

Cornell University
Graduate and Professional
Student Assembly

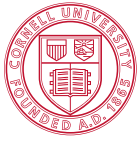
Cornell University Graduate and Professional Student Assembly

Minutes of the March 29, 2021 Meeting

5:30 PM – 7:00 PM

Zoom Meeting

- I. Call to Order
 - a. D. Dunham called the meeting to order at 5:32 PM
- II. Announcements
 - a. D. Dunham reminded members that there were two regular meetings left (4/12/21 and 5/3/21). The elections for voting members for all of the Graduate School divisions would take place on April 12th during Division Breakout. The elections for officers along with the GPSA representative to the General Committee of the Graduate School and standing committee chairs (except the Appropriations Chair and the Finance Chair) would take place on May 3rd.
- III. Roll Call
 - i. *Present* [18]: M. Balch, H. Bidigare-Curtis, M. Chatterjee, H. Cole, N. Danev, M. Drescher, B. Hayes, M. Keefe, K. Krishnan, K. Laurent, T. Luttermoser, C. O'Connor, C. Ohenewah, A. Pandey, A. Presher, C. Steingard, P. Vinhage, M. Welch
 - ii. *Absent* [13]: C. Anklin, R. Barankevich, M. Cantar, A. Cirillo, C. Day, J. Dotzel, C. Duell, N. Gonzalez, D. Kent, J. Levin, C. Liu, S. López, R. Maloney
- IV. Approval of the Meeting Minutes
 - a. Monday, March 15th, 2021
 - i. The meeting minutes were **approved** unanimously.
- V. Presentations
 - a. Big Red Barn (Jennifer Forbes, Operations Manager for the Big Red Barn) – Refer to Presentation Slides on the Office of the Assemblies website
 - i. N. Danev asked if the launching of Governor Cuomo's NY State Excelsior Pass, which would allow indoor gatherings for people that have tested negative for Covid-19 within the past three days or have both of their vaccines, allow for larger gatherings at the bar and TGIF?
 1. J. Forbes noted that she would wait on more information from the University to decide when the Big Red Barn would be ready to reopen and that the plan would be to allow programs like TGIF when it was possible.
 - ii. C. O'Connor asked if J. Forbes could elaborate on some of the Big Red Barn upgrades.
 1. J. Forbes stated that one of the larger upgrades once the Big Red Barn was reopened was that it would accept Credit Cards and would



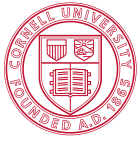
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no longer be a cash-only facility. J. Forbes also added that there would be some other cosmetic changes to the barn.

b. University Leadership

i. Martha Pollack, President

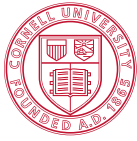
1. President Pollack provided brief updates on ongoing Dean searches, the pandemic along with the new significant increase in cases, instances of academic excellence, Commencement, the plans for de-densification during the upcoming school year. President Pollack also noted that a question she often received was whether or not there would be a blanket extension given to all graduate students in terms of financial support from degree completion. She stated that the pandemic had not affected all students equally to necessitate such a response and added that the number of students graduating in the three Commencement events since the University moved operations online had been normal. President Pollack highlighted the impact the pandemic may have had though on students that were in the middle of their research when operations moved online and noted that the Graduate School was asking these students to work closely with their advisors and that the administration was working with the Graduate School to provide as much funding and flexibility as possible. President Pollack also expressed gratitude for the work that went into the GPCI.
2. L. Davis-Frost asked if President Pollack could elaborate on what the threshold was for shutting down or Code Orange, noting that it had been 100 last semester, but now there appeared to be some shifts in that.
 - a. President Pollack stated that there had been a NY state requirement that if a school had 100 cases within a week, it had to go fully online. President Pollack noted that the University never had a hard cut-off and said a range of criteria were looked at including, notably, whether the University administration felt that the cases were contained. President Pollack also stated that the availability of hospital and quarantine space played a role in the decisions to go online.
3. B. Harrison stated that although she agreed with the importance of pointing out the ways that the Cornell Community was thriving, it was harmful to not point the ways that the community had not been thriving. B. Harrison gave an example of that, noting that on the NY State Covid Report Card, a Cornell employee death had been



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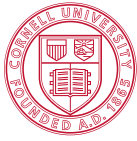
mentioned but Graduate students and other employees were not made aware of this and asked President Pollack why the University had not been more transparent on the matter.

- a. President Pollack stated that out of respect for the individuals privacy, the University did not release any additional information since doing so would reveal personal health information that was not only illegal but disrespectful to the individual and their family.
4. B. Harrison asked if there were any reasons why the death statistics could not be reported on the University Covid dashboard.
 - a. President Pollack stated that in a small community like Cornell, if the University reported deaths, community members would know who that individual was.
5. D. Dunham asked President Pollack her thoughts on ways that mentor-mentee relationships between advisors and their students could be improved, especially given the remote nature of the year.
 - a. President Pollack stated that she believed that the core of a good mentor-mentee relationship came down to mutual respect. She added that if the respect were to break in either direction, students had to be guaranteed the opportunity to have another mentor.
 - b. Dean Boor noted that there were four areas that the Graduate School had prioritized and had been in communication with the GPSA in moving towards improving the overall environment for Graduate Studies. The first was ensuring that every Graduate field was portraying clear and consistent standards for PhD degree completion. Dean Boor stated that the Graduate School was working to develop an expectations template for advisors and their students to prevent misunderstandings from developing in the first place. The Graduate School was also committed to ensuring that new faculty were trained in the best practices for developing mentor-mentee relations, for managing people, and for addressing conflict. Dean Boor also stated that the fourth priority was developing a mechanism for Graduate students to provide feedback on advisors, developing a process for acting on that feedback when tensions might arise, and having a mechanism for resolving those conflicts.



