



# Cornell University Student Assembly

## Cornell University Student Assembly

Minutes of the Thursday, January 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2020 Meeting  
4:45-5:48pm in the Memorial Room of Willard Straight Hall

### I. Call to Order & Roll Call

- a. J. Anderson called the meeting to order at 4:45 pm.
- b. Roll Call:
  - i. Present: M. Adeghe, J. Anderson, M. Baker, C. Benedict, A. Cass, U. Chukwukere, J. Feit, M. Haddad, C. Huang, J. Kroll, Y. Li, G. Martin, N. Matolka, L. Ordonez, I. Pavlov, T. Reuning, L. Smith, P. Solovyeva, S. Sun, N. Watson, B. Weintraub, K. Wondimu, V. Xu, J. Youngblood
  - ii. Absent: J. Clancy (excused), O. Egharevba (excused), S. Xu (excused), Y. Yuan (excused)

### II. Announcements

- a. CSDS Special Project Funding
  - i. M. Adeghe said that the Cornell Speech and Debate Society had a special projects request of \$500 and that this request was fulfilled.

### III. Open Microphone

- a. No speakers at the open microphone.

### IV. Business of the Day

- a. Resolution 23: Establishing the Position of the Vice President of Research & Accountability and the Creation of the Research & Accountability Committee
  - i. J. Anderson said that President Martha Pollack and VP Ryan Lombardi would arrive to the meeting at 5:15 pm, and that they would discuss Resolution 23 until that time. He also wished a happy belated birthday to J. Kroll.
  - ii. C. Huang wished happy birthday to J. Anderson.
  - iii. G. Martin thanked everyone for their patience while going through the different reiterations of the resolution. He presented the resolution in its current form.
  - iv. S. Sun asked if there would be a possibility to change the name of the committee to something along the lines of “cooperation,” since President Pollack said that the current name seems somewhat Orwellian and creates a power imbalance.
  - v. G. Martin said that his understanding is that the title itself of the position might be too strong of language, and that the position was originally called “Oversight, Accountability, and Reform,” but if the assembly as a whole would like to change the committee or VP name, he is open to that. He

added that they talked about this as a group at Sprint Planning, and that he invites other opinions. He asked S. Sun to repeat her suggestion for the name.

- vi. S. Sun obliged, and said that it would be along those lines.
- vii. V. Xu said that this position is going to work with a lot of the VP positions, and that she wanted to make sure that there's not a lot of overlap based on what is already being done by them.
- viii. G. Martin said that this was a big issue, in that there is not a need for two people to do one job, and that it is currently outlined in lines 91-111 as "it is invited to". He added that his understanding would be that people would reach out for help, rather than help being pressed on them.
- ix. J. Feit said that he thinks that this is a great resolution, and that he knows that there is a clause in the resolution that says that the holder of this position can never run for SA President. He added that he hopes that this clause remains in there, and that he would not vote for this resolution unless it is in there.
- x. G. Martin said that the aforementioned clause is found in lines 158-168, and that this was done in the interest of making this a public steward position, rather than making it an upward mobility position.
- xi. There was a motion to vote.
  1. J. Anderson said that A. Cass is still on the speakers list.
- xii. A. Cass said that in regard to the name of the position and the committee, they understand how accountability causes concerns, but at the same time, they feel like it is a good thing with regard to holding the assembly accountable, and that their input is that the name is pretty good and indicates that the assembly is promoting accountability of its own body.
- xiii. Motion to vote on Resolution 23 – approved 23-0-1.
- xiv. J. Anderson said that they would take a 15 minute recess until President Pollack and VP Lombardi arrived.
- xv. The meeting was recessed at 4:58 pm.

## V. Presentations

- a. President Pollack and Vice President Lombardi
  - i. The meeting reconvened at 5:12 pm.
  - ii. M. Pollack welcomed the assembly back and presented on academic achievements and certain facets of campus life.
  - iii. U. Chukwukere said that there have been new rules and regulations put in place for fraternities and sororities, but the Campus Code of Conduct (henceforth CoC) has not yet released substantive changes such as discrimination on the basis of race or sex, and that he was wondering how these concerns would be mitigated moving forward.
  - iv. M. Pollack said that she cares deeply about the CoC like U. Chukwukere, and that she has been pushing for changes since she got here, but that the University Assembly dropped the ball last year. She added that the UA was given another chance this year, and that they have to have something by the end of this year, or otherwise the Board of Trustees will insist that she take over the process. She also said that the CJC has made some progress, and that they brought her an intermediate draft, but they do need to hurry up.

