



Cornell University Student Assembly

Cornell University Student Assembly

Minutes of the Thursday, October 24th, 2019 Meeting,
4:46-5:54 pm in Memorial Room, Willard Straight Hall

I. Call to Order & Roll Call

- a. J. Anderson called the meeting to order at 4:46 pm.
- b. Roll Call:
 - i. Present: M. Adeghe, J. Anderson, M. Baker, C. Benedict, A. Cass, U. Chukwukere, J. Clancy, O. Egharevba, J. Feit, M. Haddad, C. Huang, Y. Li, G. Martin, N. Matolka, L. Ordenez, T. Reuning, L. Smith, S. Sun, N. Watson, K. Wondimu, S. Xu, V. Xu, J. Youngblood, Y. Yuan
 - ii. Absent: J. Kroll (excused), B. Weintraub (excused)
 - iii. Arrived After Roll Call: I. Pavlov (excused), P. Solovyeva (excused)

II. Presentation

- a. SUNY SA
 - i. Austin Ostro introduced himself and Michael Stefanko, and presented on the SUNY Student Assembly.
 1. Austin Ostro is the President of the SUNY SA.
 - ii. A member asked where A. Ostro attends school.
 - iii. A. Ostro said that he is a graduate student at the University of Albany.

III. Open Microphone

- a. No speakers at the open microphone.

IV. Announcements

- a. C. Huang said that Sprint Planning would be on Sunday, and would likely be in the same location as the last Sprint Planning meeting. She asked that members be there and for them to bring their initiatives.

V. Approval of the Minutes

- a. October 17th, 2019
 - i. Motion to approve the October 17th, 2019 minutes – **approved**.

VI. Byline Reports

- a. Slope Day Programming Board (SDPB)
 - i. M. Adeghe said that SDPB was at \$19 during the current cycle and are requesting \$21 for this coming cycle, and that this was mostly because of rising talent prices and a desire to get bigger artists. She added that the committee felt that the extra \$2 would do nothing but help people get more excited for Slope Day and help the other programming that happens during the day.
 - ii. Motion to approve SDPB's byline funding – **approved**.
- b. Cornell Concert Commission (CCC)
 - i. M. Adeghe said that CCC is currently funded at \$13 and requested \$13, and

that they do have a fairly large surplus that they plan on spending down. She added that they did not ask for an increase in funding due to their large surplus.

- ii. Motion to approve CCC's byline funding – **approved**.
- c. Professional Fraternity Council (PFC)
 - i. M. Adeghe said that PFC is new to byline, and that the organization began last fall, and that the reason they got \$0.50 rather than their requested amount of \$1.25 was because the committee felt that efforts to promote diversity and inclusion were not being met, in that they talked a lot about diversity and inclusion but there were not efforts present to meet that. She added that PFC oversees the preprofessional fraternities on campus, and that they intended to give each of their organizations the same amount of money, and that one way to get the money would be through diversity and inclusion efforts, which the committee felt was incentivizing diversity and inclusion which they did not feel would be a good thing. She also said that they felt that PFC's selectivity and recruitment process was not fleshed out, and that they didn't think that it was right to give that money to an organization that still values selectivity and small organizations, which they do not agree with. She added that they hope to help and reform PFC in the next few years based on the efforts that the committee did see, and that they will be working with them in the spring as they do with all of their byline organizations.
 - ii. V. Xu asked if PFC explained where the money would go, as they were never on byline before.
 - iii. M. Adeghe said that it would be divided among the eleven or so organizations under them, with each getting the same amount of money, and that they would be getting less than they initially detailed because of AppsCom's decision to put them at \$0.50. She added that 75% would be going to those organizations under them, and that the remaining 25% would be going to their e-board to run campus-wide initiatives.
 - iv. I. Pavlov asked if they said whether or not the remaining 75% would be distributed based on the number of students in each organization.
 - v. M. Adeghe said that it would be distributed evenly, which was also a point of conversation.
 - vi. J. Youngblood asked if they knew how those organizations would be spending their money.
 - vii. M. Adeghe said that there were three categories for that, one being diversity and inclusion and another being campus outreach; she could not recall the third. She added that whatever money they got would be divided up into those three sections.
 - viii. O. Egharevba said that M. Adeghe had mentioned that one of the motives for this decision was that the diversity and inclusion efforts were lacking, and asked what some of the things they wanted to improve were.
 - ix. M. Adeghe said that one of the things that they wanted to see was a concrete plan, and that they did not see anything that was very concrete as far as what they planned to do, which is something that comes up in byline often, and that this shouldn't just be a term that's thrown around. She added that they also mentioned that they have statistics on the racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic profiles of each organization, and when asked if that info

