

# Resolution 35: Calling on Cornell to Eliminate Legacy Preference in Admissions

**Abstract:** This resolution calls for Cornell University to eliminate the usage of legacy preference in its admissions process.

**Sponsored by:** Claire Tempelman '24, Nicole Overton '23, Valeria Valencia '23, Adele Williams '24

**Reviewed by:** Academic Policy Committee, 11/30/2021, 6-0-1

**Type of Action:** Recommendation

**Originally Presented:** 12/02/2021

**Current Status:** New Business

---

**Whereas,** Cornell University currently uses the practice of legacy preference admissions, defined as preference given to applicants with a familial connection to a university, such as having a parent who is an alumnus,

**Whereas,** legacy preference admissions became prevalent during the 1920s, and was used to exclude Jewish and second-generation immigrant applicants from selective universities,<sup>1</sup>

**Whereas,** a 2020 Duke University study found that legacy preference admissions prevented the admission of more promising students, and if abolished would lead to a more socioeconomically and racially diverse freshman class,<sup>2</sup>

**Whereas,** a 2019 National Bureau of Economic Research study found that three-quarters of white legacy students, athletic recruits, and children of alumni and donors would not have been otherwise admitted at Harvard University,<sup>3</sup>

**Whereas,** in 2014 Johns Hopkins University abolished the use of legacy preference admissions, stating "It was impairing our ability to educate qualified and promising students from all backgrounds and to help launch them up the social ladder,"<sup>4</sup>

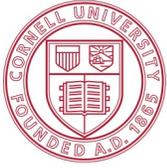
---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23055549>

<sup>2</sup> <http://public.econ.duke.edu/~psarcidi/legacyathlete.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.nber.org/system/files/working\\_papers/w26316/w26316.pdf](https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w26316/w26316.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/01/why-we-ended-legacy-admissions-johns-hopkins/605131/>



## Cornell University Student Assembly

25 **Whereas**, Johns Hopkins University saw an increase in socioeconomic diversity after abolishing  
26 legacy preference admissions, from 9% of students being Pell Grant eligible in 2010 to 19.1% in  
27 2020,<sup>4</sup>

28 **Whereas**, in 2021 Amherst College abolished the use of legacy preference admissions, stating  
29 “We want to create as much opportunity for as many academically talented young people as  
30 possible, regardless of financial background or legacy status,”<sup>5</sup>

31 **Whereas**, other peer institutions such as the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the  
32 University of California, the California Institute of Technology, Pomona College, the University  
33 of Oxford, and the University of Cambridge have either abolished or never used this practice,

34 **Whereas**, a 2010 study found that the policy of legacy admissions had no impact on alumni  
35 giving rates,<sup>6</sup>

36 **Whereas**, a 2008 study found that there was no correlation between legacy admissions and  
37 university revenues,<sup>7</sup>

38 **Whereas**, legacy students, who already have inherent advantages during the admissions process,  
39 would continue to contribute to the Cornell community even if legacy preferences are eliminated,

40 **Whereas**, in 2018 the Cornell First Generation Student Union, along with several other FGLI  
41 student organizations, submitted a letter to Pres. Pollack to “re-evaluate the purpose behind as  
42 well as the extent to which legacy preferences play a role in the college admissions process,”  
43 which received nearly 400 signatories,<sup>8</sup>

44 **Whereas**, Cornell University’s motto proclaims, “I would found an institution where any person  
45 can find instruction in any study,”

46 **Whereas**, Cornell University would continue this commitment by becoming the first Ivy League  
47 university to abolish legacy preference in admissions,

48 **Be it therefore resolved**, the Student Assembly calls on Cornell University to eliminate its  
49 practice of legacy preference admissions.

50 Respectfully Submitted,

51 Claire Tempelman ‘24

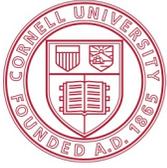
---

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.amherst.edu/news/news\\_releases/2021/10-2021/amherst-college-to-end-legacy-preference-and-expand-financial-aid-investment-to-71-million](https://www.amherst.edu/news/news_releases/2021/10-2021/amherst-college-to-end-legacy-preference-and-expand-financial-aid-investment-to-71-million)

<sup>6</sup> <https://tcf.org/content/book/affirmative-action-for-the-rich/>

<sup>7</sup> [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=1299224](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1299224)

<sup>8</sup> <https://cornellsun.com/2018/04/15/petition-to-publicize-admissions-policies-for-legacy-students-to-be-handed-to-pollack-next-week/>



Cornell University  
Student Assembly

- 52 *College of Human Ecology Representative, Student Assembly*
- 53 Nicole Overton '23
- 54 *School of Industrial and Labor Relations Representative, Student Assembly*
- 55 Valeria Valencia '23
- 56 *Vice President of Finance, Student Assembly*
- 57 Adele Williams '24
- 58 *College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Representative, Student Assembly*