She added that she has met with the chair of the CJC and that they will be receiving some help, and that the real goal is to have a student CoC and then some statement about their commitment to free speech independent of that, which would apply to student groups and individuals.

- v. G. Martin said that on Wednesday, December 18<sup>th</sup>, M. Pollack sent out an email discussing the reforms of Greek life, and that in that email, she wrote that there are intrinsic values that come along with Greek life. He asked what cost-benefit analysis has been done to evaluate the value of Greek life against a human life, and asked whether or not the permanent suspension of Greek life on campus has been discussed.
- vi. M. Pollack said that nothing was off the table, and that there were a huge number of conversations had with stakeholders, and that the other thing she did was look into the experience of other universities. She added that her sense at the end of that is that the Greek system does exist because it has its benefits, and in principle they should be a place to learn leadership skills, though she is unsure if this is happening as much as it should. She also said that her hope is that these organizations will provide a healthy outlet for Cornell students, and that if yet another round of changes to the system doesn't fix this, then the changes are on the table again.
- vii. B. Weintraub said that he has a number of close friends in Human Ecology (henceforth HumEc), and that his impression so far is that the overwhelming opinions of faculty, staff, and students don't seem to have mattered very much for the committee, and that he wants to get a better understand of when those opinions will be taken into account. He added that people in majors such as FSAD and DEA that are unrelated to public policy are scared about the potential changes.
- viii. M. Pollack said that she understands why people are scared, and that the commitment she and Provost Michael Kotlikoff have made from the beginning is that all faculty will continue to be supported. She added that she understands that it will not completely ameliorate the concerns, and that she has to applaud the Provost with regard to listening to whom, in that he has been meeting mostly with faculty but also with alumni and students over a two-year period about how to make social sciences on this campus stronger.
- ix. J. Kroll said that he wanted to speak regarding the Greek life policy that was introduced yesterday, and that he appreciates that the Greek system needs reform like everyone else in attendance, but that he does not think that anyone is on board with the changes introduced yesterday, and that no one seems to think that they'll be as effective as the writers might think they will be. He added that people can be punished for events that are unregistered and happen on private property, and that these changes will only complicate students' friendships, invade their privacy, and leave them feeling violated. He also said that there were numerous violations that went unnoticed over rush, and that this will be no different, and asked what right the university has to disband private gatherings off-campus.
- x. M. Pollack said that what J. Kroll is telling her makes her want to go back to G. Martin and say that they have to get rid of Greek life, but that R. Lombardi is more measured about this.

- xi. R. Lombardi said that he was not at the previous night's meeting, but that he has heard a lot about it, and that he would challenge some of the assertions that J. Kroll made. He added that this is a living process that they will continue to refine and focus, and that he doesn't want to set up a situation where a student doesn't feel safe, and that they will be watching to make sure that there are no unintended consequences. He also said that the way that the monitoring and roving will work will not be a problem unless there is a problem event, and that they were more active during rush and will only check on events that seem to be in violation of six certain principles.
- xii. I. Pavlov said that there are a lot of unintended consequences that she thinks will arise from the new changes, and that both Greek and non-Greek students have come to her with concerns. She added that students bringing their own alcohol will increase binge drinking and the chance of students overdrinking alcohol, and that fraternities should have Good Samaritan laws extended to them. She also said that the rule that outlines small events as only 99 active members does not consider the realities of Greek life, where in pretty much every sorority has over 99 member, and that this rule will contribute to an unsafe and exclusive environment. She added that these rules seem dissonant from Cornell's egalitarian principles, since most chapters are unable to pay for licensed bartenders and catering alcohol, and that she has personally witnessed security being abrasive and overly touchy at events with these resources. She also said that she implores M. Pollack and R. Lombardi to look at and edit these rules on behalf of the students that reached out to her.
- xiii. M. Pollack said that she is open to tweaking the rules, but that she is not open to backing down on fundamental changes to a system like Greek life, and that it is her moral responsibility to make this safe. She added that she is open to changing the 99-person threshold, but that she is not opening to abandoning spot checks, and that they have been trying for decades to make this safe.
- xiv. I. Pavlov said that she would like to make her question more specific, and asked if the new provisions would be re-edited before they are put into effect.
- xv. R. Lombardi said that as part of his lunch today, they are open to modifying certain kinds of things such as the small events, and with regard to the large events, that is one of the broad principles where there is a question at hand. He added that they have to be able to create social outlets on this campus that are safe, and that he understands some of the socioeconomic concerns, and that he thinks that they can tweak that without getting rid of the safety provisions, and that this is something he would really appreciate open dialogue about.
- xvi. Ian Wallace said that undergraduate students were not invited back to many university committees following the Mitch McBride incident, and asked if they would be willing to invite them back.
- xvii. M. Pollack said that she doesn't know the details of that, and that she would need to look into it, and that they are working on a pretty detailed plan at this time to expand financial aid and socioeconomic diversity, but that she does not have the answer to that question right now.