would be made public, they said it wouldn't without giving a reason why, which was a point of concern for many people.

- x. V. Xu asked if PFC has a concrete proposal on what their money would be used for if given \$0.50, and asked if they are holding any events.
- xi. M. Adeghe asked V. Xu to clarify whether she meant PFC or the organizations under PFC in regard to the holding of events.
- xii. V. Xu said that she meant both.
- xiii. M. Adeghe said that the 25% was originally for events whether they got the \$1.25 they requested or not, and that as an example, they funded a preprofessional event in Klarman last semester that was open to the whole campus. She added that they know that there is a stigma about the organizations being selective, because they are, and so they wanted a way to reach out to people outside of the organizations, and that they said that they would be keeping the 75/25 split regardless of the amount of money they received.
- xiv. There was a motion to approve the funding.
 - 1. There was a dissent.
 - 2. The motion was **withdrawn**.
- xv. S. Sun asked if M. Adeghe could give examples of the concrete plans that PFC had for diversity and inclusion.
- xvi. M. Adeghe said that they did not have concrete plans, which was the problem, and that there was one thing that was said about making their recruitment process more diverse, but nothing was said about how that would happen. She added that they said that they needed concrete plans because they did not see any.
- xvii. There was a motion to approve PFC's byline funding.
 - 1. M. Adeghe asked if whether or not abstentions are only meant to be used in cases of conflicts of interest.
 - 2. Deborah Nyakaru said that this is the case, and asked if the members wanted to revoke.
 - 3. Funding was **approved** 19-1-6.

VII. Public Statement

- a. Condemning the Dismissal of Julia Feliz from the Cornell Alliance for Science's Global Leadership Fellowship
 - i. J. Anderson said that he would like to introduce everyone to the Office of the Assemblies' new coordinator, Wendy Treat, before proceeding with the public statement.
 - ii. G. Martin thanked everyone for being here, and asked that assembly members and audience members to please use J. Feliz's correct pronouns of they/them when referring to or addressing them. He added that it has been said by some, including members of Exec, that this issue is out of the SA's jurisdiction, and that neither he nor Julia believes that to be the case.
 - 1. There were instances in this meeting wherein J. Feliz's proper pronouns were not used. Out of respect for J. Feliz's identity and personhood, their proper pronouns will be used in all instances in these minutes.
 - iii. J. Feliz introduced themselves and presented.
 - iv. J. Anderson said that the meeting will now proceed with two community

members speaking followed by an SA member speaking if there is an SA member on the speakers list. He asked that community members who wish to speak to tell D. Nyakaru, and that they will keep going through the list until someone moves to vote on the statement.

