benefits are there to staff other than the Faculty & Staff Assistance Program and can we communicate these benefits in a newsletter? C. Sanzone asked if anyone wants to take point on the research and help the Communications Committee. She would love to do some sort of feature on that.
 - a. L. Taylor volunteered to put together some resources.
17. H. Sheldon brought up emotional difficulties at work. He had a coworker who was mistreated by his supervisor in which information was used against him. He advocated for counseling or support avenues.
18. A. McCabe added that emotional difficulties could be episodic. While some people may not have severe mental health issues, they can be in bad mental states. Compassion in daily actions can go a long way.
19. H. Depew relayed a comment from J. Kruser, who indicated that employees are unlikely to be candid in issue about mental health for fear of negatively impacting their careers. One avenue to address this is to think about how Cornell might provide some anonymous means for staff to identify local resources for mental health. He talked about this idea in passing with people from Cornell Health, and they seem keen on this idea. However, it would require thought for implementation.
20. B. Goodell said he has dealt with mental health issues before as he was a counselor in the past. He stated that the biggest solution to the problem is referral. If people know

something is going on, being quiet is the worst thing they can do. If they cannot deal with it, they can find someone who can. There are many organizations in the Cornell community, not just Cornell. Many of them are not-for-profit, and there are advocacy, suicide, and crisis centers.

21. A. Sieverding said the main problem is stigma. Staff are not identifying themselves as having a mental illness for fear of losing their jobs. Supervisors are able to manipulate information and it puts people in fear of retaliation. She supported mental health awareness and stigma education.
- ii. C. Wiggers asked a question about the annual budget. Because the EA is not providing a larger element of refreshment at the President's Address to Staff, he asked if it would be possible to reallocate the funds towards the Cornell Cares & Crisis Services.
 1. H. Depew noted it is something the Executive Committee received some indication about. They are still getting details on their funds, but once they have a more affirmative answer they will let the EA know.
 2. C. Sanzone added that M. Benda noted the snacks will not be much cheaper than the box lunches the provided last year.
 - a. M. Benda explained that the box lunches last year was \$4.75 per box. It was a special price, and has now gone up to \$11.00. This year, an apple, cookie, and bottle of water is costing the same price as the box lunches last year.
 3. EA member suggested having no snacks.
 - a. C. Sanzone replied they are still working on it.
 4. EA member noted the budget is not posted to the Box.
 - a. H. Depew said she will make sure that is transparent.

VI. **Adjournment**

- a. H. Depew adjourned the meeting at 1:29pm.

Respectfully Submitted,
Catherine Tran

Clerk of the Assembly