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- c. President Pollack and VP Lombardi expressed joy that the mentor-mentee relations was being taken seriously. VP Lombardi also acknowledged the enormity of the difficult circumstances that everyone had been living with for the last year. VP Lombardi also expressed his support of academic leadership stepping to the table in the mental health review process and allowing a look at a number of academic initiatives and policies that would strengthen and improve the culture for mental health on campus.
6. M. Welch asked if President Pollack had an idea on what the plans would be for Graduate Students living in Ithaca for the travel policy and testing.
 - a. President Pollack encouraged meeting attendees to sign-up for vaccinations and to not get discouraged if they could not get an appointment right way. President Pollack also noted that she was not sure what the exact policies would be for the summer because of how rapidly the pandemic and vaccine landscape was changing. She noted that if many people were to get vaccinated and case rates were to drop, that would increase the possibility of having a greater return to normalcy this summer.
7. B. Harrison asked President Pollack if she had a ballpark estimate of the average amount of money Graduate Students were spending above normal to do their work.
 - a. President Pollack noted that she did not have a ballpark estimate, but noted that there was a distribution in the amounts.
8. C. Lambert asked if there was a timeline for the NY State Point of Distribution (POD) decision.
 - a. President Pollack noted that there was not a timeline but expressed her hopes of it being soon.
9. T. Luttermoser asked Dean Boor about the SPR (Student Progress Report) and any adjustments that had been made.
 - a. Dean Boor noted that various students had asked if the questions on the SPR could be customized to specifically address some of the issues that had emerged as a consequence of Covid. She noted that the SPR that had been sent out was the same as the previous year because the information from it was used to set baselines and to understand where things were going with regard to the



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University. Dean Boor stated that the expectations were that the answers would be quite different than they had been in previous years because of the consequences of Covid.

10. E. Maloney asked if vaccination considerations would be applied to visitors in the new changes for possible summer rules.

a. President Pollack stated that the administration would look at everything in making those decisions, including travel, visitors, de-densification of the classrooms, etc.

ii. Kathryn Boor, Dean of the Graduate School and Vice Provost for Graduate Education

iii. Ryan Lombardi, Vice President for Student and Campus Life

VI. Vacancies and Elections

a. DISC Chairperson

i. D. Dunham noted that approximately \$1,800 was appropriated to DISC in the Internal Budget from the previous year and could be spent at the discretion of the committee until May 3rd.

ii. T. Luttermoser asked if the \$1,800 wasn't used, would it rollover into the following year for events planned during the Fall or Spring semesters or would it have to be used by the end of the current school year.

1. D. Dunham stated that he believed that the funds do rollover into a general account and that secondly, if the money were to be spent during the remainder of the term, it would be appropriate even for events that would not fully take place until later.

2. K. Krishnan noted that student organizations had until the summer of this year to spend their funds but wasn't sure what the procedure was for GPSA committees.

3. G. Giambattista noted that the term for the current assembly would end on May 30th and stated that an event could not be funded for a future time period on behalf of another assembly term. However, the funds would stay with the GPSA and could be reallocated again to DISC.

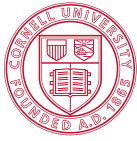
iii. A. Presher introduced herself expressing the importance of diversity and inclusion including among international students and self-nominated to become DISC Chairperson.

1. The self-nomination was seconded by N. Danev and the self-nomination was approved by unanimous consent.

b. Masters-At-Large Representative – *No Nominations*

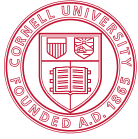
i. N. Danev added that the commitment would be no more than two meetings.

VII. Reports of Officers and Committee Updates



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- a. Executive Committee – N. Danev
 - i. N. Danev, on behalf of D. Kent, noted that the next SAC meeting would be Wednesday (3/31/2021) at 5pm. N. Danev stated that after meeting with the Provost and Dean Boor regarding the ITAP, a preliminary agreement had been reached with a planned joint statement being released that would affirm the items decided on. N. Danev summarized the memorandum noting that feedback would be given to international students if they failed the exam and proper notice would be given to everyone about the existence of the program. N. Danev added that as a sponsor of the ITAP resolution, he would either retract the resolution or amend it. N. Danev, closed off stating that he hoped to share the formal agreement with the assembly at the following GPSA meeting.
- b. Communications – K. Krishnan
 - i. K. Krishnan stated that the committee would be working to spread the word about elections for GPSA officers.
- c. Operations – M. Chatterjee
 - i. No Updates
- d. Finance – C. Steingard
 - i. No Updates
- e. Appropriations – A. Pandey
 - i. A. Pandey stated that the deadline she had in mind for the Byline-funded organizations would be April 26th, 2021.
- f. DISC – A. Presher
 - i. No Updates
- g. Faculty Teaching – C. Duell
 - i. No Updates
- h. Programming – K. Laurent
 - i. K. Laurent noted that the Build Your Own Windchime event went well, and that the committee was currently working with the Big Red Barn to organize a Bingo event.
- i. Student Advocacy – D. Kent
 - i. T. Luttermoser noted that there had been follow-up on GPSA R15.
- VIII. Breakout Session by Division
- IX. Open Forum
 - a. K. Krishnan asked if the Graduate School had received comments about advisors placing students in unsafe positions during the beginning of the pandemic and how the complaints were handled.
 - i. Dean Boor stated that comments and cases were managed on a person-by-person basis at the College level.
- X. Adjournment



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- a. The meeting was adjourned at 6:55 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Auriole C. R. Fassinou
Clerk of the Assembly