- v. A community member thanked the SA for giving the Puerto Rican Students Association (henceforth PRSA) the opportunity to speak here, and that they are here because an injustice was revealed that affects Puerto Rican students as well as anyone against racism and injustice. She added that dismissal of the incident and redirection to support groups is a trend that management and staff take against marginalized students to direct the problem out of sight and out of mind, but J. Feliz refused to be redirected. She also said that if a director cannot accomplish the very basic necessity of creating a welcoming environment, then perhaps they should not hold that position. She added that little has changed since the incidents surrounding Hurricane Maria, and that incidents like these set a precedent for the treatment of students of color on campus, wherein they devalue them, silence them, and try to get rid of them. She also said that PRSA humbly asks the SA to strive toward meeting J. Feliz's demands that were published last week and just reiterated here. She added that PRSA commends J. Feliz for standing up and refusing to separate their studies from their personal values.
- vi. Three community members spoke representing the Cornell Alliance for Science (henceforth CAFS).
 - 1. The first of the three said that he and his fellows were in attendance to speak on their experience living with racism, and not the racism that J. Feliz spoke of, but that of them living as black people whose voices have been drowned. He added that J. Feliz cannot claim to fight white supremacy, and that they cannot claim that Africans are empty vessels, and that no one is superior to African people. He also said that they do not have to be made submissive to something that they do not believe in, and that people must let Africa speak for itself, and that to drown out their voices in this debate is racism. He added that the people in attendance have heard only one side of the story, and that what J. Feliz has said about CAFS is not true. He also said that they are African, and as such, they believe in speaking clearly, and that J. Feliz wants to use their personal suffering against them. He added that just because he comes from a difficult place does not mean that he does not have agency, and that by claiming that since they are from Africa, they do not have agency, J. Feliz is silencing them, and that as Africans, they can help their people back on the continent by way of what they are doing here. He also said that they want to help their people to fight against climate change, and that they should be with them, not against them today, and that J. Feliz was preventing them from proceeding with their walk.
 - 2. The second of the three said that just because J. Feliz is POC and an American citizen does not mean that they are superior to them or that they have a better understanding of what their fight is, and that if there is an American Dream, there is also an African Dream, and that the African Dream excludes racism and hatred toward anyone. He

added that CAFS has not wronged them, and that they are the alliance, and that social justice is a process that must be fought on all levels, but for them as Africans, having practical alliances including transfer of technology is a social injustice fight. He also said that sitting at the table deciding what should be done for their people means more than black or white skin color, and that they have come to speak to the assembly to seek justice as people and as African fellows for CAFS. He asked that the assembly not commit another injustice today by voting in favor of this statement.

3. The third of the three said that they did not want to make this look like a white-against-black battle for supremacy, J. Feliz's activism came out in every debate in regard to their identity as a person, and that turning every debate into a back-and-forth about identity and racism was against their mission. She added that they disrupted every single session and were not interested in dialogue, and that this did not have to come out in every session that they had. She also said that it came to a point where it became too uncomfortable for everyone in class, and that in Africa, they have food insecurity, droughts, and rampant poverty, and that they came here to help their people get better lives, and that this prevented them from doing this. She asked the assembly not to support this motion.
- vii. M. Baker thanked J. Feliz for coming and said that she would like to hear more about the racism and harassment they faced from CAFS and from Cornell in general.
- viii. J. Feliz said that around week three of the program, there was a visiting professor named Max Rothschild, and that being an Afro-Indigenous person from the US, as well as a scientist, they felt that they were coming to a program that had to do with science communication and intersecting things with social justice, and that they had a presentation from M. Rothschild. They added that they have severe ADHD and sometimes things will come up, but that they are aware of this and can wait until question and discussion sections where they assumed such things can happen. They also said that someone asked a question related to climate change since the person had made strange remarks using strange data, and that this person raised her hand and asked how this person could make claims that there is no impact between animal agriculture and climate change, and that they said that the UN had an agenda. They added that they then raised their hand and said that they felt uncomfortable that they said that they needed to push animal agriculture to save developing countries, and that they started asking the question of how someone can say that when animal agriculture is one of the most oppressive industries of black and brown people in the United States, and that this person did not let them finish and lost control, became aggressive, and began moving toward them. They also said that this person said that J. Feliz only sees them as a white person, and that they said that they didn't know what that has to do with this, but that that was correct and that they are a brown person, which prompted the person to say that they did not know him or his experiences, which prompted them to ask if he knows more about these issues than black or brown people, to which he said yes and

