



GPSA Resolution #7: On the need for an institutional commitment to deconstructing systems of oppression and inequity

Sponsored by: The OISE Student Leadership Council, Eugene Law; GPSA Diversity & International Students Committee Chair, Elena Michel; GPSA Voting Member.

Whereas, on September 28th, 2017, the OISE Student Leadership Council (OISE LC), consisting of graduate and professional student leaders from the Black Graduate and Professional Student Association (BGPSA), the Cornell Latin American Student Society (CLASS), Graduate Women in Science (GWIS), the GPSA Diversity and International Student Committee (DISC), the Indigenous Graduate Student Association (IGSA), the Latino/a Graduate Student Coalition (LGSC), the Society for Asian American Graduate Affairs (SAAGA), the Multicultural Academic Council (MAC), and Out in STEM (oSTEM), submitted a letter to Cornell University President Martha Pollack and associated senior leadership outlining thirteen demands for action to improve campus climate in the areas of graduate and professional student community, research, teaching and learning, safety, and physical and mental health;¹ and,

Whereas, on October 2nd, 2017, the OISE LC made an initial press release publicizing their demands and emphasizing the need to name and address issues contributing to a campus climate that is often unwelcoming and even hostile to students who identify as members of marginalized communities;² and,

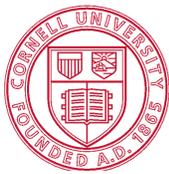
Whereas, on October 3rd, 2017, Provost Michael I. Kotlikoff, Deputy Provost John A. Siliciano, and Vice President for Student and Campus Life Ryan T. Lombardi responded to the letter via email, thanking the OISE LC for “your commitment to assisting us with this most important work”, and stating that, “Your ideas have been critical thus far in the process and will help inform the task force’s charge and responsibilities. We hope to be able to provide more detailed information on the task force in the near future.”;³ and,

Whereas, since that email there has been limited further communication from the University’s senior leadership, specifically regarding the OISE LC’s demands that include the need for the forthcoming Presidential Task Force on Campus Climate to include voices of marginalized graduate and professional students representatives nominated by their peers; and,

¹ See OISE LC Demands, attached.

² See OISE LC 1st Press Release, attached.

³ See Response from Kotlikoff et al., attached.



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Whereas, on October 5th, 2017, the OISE LC made a second press release calling for a meeting between senior leadership and the OISE LC to address the demands laid out in the September 28th letter;⁴ and,

Whereas, on October 9th, 2017, the OISE LC responded to Provost Michael I. Kotlikoff, Deputy Provost John A. Siliciano, and Vice President for Student and Campus Life Ryan T. Lombardi with a letter that reiterated the call for a meeting between Cornell senior leadership and the OISE LC contained in the second press release; and,

Whereas, in both this second press release and the October 9th letter to senior leadership the OISE LC also stated that it would be soliciting internal nominations for graduate and professional students to serve on the Presidential Task Force, to be vetted by the council and forwarded to President Pollack; and,

Whereas, on October 11th, 2017 President Pollack sent an update on the Presidential Task Force to the entire campus community, in which she announced the official charge of the Task Force to address issues in the three areas of Campus Experience, Regulation of Hate Speech and Harassment, and Campus Response to future incidents of racism or other overt forms of discrimination and bias;^{5, 6} and,

Whereas, the official charge of the Task Force fails to explicitly acknowledge structural and institutional oppression and inequity at Cornell, thereby focusing its work on addressing the symptoms rather than the root causes of these issues, as is highlighted by the statement, “the goal is to move us forward as a community, recognizing that our campus is a reflection of our society, and that we cannot entirely eliminate attitudes and expressions of intolerance and bias, but that we can and must redouble our efforts to respond to them in a way that reaffirms Cornell’s founding principles.”; and,

Whereas, Cornell University already has a wealth of data on diversity and inclusion at Cornell compiled in recent years, most notably in the 2014 report titled "The Climate for Diversity at Cornell University: Student Experiences" by Sylvia Hurtado, Josephine Gasiewski, and Cynthia Lua Alvarez, which includes not only qualitative data but also specific and substantive suggestions which have yet to be fully acted upon by the university;⁷ and,

Whereas, in her October 11th message President Pollack also appointed three co-chairs to lead three sub-committees of the Task Force charged with making recommendations on how to

⁴ See OISE LC 2nd Press Release, attached.

