

Cornell University Student Assembly

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Status/Result:	New Business

S.A. Resolution #10

Calling on the President's Office to Respond to 2020 SA Resolution #30: Urging Cornell University to Contribute Financial Support for the Summer 2020 Student Contribution Pilot Program

ABSTRACT: This resolution asks for the Student Assembly to support the People's Organizing Collective's (POC-USAS3) call for the President's Office to respond to SA Resolution #30: Urging Cornell University to Contribute Financial Support for the Summer 2020 Student Contribution Pilot Program, which was passed in the Spring 2020 semester.

Sponsored by: Cat Huang '21, Yana Kalmyka '20, Kataryna Restrepo '21

Whereas, the People's Organizing Collective-USAS Local #3 had brought a resolution to the 2019-2020 Student Assembly that urged Cornell University to contribute financial support to create a pilot program that would assist in waiving the student contribution fee for low-income students for Summer 2020;

Whereas, this resolution had been a result of a year-long campaign and multiple conversations and collaborations with the office of Financial Aid;

Whereas, SA Resolution #30 passed the 2019-2020 Student Assembly unanimously with a vote of 19-0-0 on February 20th, 2020;

Whereas, per Article III, Section III, lines 57-58 of the Student Assembly Charter, the University President is required to respond to all resolutions and legislation within 30 days;

Whereas, the President's Office has not yet provided a response to SA Resolution #30;

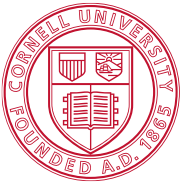
Whereas, the People's Organizing Collective understands that the COVID-19 crisis interrupted normal university proceedings mid-March but also recognizes that the pandemic has exacerbated existing income inequality across the country and it is more important than ever to address unequal student access to opportunities;

Be it further resolved, the People's Organizing Collective has penned the letter as included in *Resolution #10 Appendix A* and conveyed it to the the President's Office;

Be it further resolved, the Student Assembly recognizes and thanks the People's Organizing Collective for their hard work in organizing for this pilot program

Be it therefore resolved, the Student Assembly will endorse the letter written by the People's Organizing Collective as included in *Resolution #10 Appendix A* and support their call for the President's Office to respond to Resolution #30 from Spring 2020;

Respectfully Submitted,
Cat Huang '21



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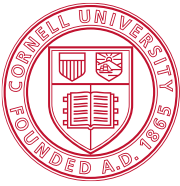
- 45 *President, Student Assembly*
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47 Kataryna Restrepo '21
48 *The People's Organizing Collective-USAS Local #3*
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50 Yana Kalmyka '20
51 *The People's Organizing Collective-USAS Local #3*
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53 Uche Chukwukere '21
54 *Vice President for Finance, Student Assembly*
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56 Lucy Contreras '21
57 *First-Generation Student Representative, Student Assembly*
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59 Noah Watson '23
60 *Executive Vice President, Student Assembly*
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62 Laila Abd Elmagid '21
63 *Vice President of Internal Operations, Student Assembly*
64
65 Maria Silaban '21
66 *Executive Archivist, Student Assembly*
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68 *(Reviewed by: Executive Committee, 5-0-2, 11/11/2020)*
69

Resolution #10 Appendix A:

71
72 Dear President Pollack,

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74 We, the People's Organizing Collective-USAS Local #3, are writing to you on behalf of Cornell
75 University's working class students to follow up on a Student Assembly resolution to create a
76 summer 2020 pilot program waiving the Student Contribution for low-income students pursuing
77 unpaid opportunities over the summer, which was passed unanimously with a vote of 19-0-0 on
78 February 20, 2020. Per Article III, Section III of the Student Assembly Charter, your Office was
79 meant to respond to this Resolution within 30 days. We understand that this is a trying and difficult
80 time for everyone and that the unforeseen COVID-19 crisis likely bumped this off your radar, but
81 we think that the ways in which this pandemic has exacerbated existing income inequality across the
82 country have made this an even more pressing time than ever to address unequal student access to
83 opportunities.

84
85 Ever since Cornell University's inception, our institution has strived to hold itself to the motto of
86 "Any person, any study." With respect to the plight of Cornell's low-income students, our university
87 and its administration have faltered in their commitments to this motto. The existence of the
88 Student Contribution is an example of how low-income students are marginalized as a result of



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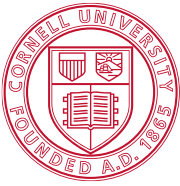
89 University financial aid policies. In comparison to their higher-income counterparts, low-
90 income/low-SES students have few resources in financially supporting their education. They often
91 rely on taking out loans and plummeting themselves into student debt, which staggers their
92 economic advancement. In 2012, Cornell and private loans had risen [516% and 78% respectively](#),
93 which shows that even prior to the virus, there was a financial burden as a result of existing Cornell
94 financial aid policy.

95
96 Now, in the era of COVID-19, the pandemic and subsequent economic upheaval have exacerbated
97 these existing issues. Many Cornell families are facing furlough or unemployment and are struggling
98 to pay semesterly tuition. Furthermore, finding temporary employment as a student is difficult at
99 best and unsafe at worst due to the public health crisis, especially for immuno-compromised
100 students and low-income students who may struggle to pay for necessary healthcare.