continued. They added that this is when the program leader tried to silence them, and they left for the rest of the day. They also said that there was a welcome picnic later in the day, and that this person was invited even though it was only for fellows, and so they did not go because no one stood up for them and they did not feel comfortable. They added that they communicated that they were upset, and a program leader showed up at their house at 8:00 PM to inform them that the program hadn't been open to other people but to Africans, which prompted them to ask what the program leader was trying to tell them, since there had been white students in every prior year, and that they were the first Afro-Indigenous student. They also said that because of their ADHD, when they are really stressed out, they have trouble communicating or can talk too much, and they said that they would need a support person when meeting with people in regard to this, which was ignored, and that the only time they spoke about veganism was when a conversation was started with them about it without asking them, and they said in response that they did not know why that was a topic of conversation at that point. They added that they did not understand the point of them being in this program when, as an Afro-Indigenous person, they cannot discuss issues that affect their community, and that they were basically bullied and harassed up to being kicked out of the program, and that they were misgendered repeatedly even after explanation, but the program and the fellows made no effort and thought that they were a problem because they wanted their pronouns to be used. They also said that they were refused accommodation for their disabilities, including having spaces to be able to write and having access to a printer, since their mind can go blank when they need to speak and are put on the spot, so they need to print things in a specific way so that they can stay on track and focus enough to read it, but that this was not provided for them even when they asked for it repeatedly. They added that they were embarrassed for needing to write when they need to hear, and that they don't think that they should be shamed for needing access to things that should be provided for everyone.

- ix. Community member Patience introduced herself and said that she was a farmer from Nigeria and a friend of CAFS, and that she believes in the work that they do, the way that they do it, and the value that they add to the rest of the world. She added that they might think that this is just a small problem that occurred in Cornell, but that it will have a ripple effect all over the world, and that that should be considered before anyone makes any decisions. She also said that she is a black person, and that they all feel that sometimes they are being discriminated against because of their skin color, and that as a person and more so as a woman, she sometimes feels like things did not go the way that she wanted, but that she does not let that get in the way of things that could help so many people. She added that biotechnology can save so many people from hunger, and that they want the world to have zero hunger, and that the world is very diverse. She also said that people in Nigeria are denied access to seeds and technology because they don't have the information that they can use these things to improve their lives, and that she doesn't want to be worried that more dark shadows are being cast on a field that already has so much confusion and dispute. She began to say that

everyone has the right to feel the way that they feel.

- x. J. Anderson said that J. Feliz uses they/them pronouns.
- xi. Community member Patience said that she did not hear what J. Anderson said.
- xii. J. Anderson said that J. Feliz uses they/them pronouns, and that community member Patience would not be able to speak if she could not abide by this.
- xiii. Community member Patience said that she did not hear what J. Anderson said.
- xiv. This exchange was repeated a few times.
- xv. Community member Patience apologized for using the wrong pronouns, and said that in responding to someone, it is important that they do not drag the whole world into a situation if there can be one-on-one communication about something, and that what happens in this room is very important and will be taken in many contexts in places where so many are already struggling. She added that there are 31 people in this fellowship, of whom 27 are people of color, and that if they ask them one-on-one if they felt like they were disadvantaged in one way or another due to their color, they might tell you that they haven't, because she has interacted with fellows who have been here over the years. She also said that she would ask that the assembly look at this and wait with a great deal of consideration, and that what they say here today can affect work that millions of dollars can be put into to help all over the world. She added that as a Nigerian farmer, her greatest struggle every day is access to technology, as well as what it could be that allows for surplus in America and hunger in Nigeria. She also said that they can now realize that there is a forum for everything that they want to propagate, but that this might not be the forum to bring it to, and that everybody in life has issues, but there is a place for everything.
- xvi. Community member William introduced himself and said that he would like to acknowledge J. Feliz and other students' views, and that he feels like they don't now and might never have a full grasp of what went down in the program, and that his question is toward any willing member of the SA. He added that this is not the first instance he has heard about racial or gender or sexuality bias from faculty toward students, and that he does not see any issue with increased sensitivity training. He asked what purpose this school could serve if students are not comfortable in their classroom.
- xvii. G. Martin said that he agreed, and that he has had grades docked for bringing up black rights in discussion sections at a frequency deemed "too much" by professors, and that he thinks that sensitivity training and bias reporting should be a must. He added that he wants there to be actions taken, and that this is a great time to point out again that J. Feliz's demands are not just for them, but for everyone.
- xviii. K. Wondimu expressed his gratitude that J. Feliz is here, and said that he read their article on Medium. He asked if they could elaborate on the incident characterized on Medium as being violent.
- xix. J. Feliz said that they feel like any form of oppression is violent, and that it's not just one incident, but many incidents, and that it can make someone feel empowered to have power over others and can treat someone however they want without repercussions, and that it is true since they are the one that was

punished. They added that nothing was done, and that to them that was violent.

