

ADAM HOWELL: Welcome. Thank you all for joining us at our latest topical forum of Virtual Community, sponsored by the Employee Assembly. My name is Adam Howell. I'm the Chair of the Employee Assembly. And I'd like to, like I said, welcome you, and thank you all for being here.

Again, we're so fortunate and lucky to be able to have all of these forums this summer during such unprecedented times. And we're grateful that we're able to be a conduit of connecting information and connecting leadership with our extraordinary staff during this extraordinary time. So on these topical forums, and in on our open ones, I'd like to thank you all for joining us. We really hope that you get a lot of good information out of these.

I do want to mention, that going forward, we're going to try to extend all of our topical forums to 45 minutes. Hopefully, we can get even more information. We know that a lot of you have so many questions. And sometimes they get left on the table, but we're going to try to get as many as we can answered.

We're lucky to have a great group of panelists and our staff question askers with us today. And I will ask the Office of the Assemblies, also, to put in the chat pod for all of our attendees, the schedule going forward for the rest of the summer as it stands right now. Like I said, we've got several more topical forums going into August. And we've got our next EA open forum coming up next week. So we're looking forward to all that.

So as always, we have Mary Opperman with us. Thank you so much for joining, Mary. And I'll turn it over to you for some remarks.

MARY OPPERMAN: Great. Adam, thank you. And as always, thank you to the whole of the EA for sponsoring these forums. They're helpful, and they help me and my colleagues learn more about what's important to our employee community. So thank you very much.

I am going to just say a few things, and then have each of the other panelists introduce themselves, and then tell us a bit about themselves. So I was thinking about this forum and realizing that we're working on five months of being in the situation that we're in. That's a really long time. And certainly a lot longer than some of us thought when we left in March.

And so I think that we need to acknowledge the stress of that-- that we don't see a forward path yet. We keep-- we're hopeful. I think we all celebrate good news, and feel disappointed when things are going in the wrong direction. But one of the positives is that this has given us an opportunity to be very intentional about the community we want to be a part of, and the role that each of us wants to play. And that is, in many ways, the gift of this time-- or a gift of this time for us-- that we can decide for ourselves, and then decide collectively, what it means to be part of this community. And importantly, how we want to show up.

Because I think what I've learned-- I've talked to thousands of people during this period of time. And what I've learned is that people express how they feel differently at different times. But

eventually, we all make choices about who we want to be in a community when things are not exactly as they hoped-- we had hoped they would be. So this virtual community conversation is really, really important.

And I thank Employee Assembly for putting this on. So without further ado-- I'm going to look that word up sometime and find out what ado means. And I betcha I'll hear from some of you to tell me. I'm going to start by asking Linda Croll Howell to introduce herself, followed by Cassie Joseph, and finally, Susan Fussell. So Linda, take it away.

LINDA CROLL HOWELL: Good afternoon, everyone. And by the way, thank you to the EA for sponsoring these. I think it's really important to connect and keep us part of a community-- with community being the topic. I work in HR in a newly formed area that just was put together under Mary's great leadership and vision called Employee Experience.

And there is really four areas under Employee Experience, one of which we'll be focusing mostly on today. So there is Wellbeing, there's Talent Planning, there's Human Resources Analytics, which most of you probably have heard of that through the surveys that we do. And in fact, we have one actively out there right now that some of you may have received on. And we'd love to hear your feedback on that. And then the final area, which is a new area too, it is focusing on Talent Engagement. And I'm going to let Cassie talk a little bit about that because Cassie Joseph is the one who's overseeing that area.

And we just want to say a couple of quick things-- in all the survey work that we've done, one of the things that over and over again employees have told us is such an important part of Cornell and being part of Cornell, is the sense of community that we have at Cornell. So I think this is an incredibly important topic for us to be focusing on today. And how we can maintain something that I really think is one of the great strengths of Cornell, is that sense of community and caring that we have for each other. So I'll pass it off now to Cassie.

CASSIE PIERRE JOSEPH: Hi, everyone. I'm Cassie Pierre Joseph. And I am a part of the newly created Office of Employee Experience. I am leading the engagement piece. And when this office was created it was known and understood that helping employees connect is a very important piece of the employee experience.