101
102 At the same time, student access to work opportunities is more important than ever, especially for
103 working-class students whose families may need extra support as a result of COVID-related job loss
104 or inability to work due to health concerns. Many students already struggle to meet their Student
105 Contribution each semester because of the unrealistic summer savings expectation which cannot be
106 met by students who are using money earned over the summer to support themselves and/or their
107 families. The added stress of the global health and economic crisis has only made the Student
108 Contribution more burdensome to low-income and working-class students. Moreover, low-income
109 students seeking careers in the government, the nonprofit sector, the arts, and others which may
110 frequently offer unpaid summer internships are already at a disadvantage relative to higher income
111 peers looking to pursue these same careers since many low income students cannot afford to take
112 unpaid work opportunities, and this issue, like all other economic divides, has been heightened by
113 the pandemic. While we know that COVID-19 has placed financial strain on Cornell University
114 operations, it has also placed great financial strain on Cornell's working-class students, and the
115 institution needs to take greater action with the pilot program that we at POC-USAS Local #3 called
116 for last semester.

117
118 Over the past several years, we have worked to organize working-class students around our Student
119 Contribution campaign. According to University leaders, the Student Contribution exists because
120 Cornell believes that students must have "a stake" in their education. However, the Student
121 Contribution poses cumbersome expectations on low-income students, many of whom work
122 multiple jobs or forego unpaid internships that would advance their desired careers to afford their
123 Contribution. Meanwhile, higher-income peers do not actually experience the Contribution as a
124 "stake" in their education as, for many, their families are able to pay this sum. This has become clear
125 through our many [conversations with students](#), as year after year our higher-income peers do not
126 even recognize what the Student Contribution is when asked on campus, but our working-class
127 peers almost always have a story to share about the undue burden caused by this class tax.

128
129 We have held various sessions in collaboration with the First Generation Student Union in which we
130 have brought together students to share grievances about the unfairness of the Student Contribution
131 and we have also led initiatives to aggregate student opinion regarding the negative effects of the
132 Student Contribution. Furthermore, we have also had a series of meetings with Vice Provost



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133 Jonathan Brudick and Executive Director of Financial Aid Diane Corbett and we have earned their
134 support in implementing a pilot program that would have removed the burden of the Student
135 Contribution for low-income students taking unpaid internships during the Summer of 2020. As
136 mentioned above, we also gained the approval of the full Student Assembly for this pilot program in
137 the form of an SA resolution. However, due to COVID-19, this program was put on hold and we
138 never received a response from your Office.

139
140 In light of the aforementioned financial hardships imposed by the ongoing pandemic, POC-USAS3
141 demands that the University institute the pilot program this summer in order to provide much-
142 needed relief for low-income students. We understand the financial burden placed on the University
143 by expanding financial aid in a time of economic calamity. That said, such a decision would not be
144 without precedent. In the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, the University eliminated need-based
145 loans for families making less than \$75,000. At the time, President Skorton noted that such a
146 program marked a “proud day for Cornell.” Indeed, the University should pride itself not on
147 siphoning funds from its most vulnerable students, but rather on promoting access irrespective of
148 any student’s ability to pay.

149
150 With regard to the burden of the Student Contribution, the present situation may be even more dire
151 than 2008. Millions of parents and guardians remain unemployed, and widespread hiring freezes
152 have obfuscated any possibility of meaningful, remunerative summer work experience. This is
153 precisely the kind of work experience the Student Contribution is, at least ostensibly, designed to
154 encourage. The late Peter Meinig remarked in 2008 that Cornell’s founding mission remains “to
155 provide a superb liberal education across the full range of disciplines to the best and brightest
156 students from all walks of life, *regardless of resources.*” In 2008, faced with dire economic circumstances,
157 the University demonstrated magnanimity. We believe that an even bleaker economic outlook, with
158 its concomitant effects on students’ financial well-being, requires a more sympathetic approach on
159 the part of the administration. So we urge you: be the Cornell we know you aspire to be

160
161 Our pilot program would provide great financial relief for students in need. Furthermore, this pilot
162 would help retain students because of the temporary assistance that this program would provide to
163 low-income students. Vice Provost Burdick has remarked multiple times in our meetings with him
164 that the summer internship is becoming increasingly crucial to a Cornell student’s education and
165 indeed should be seen as a vital aspect of a robust Cornell experience. Many students have already
166 been denied parts of their educational experience that they will never get back because they were
167 unable to return to campus this semester, and the ability to return seems to have been largely split
168 along lines of privilege and wealth. We ask that you help us ensure low-income students are not
169 robbed of another important opportunity in their Cornell careers when the summer of 2021 comes.

170
171 We would greatly appreciate a response by November 13, 2020 at 4 pm EST as we gear up for
172 another meeting with our program design partners, Ms. Corbett and Mr. Burdick. Thank you for
173 your time and consideration.

174 Sincerely,
175 People’s Organizing Collective, USAS Local #3