- xx. K. Wondimu said that it is his understanding that the program had HR channels for conflict resolution and what not, and that J. Feliz should correct him if he is wrong, but that they did not follow up on those channels. He asked why that was.
- xxi. J. Feliz said that they emailed them a few days after the incident, and again requested for a support person since they sometimes need someone to help them communicate, and that their request was ignored, and that these communications can be seen in the most recent Medium article. They added that they were told “thank you Julia, I hope this week is better for you,” and that they were very ill later that week, which they suspect to be from stress, and that they sent an email because it had been weeks at that point and they did not understand why nothing had been done. They also said that a person said that she knows someone from HR that they could meet, which prompted them to say that they need a support person and that they do not understand why she is telling them to meet with HR unless she is asking them to file a formal complaint, and she once again did not make the offer. They added that, weeks later, she showed up to their class and asked them to leave and meet with her privately, which violated their request for a support person, and she told them that no one was appropriate at Cornell to help them address these issues, and that she knew about the racism but still needed to look into it. They also said that she said to them that they made a big sacrifice coming here and leaving their three- and five-year-olds at home, and asked them if they are sure that they don’t want to go home, to which they said that they want to stay. They added that they feel like it’s inappropriate not to address racism in a program comprised mostly of black and brown people, and that she asked them if they are sure that this is the right program for them, since it is about biotechnology rather than social justice, to which they said that they are an Afro-Indigenous person from Puerto Rico, as well as a scientist. They also said that 75% of biotech crops are researched and studied in Puerto Rico, and that 16 of the world’s 20 most-used drugs are produced in Puerto Rico, and that they would like to know why speaking about issues that affect them and their people is a problem, and why they were asked to be in this program and why they would leave their children if they were just going to cause problems. They added that they are as much in shock as anyone else that things like this are allowed to happen at Cornell, and they apologized to K. Wondimu for having forgotten his question.
- xxii. K. Wondimu repeated his question.
- xxiii. J. Feliz said that they were told that a complaint was filed on their behalf, and they said that they did not understand why this happened, and that they did not consent to it, nor did they know what exactly was filed, but that it should have been about the racism in the program. They added that someone responded in an email to everyone in the program except for them after this to tell them not to respond to them, and that they would be updated as they had more information. They also said that it is clear that Diversity & Inclusion does not have their wellbeing in mind when a complaint was filed

on their behalf, and that they feel like this was more bullying and ganging up on them to get them to leave the program. They added that VP Angela Winfield did respond and apologize for what the others had done, and then again a week later when they were removed from the program,

xxiv. K. Wondimu asked if A. Winfield was VP of the program.

xxv. J. Feliz said that she is the VP of D&I.

xxvi. K. Wondimu asked if J. Feliz requested that a friend or someone else be with them to help them.

xxvii. J. Feliz replied in the affirmative and said that they suggested multiple people, but was ignored, and that when Cornell claims they were given access to resources, they weren't, and that they think that these resources were used to bully them further.