And in my previous role, I've had the pleasure of creating communities through the colleague network groups, and have seen them thrive. And I'm looking forward to building a framework to support additional communities, connecting through affinity. So we're currently working on that, and look forward to sharing more about those different affinity groups that will be available to our campus community.

MARY OPPERMAN: Susan?

SUSAN FUSSELL: Hi, everybody. I'm Sue Fussell. I'm a professor in Information Science and Communication. And thank you for inviting me to be on this panel. I've always been really

interested in this topic of online community, but usually what we study is what happens if one or two people are remote. And it's an interesting challenge to think, now, what are we going to do with everybody remote? And so I'm looking forward to hearing everybody's questions.

ADAM HOWELL: Great. Well, thank you so much to all of our panelists and everybody for joining us. We really appreciate you being here and getting all this great information out. So at this time, I would like to introduce Hei Hei Depew, our Executive Vice Chair of the Employee Assembly, and she's going to be running through and curating some of the questions for us today. So Hei Hei, go ahead and take it from here.

HEI HEI DEPEW: Hello, everyone, this is Hei Hei Depew. We've collected questions from Qualtrics, and I encourage anybody participating online right now to submit questions via the Q&A function. We're going to try to get to as many of those as possible. So I'm going to start off with a question asked through the Qualtrics, which is, what are you most concerned about, as some of us are, working remotely and others on campus? I'm going to send this over to Valerie Kuramoto who answered this question online. And then we'll get responses from the panelists.

VALERIE KURAMOTO: Thank you, Hei Hei. Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you so much. And I want to thank the Employee Assembly and all of our leadership, especially Mary Opperman, who's with us every week. Thank you, Mary. Yes. My response to this question was that I wanted to say that I'm concerned about not creating a sense of us versus them, where those who are working on campus either feel resentful of those who continue to work remotely, or conversely, feel superior to those working remotely.

MARY OPPERMAN: Thank you, Valerie. And it's a great question. I'm really glad that you asked it. And I'm going to turn to some of the other panelists in a minute, but I just want to acknowledge the reality of the question that you're asking.

I do think that that's existing, and that it comes up in the frame of the differences in the kinds of work that gets done on campus. We have faculty. We have academic RTEs. We have staff. We have people who do such different work and they do it in different ways. And that requires them to be present in different ways. Knowing that doesn't necessarily mean that there isn't a sense of unfairness in the system because some people work remotely and others need to be on campus.

And the best answer-- first of all, I just think it's really important to say it out loud because pretending something isn't there doesn't move us forward past the feeling. So first of all, I just want to thank you for bringing it up. I do think that some of this can be at least addressed and acknowledged by saying we have different roles.

And so the people who have to be on campus to get their roles done, they are best protected by keeping the densification of the campus at a minimum. And that aspect of this is sometimes kind of lost in the reality that if you've got to be on campus-- if we bring people on campus who don't need to be on campus, that densification increases risk. So-- I'm going to turn it over

though to others to add. So I'm looking to see-- Linda, or Cassie, or Susan, any of you want to add to that?

LINDA CROLL HOWELL: I would agree, Mary. I think it was really important for you to say that we do need to say it out loud, that those feelings definitely are real. And people have expressed some concerns around that. And one of the things I would say is if we can go from kind of a generous mentality in thinking of saying, everyone's trying to do their best.

The decisions that are being made around who's on campus and who are not are based on what's best for the university. It's not individual or personalized. And for our continued-- and for the safety-- in trying to maintain safety-- I would say to try to recognize what other people's experience are on campus. For those who had to be there when New York state closed down-- to recognize that, that was a lot of sacrifice for them. And as good community members, doing what we can to support those individuals, and try to be as cognizant of that as possible, I think goes a really long way. So I would just add that.

MARY OPPERMAN: Thank you, Linda.

HEI HEI DEPEW: Thank you. If there are no other responses I'm going to move on to the next question. We posed the question on Qualtrics. What ideas and suggestions do you have to improve our sense of community during this time? I'm going to send it over to Ellen Miller for her response.

