

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

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5 Sponsored by: The OISE Student Leadership Council
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7 **Whereas**, on September 28th, 2017, the OISE Student Leadership Council (OISE LC),
8 consisting of graduate and professional student leaders from the Black Graduate and Professional
9 Student Association (BGPSA), the Cornell Latin American Student Society (CLASS), Graduate
10 Women in Science (GWIS), the GPSA Diversity and International Student Committee (DISC),
11 the Indigenous Graduate Student Association (IGSA), the Latino/a Graduate Student Coalition
12 (LGSC), the Society for Asian American Graduate Affairs (SAAGA), the Multicultural
13 Academic Council (MAC), and Out in STEM (oSTEM), submitted a letter to Cornell University
14 President Martha Pollack and associated senior leadership outlining thirteen demands for action
15 to improve campus climate in the areas of graduate and professional student community,
16 research, teaching and learning, safety, and physical and mental health;¹ and,
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18 **Whereas**, on October 2nd, 2017, the OISE LC made an initial press release publicizing their
19 demands and emphasizing the need to name and address issues contributing to a campus climate
20 that is often unwelcoming and even hostile to students who identify as members of marginalized
21 communities;² and,
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23 **Whereas**, on October 3rd, 2017, Provost Michael I. Kotlikoff, Deputy Provost John A. Siliciano,
24 and Vice President for Student and Campus Life Ryan T. Lombardi responded to the letter via
25 email, thanking the OISE LC for “your commitment to assisting us with this most important
26 work”, and stating that, “Your ideas have been critical thus far in the process and will help
27 inform the task force’s charge and responsibilities. We hope to be able to provide more detailed
28 information on the task force in the near future.”;³ and,
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30 **Whereas**, since that email there has been limited further communication from the University’s
31 senior leadership, specifically regarding the OISE LC’s demands that included the need for the
32 forthcoming Presidential Task Force on Campus Climate to include voices of marginalized
33 graduate and professional students representatives nominated by their peers; and,
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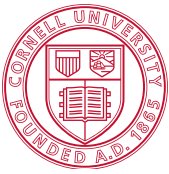
35 **Whereas**, on October 5th, 2017, the OISE LC made a second press release calling for a meeting
36 between senior leadership and the OISE LC to address the demands laid out in the September
37 28th letter;⁴ and,
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¹ See OISE LC Demands, attached.

² See OISE LC 1st Press Release, attached.

³ See Response from Kotlikoff et al., attached.

⁴ See OISE LC 2nd Press Release, attached.



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41 **Whereas**, on October 9, 2017, the OISE LC responded to Provost Michael I. Kotlikoff, Deputy
42 Provost John A. Siliciano, and Vice President for Student and Campus Life Ryan T. Lombardi
43 with a letter that reiterated the call for a meeting between Cornell senior leadership and the OISE
44 LC contained in the second press release; and,
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46 **Whereas**, in both this second press release and the October 9th letter to senior leadership the
47 OISE LC also stated that it would be soliciting internal nominations for graduate and
48 professional students to serve on the Presidential Task Force, to be vetted by the council and
49 forwarded to President Pollack; and,
50

51 **Whereas**, on October 11th, 2017 President Pollack sent an update on the Presidential Task Force
52 to the entire campus community, in which she announced the official charge of the Task Force to
53 address issues in the three areas of Campus Experience, Regulation of Hate Speech and
54 Harassment, and Campus Response to future incidents of racism or other overt forms of
55 discrimination and bias;^{5, 6} and,
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57 **Whereas**, the official charge of the Task Force fails to explicitly acknowledge structural and
58 institutional oppression and inequity at Cornell, thereby focusing its work on addressing the
59 symptoms rather than the root causes of these issues, as is highlighted by the statement, “the goal
60 is to move us forward as a community, recognizing that our campus is a reflection of our society,
61 and that we cannot entirely eliminate attitudes and expressions of intolerance and bias, but that
62 we can and must redouble our efforts to respond to them in a way that reaffirms Cornell’s
63 founding principles.”; and,
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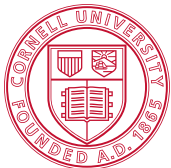
65 **Whereas**, in her October 11th message President Pollack also appointed three co-chairs to lead
66 three sub-committees of the Task Force charged with making recommendations on how to
67 address the three areas listed above, and stated that she would be relying on the Scheinman
68 Institute of Conflict Resolution to recommend the composition of the Task Force, after which
69 she will personally appoint individuals to serve as task force members; and,
70

71 **Whereas**, in this same message President Pollack states that the Task Force Charge “has been
72 carefully developed with the input of faculty, staff and students”; and,
73

74 **Whereas**, while the graduate and professional student community, and the OISE Leadership
75 Council in particular, has been exceptionally vocal in stating our collective stance on how to
76 address issues of structural and systemic systems of oppression and inequity at Cornell, including
77 making recommendations on how to populate the Task Force, university administration has not
78 made us aware of any opportunity for graduate and professional students to provide feedback on
79 the appointment of Task Force co-chairs, on the mechanism by which task force members would
80 be selected, or on the charge itself,
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82
83

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/>



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

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

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94 **Be it further resolved**, that the GPSA unequivocally supports the demands made by the OISE
95 LC; and,

96
97 **Be it further resolved**, that the GPSA calls for President Pollack to immediately respond to
98 those demands, detailing a course of action towards their fulfillment; and,

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100 **Be it further resolved**, that the GPSA reiterates its position that graduate and professional
101 students appointed to the Presidential Task Force be representative of the marginalized groups in
102 our community, and that these representatives should be selected by their own constituencies;
103 and,

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

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

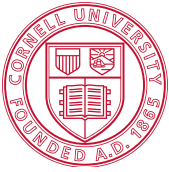
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115 **Be it finally resolved**, that all reasonable efforts be made to ensure that graduate and
116 professional students are continuously engaged as stakeholders in any institutional efforts to
117 address issues of bias, discrimination, and other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

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121 **Respectfully Submitted,**

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123 Eugene Law
124 *Chair, GPSA Diversity and International Students Committee (DISC)*

125
126 Theresa Rocha Beardall
127 *Member, DISC; Latino/a Graduate Student Coalition (LGSC); Indigenous Graduate Student*
128 *Association (IGSA)*

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- 130 Monet Roberts
131 *President Emeritus, Black Graduate & Professional Student Association (BGPSA)*
132
133 Hao Shi
134 *Co-President, Out in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics*
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136 Elena Michel
137 *GPSA Biological Science Voting Member; Co-President, Out in Science, Technology,*
138 *Engineering and Mathematics*
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