⁵ <http://news.cornell.edu/stories/2017/10/pollack-updates-cornell-community-presidential-task-force>

⁶ <http://president.cornell.edu/task-force/presidential-task-force-on-campus-climate/>

⁷ <http://diversity.cornell.edu/sites/default/files/Qualitative-Study-of-Student-Climate-Full-Report.pdf>



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address the three areas listed above, and stated that she would be relying on the Scheinman Institute of Conflict Resolution to recommend the composition of the Task Force, after which she will personally appoint individuals to serve as task force members; and,

Whereas, in this same message President Pollack states that the Task Force Charge “has been carefully developed with the input of faculty, staff and students”; and,

Whereas, while the graduate and professional student community, and the OISE Leadership Council in particular, has been exceptionally vocal in stating our collective stance on how to address issues of structural and systemic systems of oppression and inequity at Cornell, including making recommendations on how to populate the Task Force, university administration has not made us aware of any opportunity for graduate and professional students to provide feedback on the appointment of Task Force co-chairs, on the mechanism by which task force members would be selected, or on the charge itself,

Whereas, on October 16th, 2017 Provost Kotlikoff met with representatives from the OISE LC, where he indicated that their demands would be forwarded to the Task Force once it has formed and addressed as part of the Task Force’s reports and recommendations that will be made on or about May 1st, 2018; and,

Whereas, this proposed course of action of simply forwarding the demands of the OISE LC to the Task Force ignores the facts that many of the demands and the issues that they are intended to address lie outside of the scope of the Task Force, as defined in the official charge to that body, and that the timeline for the Task Force to do its work does not align with the timeline of the demands to be addressed, as was clearly laid out in the September 28th letter; and

Whereas, the update that President Pollack provided on the formulation of and the charge of the Presidential Task Force implicitly rejected the spirit of GPSA AY 2017-2018 Resolution 5 without any direct communication with the GPSA,

Therefore be it resolved, that the GPSA reiterates its position that the Presidential Task Force be charged with addressing structural and systemic oppression and inequity at Cornell,

Be it further resolved, that the GPSA calls for an institutional commitment to the deconstruction and elimination of systems of oppression and inequity on our campus and more broadly in our society, believing that Cornell should be an international leader and role model in this work and that anything short of a goal of complete elimination is a failure to live up to Cornell’s founding commitment to diversity and inclusion and its land grant legacy of public engagement; and,

Be it further resolved, that the GPSA unequivocally supports the demands made by the OISE LC and applauds their leadership in confronting and addressing these issues; and,



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Be it further resolved, that the GPSA calls for President Pollack to immediately and publicly respond to those demands, detailing a course of action towards their fulfillment; and,

Be it further resolved, that simply forwarding the OISE LC's September 28th letter to the Task Force for their consideration would be an inadequate response, specifically with respect to demands related to the formation and accountability of the task force, increased completion fellowship and conference funding for graduate and professional students, and upholding the Title IX policy guidance of 2011 and 2014, all of which clearly lie outside the stated scope of the Task Force; and,

Be it further resolved, that the GPSA reiterates its position that graduate and professional students appointed to the Presidential Task Force be representative of the marginalized groups in our community, and that these representatives should be selected by their own constituencies as indicated in GPSA AY 2017-2018 Resolution 5; and,

Be it further resolved, that the GPSA fully endorses any nominations of graduate and professional students to serve on the Presidential Task Force made by the OISE LC and urges President Pollack to respect the autonomy of graduate and professional students in addressing the issues that so deeply affect our communities by appointing said nominees to the Task Force without question; and,

Be it further resolved, that future development and work of the Presidential Task Force be completely transparent and responsive, while striving to engage the entire campus community; and,

Be it finally resolved, that all reasonable efforts be made to ensure that graduate and professional students are continuously engaged as stakeholders in any institutional efforts to address issues of bias, discrimination, and other forms of oppression. Such engagement must be public, transparent, and collected in one shared digital location so that the various stakeholders can be collectively accountable to past, present, and future actions.

Respectfully Submitted,

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