ELLEN MILLER: Hi. Thanks for having me. I'm happy to be here today. And I want to say that throughout this whole time I've been very fortunate to participate in many of the panel discussions, the community chats, and I appreciate the availability of information that everyone has for us. But I want to know about fun. What can we do about boosting employee morale?

This time last summer we were doing employee lawn games outside in the sun. And it was so much fun. And the community really got involved. So I'm wondering, like, what kind of virtual activities we can have that people can participate in from home and on campus? And a couple of things that I just thought of-- but please don't put me in charge of them-- a spirit week, a scavenger hunt, trivia, or even a virtual employee appreciation day, like we usually have a few times a year-- those Cornell RED days. So I think anything just to get people feeling part of that community again.

MARY OPPERMAN: Ellen, I was writing your good ideas down. I may have to follow up. I didn't get them all. So first of all, let me say, thank you, great questions. And you're right, we have focused most of our attention on-- I'm getting information out, and on dealing with the just, kind of, mind boggling amount of detail that we're trying to work through to get through this time, and now move towards reactivation.

But fun feels sometimes like it's in short supply. And here are some of the things that-- so I love your ideas-- if anybody wants to volunteer to work on them, please email me. I think everyone now on campus knows my email.

So I think they're great ideas. And what I would say is a couple of things-- one, I think we were better-- not at a macro level, but in those departments-- we were better at some of this early on. People had virtual happy hours, and they did trivia games, and things like that. But as time has gone on, and this has stretched out, I think, longer than people expected, the sort of, exhaustion of Zoom, and being apart, and the national and global situations, and issues locally, and people dealing with family issues, has kind of put a pinprick in some of that.

And so-- but, that said, I think when we find some energy to do some of these things, I get a lot of positive feedback about it-- that folks just appreciate a chance to not think about things that they have limited control over and just have a good time. And it's critically important, I think, to the idea of this community in this very extraordinary time that when we're on campus, we work really hard on this. Right?

I mean, not everybody loves everything we do, but we have employee days. You know in the fall and in the winter, we have RED days. We have awards for service and awards for excellence. We have the lawn games. We work really hard to make sure that there are moments in time where people can just celebrate one another, have some fun, see people that they haven't seen in a while. So I do think the idea of trying to recreate some of that virtually is a great, great idea, Ellen. And are you sure you don't want to volunteer?

ELLEN MILLER: I would be happy to help. I don't know if I want to be the lead. But I would be happy to help.

MARY OPPERMAN: Wonderful. Well, good. We've got one volunteer. So let me turn it over-- Linda, Cassie, Susan, anything you'd like to add?

SUSAN FUSSELL: Oh, go-- go ahead. Sorry.

CASSIE PIERRE JOSEPH: I would like to thank you for your really great ideas. I think those are marvelous. And I think those are the kind of things that we're at a point now where we can start really seeing how we can make those happen in real life. And how to make a lot of those things we used to have that would happen in person. How can we make that happen virtually?

And so as we go through this particular forum, we're thankful for the ideas. And feel free to reach out to me with ideas along those lines-- my netID is cpj25-- because we really do want to bring that sense of community in a fun way. We want to make sure that, that Cornell pride that's fun is still available to us. I'll be talking to you, Ellen.

SUSAN FUSSELL: Can I weigh in next? Or next? Yeah, I wanted to say, I appreciate this. It's such a problem. And I think it's a problem for many different groups. We even have this problem in

my lab. Like, how do we make a good experience for undergrads who are here this summer. I have about 35. Well, they're not here. They're virtually here.

And I wanted to mention that there's a lot of work suggesting that in addition to, like, explicit fun separate events, that there just be channels, or like, ways that people can engage informally over the course of the day. And we've been trying these things in my lab. I wish I could say which worked yet, but we don't know. But even just keeping an informal Zoom channel open among everybody in a group. And nobody has to interact, but you just get the feeling of being in an office. And you can joke around, or have lunch together, or something like that. And, you know, it has been shown to help.

So I just wanted to mention that. And another thing I wanted to mention, is people might find it interesting that there's these sets of games that rely on some people being in a space in person, and the others being remote. So it's actually kind of physical-ish, and kind of remote, and you can then appreciate being local and appreciate being remote because you need both sides to actually get it done. So thanks.