- xviii. M. Haddad said that the one thing that combines all HumEc students is the human aspect, and that this is what makes them stand out, and asked how the committee is planning on preserving that human factor of all of their majors together in the process of changing the school.
- xix. M. Pollack said that the process is in the hands of her and the Provost at this point, rather than the committee, and that they are hearing accounts of what people want from HumEc and from public policy. She added that M. Haddad articulated very well what unifies HumEc.
- xx. J. Anderson asked if M. Pollack had a hard stop time, and said that there are four people remaining with questions.
- xxi. M. Pollack said that she would entertain all of them as long as each had only one question.
- xxii. K. Wondimu said that people are concerned that Greek life will be dead one day, and asked if that is something that M. Pollack would ever foresee or intend to do.
- xxiii. M. Pollack said that she thinks that there is real value in Greek life here, and that she would have landed somewhere else in the actions taken if she didn't. She added that she wants there to be a system that lives up to what it should be while also being safe, and that if they have more tragedies and people throw out the rules, they might end up there, but she does not want this to happen.
- xxiv. Y. Li said that everyone received the email about the coronavirus today, and that he knows that there was some panic about this in the parent group-chat, and asked if there is an outreach program for parents.
- xxv. M. Pollack said that what might help people calm down is that she spoke to the dean of the university's medical school, and that he believes that the likelihood of it being a threat here is incredibly minimal. She added that she wants to assure people that they are looking into it and preparing for it, but their senior medical expert doesn't think that it's a reason for panic.
- xxvi. R. Lombardi said that in terms of outreach, he sent the email from earlier today to the parent listserv, and that they are responding to inquiries. He added that the assembly's help in getting the word out to parents is appreciated, and that students got the email from their new Assistant VP for Cornell Health.
- xxvii. M. Pollack said that if anyone does spike a fever and does feel flulike, it's the middle of flu season so the likelihood would be that it is the flu, but that they should call Student Health right away.
- xxviii. V. Xu said that she wanted to give an update regarding the translation program, and that it was successfully piloted in winter graduation. She asked if students would be able to get facemasks from Cornell Health.
- xxix. M. Pollack said that it's not warranted at this point and it would just stir up panic, and that the CDC is not recommending that at this time. She added that if there were reason to do so, then they absolutely would be able to, but this is not the case at this time.
- xxx. T. Reuning said that due to current policy, the rent-free housing that RAs receive reduced financial aid, and that the current compensation for a first-semester RA is a \$500 stipend and a microfridge. He added that this is unacceptable and disproportionately benefits RAs of a higher socioeconomic

status, and that he has been hearing for a year and a half that there would be change, but that there has been no change. He asked if there will be a change.

- xxx. R. Lombardi said that they are interested in this, and that he talked to his staff yesterday about accelerating this. He added that he happened to be in a meeting with his counterparts across peer universities in January, and that this is an active topic in a lot of peer universities. He also said that this will be addressed, and that it is a tough job that is tougher today than when he was an undergraduate student, and that they need to make sure that there is not a financial disincentive, but rather the opposite.

**VI. Executive Session**

- a. J. Anderson moved the meeting to executive session at 5:48 pm.

**VII. Adjournment**

Respectfully Submitted,

*John Hannan*

Clerk of the Assembly