xxviii. A community member said that he wanted to share what they initially thought about this and how he felt about how Cornell responded, which they think had horrific implications. He added that, when he read the Medium article initially, he thought that the university should have done an investigation and a round-table talk for anyone relevant to have an open discussion, but that this has not happened, and that it has gotten to this level. He also said that there have been a lot of activities by the university that he can only label as a coverup and trying to silence people in the community, and that it is basically sacrificing individuals in the community to benefit the collective. He added that this has concerning implications especially in science, and that many of the predecessors of this field have been marginalized for speaking out and unfairly treated, and that people were put in concentration campus because they disagreed with the Soviet Union, and that this feels like a slippery slope to that kind of treatment of their community members, which denigrates the mission of this university. He also said that he is done with the dangerous precedents set by the university, and that he thinks that the only way to go forward is not only asking for sensitivity training and such, but also to start pressing for accountability, not just because it is the right thing to do, but because it's the only way for the community to go forward. He added that for people to possibly break protocol and do things on others' behalf in the name of the university is dangerous and can affect anyone at any time at Cornell, and that they need to step up and set a precedent to show that there is responsibility and consequences. He also said that he thinks that the SA should be a little more radical in addressing this issue and seeking accountability alongside campus partners, and that he knows that some SA members have involvements elsewhere, and that the community needs to step up. He added that when they just get some warm and fuzzy feelings and move on, people might see it as a sign that they can do whatever they want and get away with it.

xxix. G. Martin moved to vote on the public statement.

1. There was a dissent.

2. G. Martin maintained his motion, and said that he would like to remind everyone that this is an emotionally draining process, and that every question that was asked of J. Feliz is asking them to relive trauma, and asked that every member consider that in this vote-to-vote.

3. Vote to vote on the public statement – **failed** 12-12-0.
- xxx. J. Anderson said that he voted in favor of the vote-to-vote, which puts them at 12 to 12, meaning that the motion fails and so he will have to go back to the speakers list.
- xxxi. There was a motion to vote on the public statement.
 1. There was a dissent.
 2. J. Anderson said that he would like to remind all members that the person right there in front of them wants the discussion to be ended, and that they should therefore end it.
 3. Vote to vote on the public statement – **approved** 19-3-3.
- xxxii. There was a vote on the public statement. Votes were cast, but the final tally was never actually read out.
- xxxiii. G. Martin said that he would like to ask for unanimous consent on this, and said that he thinks that there is an important distinction between being an ally or performing allyship. He added that no one is an ally, and no one is ever an ally, and that everyone has to perform allyship, and that he is asking all members to perform allyship on behalf of J. Feliz and other people on this campus.
- xxxiv. M. Adeghe said that she completely agrees, and that she does wonder, since the vote that was just cast was not unanimous, what unanimous consent means to G. Martin here.
- xxxv. G. Martin said that if it is not passed with unanimous consent, then they have the vote on the document, but that he thinks that it unites them.
- xxxvi. M. Adeghe asked if G. Martin is referring to the symbolism of it.
- xxxvii. G. Martin replied in the affirmative, and that it would mean that every student is behind them from all communities.
- xxxviii. Discussion continued in this regard.
- xxxix. There was a motion for a roll-call vote on unanimous consent – **approved** 16-7-2.
- xl. Motion to approve the public statement by unanimous consent – **failed** 24-1-1.
 1. M. Adeghe – yes.
 2. J. Anderson – yes.
 3. M. Baker – yes.
 4. C. Benedict – yes.
 5. A. Cass – yes.
 6. U. Chukwukere – yes.
 7. J. Clancy – yes.
 8. O. Egharevba – yes.
 9. J. Feit – yes.
 10. M. Haddad – yes.
 11. C. Huang – yes.
 12. Y. Li – yes.
 13. G. Martin – yes.
 14. N. Matolka – yes.
 15. L. Ordonez – yes.
 16. I. Pavlov – yes.
 17. T. Reuning – yes.

18. L. Smith – yes.
 19. P. Solovyeva – yes.
 20. S. Sun – yes.
 21. N. Watson – yes.
 22. K. Wondimu – abstained.
 23. S. Xu – yes.
 24. V. Xu – yes.
 25. J. Youngblood – yes.
 26. Y. Yuan – no.
- xli. G. Martin thanked some of the members, and said that those members who hesitated or voted no should be embarrassed, but that that could be discussed at a later time.
- xlii. J. Anderson moved to have the unanimous consent vote be the final vote – approved.

VIII. Adjournment

- a. J. Anderson adjourned the meeting at 6:14 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,
John Hannan
Clerk of the Assembly