HEI HEI DEPEW: Thank you all. The next question that I want to get to comes from the Qualtrics. What are you most concerned about as some of us are working remotely and others are on campus? The feedback we receive from Jeff Truelsen through the Qualtrics is-- I feel disconnected from my team, my division in Cornell in general. So I'm going to send this over to the panelists to respond to this commentary.

MARY OPPERMAN: So first of all, I just want to say thank you to Jeff for raising this because I don't think he is the only one that feels that way. I think there are many advantages to an intentional strategy to work remotely, but as I said many times, this was not an intentional strategy. A pandemic hit and people were sent home.

And so that, for some people, that has worked out well. But for other people, that isn't what they would have chosen. It doesn't really work particularly well for them for a number of reasons. And they don't necessarily have easy or reliable support networks. That was their workplace. That was their support network. And finding a way to feel like they are part of a community that is very much in flux right now is very real. But I don't think we're really talking about it enough. And I'm glad that Jeff brought it up.

We have had some-- and Linda will talk about this-- Michelle Artibee's team has had some sessions on this very issue because it is extremely real and creates a lot of stress. So let me just say that is not all that obvious to me how we deal with it before we can all be back on campus. But I do think that units need to check in with people and see how they're doing. And I've said this before, if you can see a colleague-- or if you're a supervisor, one of your team members, seeming to kind of recede in the conversations, asking in a group how someone is doing is not an effective way to actually have that deep conversation.

So if you are noticing that someone is starting to pull away, or having more difficulty engaging in the way that they had been, talk to the person privately. And don't have the conversation with the intention that you have to solve their problems. Have the conversation to be present in the conversation the way you would with anyone who was dealing with something that you didn't have a complete solution to. Maybe something will emerge. But maybe, simply, realizing that you need to make more individualized connections.

And sometimes people can do that for themselves. But if you're really starting to feel disconnected, it's actually difficult to pick up a telephone and know who exactly to call or what to say. And I have been in that situation. I've had, you know, some stressful times and I haven't felt like I had the support system that I'm used to. And in some of the cases a colleague has noticed and picked up the telephone and said, are you all right?

And I've said this before-- my boss has done that. The president has said, are you OK? I'm a little worried. You know, what can I do to help? Do you need to talk it out? Do you need some time? What can I do? And, you know, sometimes just having a conversation helps. Not always.

So I think part of what I'm trying to say is let's acknowledge it first, just like we've acknowledged the other things. Let's reach out as individuals to one another. And do the best we can to be there for one another. And then, specifically-- and this where I'm going to turn it over to Linda-- we have a lot going on that is available to people. What I'm getting feedback on is we have so much available now that it's getting hard for people to find it. But we have a lot of conversation groups going on. And I'm actually going to turn that over now to Linda.

LINDA CROLL HOWELL: And, Mary, I think you did a really good job of covering it. A lot of what I was going to say, I was like, oh, she got that point and that point. So one of the things I think that Mary was saying, is this remote experience that we're having is not like any remote experience any of us have lived through.

And when we spoke with some experts on remote working-- and I know Susan mentioned this too-- typically, the research is looking at the couple of remote workers who've asked to work remotely. There's some companies that have moved to this. But this being to a place where, even if you work remotely all the time, you can't go socialize on the weekend with your friends and family like you would if you were working remotely in a normal circumstance, is incredibly isolating.

And so it's not just remote working, but you have this whole world around you that has isolated you and made you remote. And I know that people are going through roller coaster days. There's days, you know, we'll just be honest here. I sit there and I'm like, my brain's not working today. What's wrong with me? You know, is something going on with me? And I'm going to guess that everybody's gone through that. Where there's just, you know, people are feeling so overwhelmed right now. And then I have good days too. And I'm sure people have their different experiences.

And I think what Mary said is just so important-- if you're in a good day where you're-- look around you, see if there is other people on your work team that maybe you haven't heard from. Have a virtual coffee with them. Have a connection just, you know, at a human level as much as you can because I think that's a piece that we're missing.

If you're a supervisor and you haven't had some regular group meetings and one on one meetings-- really important that you're doing that. Those connection points are so important to people. And give that person a chance, one on one, if they're struggling, to let you know that. And be able to help you with resources, or to talk through what's going on.

It's really an unprecedented time. And we don't have all the answers. We're all learning through this. But I think the best we can try to do is try to be present, try to reach out to people. I know a lot of people spend time all day long in meetings. And it's hard to realize that there's a lot of other people who are not in that situation and can go the entire week without talking to another person.

So just really be cognizant of that. It's critically important. And we are-- from this survey that we sent out that some of you may have received-- we're trying to understand what people's experiences are so we can try to develop more resources and tools to support because it's going to be a while longer that we're working in this way.

HEI HEI DEPEW: Thank you. Anything from Cassie or Susan? OK. Moving on to the last question that we're going to pull from the Qualtrics responses-- this comes from Kathryn Kvasnica in regards to the question of what ideas and suggestions do you have to improve our sense of community during this time? So I'm going to turn this over to Katherine.

KATHRYN KVASNICA: Thanks, Hei Hei. And thanks everyone for being part of the panel. I am really happy to have been able to join throughout the summer. I feel like that's been really valuable. One of my thoughts, or just responses to that, is wondering about the possibility of an opt-in, kind of, voluntary program to connect colleagues who that maybe are outside of our specific departments or divisions.

So it's not Zoom meetings that we're trying to do tasks, but ones that maybe people who love hiking, or people who love cooking, or it could be something like, we have similar roles but in different departments, and so sharing ideas. So kind of just a voluntary way to kind of connect people who not only will we not run into them physically in person on campus, but there's not really a virtual way that we will run into them either.

MARY OPPERMAN: Cassie or Linda, do you want to do you want to take this?

CASSIE PIERRE JOSEPH: Sure. I could talk more about our affinity group plans. So thank you so much for sharing your answer related to this question. And I am very appreciative of the ideas you have in there in terms of the different types of groups that could come together, and how

people can connect based on different forms of affinity. We are very much in line with wanting to provide that to our community.

And what we're doing now is trying to find the right platform so that people can find one another easily, and connect with one another, and a tool that will be engaging and user friendly. And the purpose of that is so that people not only can find interests that they already have, but perhaps find a new interest. And it would be an opportunity to connect with different colleagues from across the university.

And there would be a hope that you would also be able to build friendships and connections that wouldn't be limited to just the affinity that brought you together. So as we're looking at different platforms, again, if you have ideas and suggestions of platforms that are working for you, please share them with me. And our hope, again, is to provide that so employees can develop and grow their own groups. And again, find other people to connect with on new interest.

MARY OPPERMAN: Linda or Sue?

SUSAN FUSSELL: I guess I could say that there are some interesting tools out there that I've seen, just in the past couple of weeks, that people might want to try out. And I don't know if they would scale up. I mean, Employee Assembly is really huge. Right? I mean, the whole employee phase.

But there are interesting kind of new fun things. Like, Mozilla Hubs is kind of fun. And you can have one space with rooms for different topics. And if people are kind of interested in new technology, you can wander around to the different rooms and meet people in there.

We used that for a poster session of about 80 people plus guests. And, you know, it's kind of fun. And you could build it. One thing that is interesting about it is you can build it, and you can build it to have a Cornell feel. You know? It could even look like Cornell. Or could have some other-- and you know, and there's some other things out there too. I think that companies are trying to get them out very quickly.

MARY OPPERMAN: It's a great suggestion. Thank you. I see both Linda and Cassie writing it down. So I guess, Kathryn what I want to say, is we agree with you. And as is often the case, the complexity is in how, not in the what. We agree.

And I do want to just step back and say, we agreed with this even before we all ended up-- most of us ended up-- off campus. That one of the things that we had become aware of through the surveys that Linda's group does, is that the many, many of the connections that existed on the campus were based on long, long serving people who had either lived in the same area, or new people.

But we've had quite a turnover now. And so we've got people who are relatively new to the area, and relatively new to Cornell. And it has not easy, necessarily, to find those connections organically. And we realized we needed to add them in so people could use tools that would allow them to find affinity groups. And that's what Cassie's been working on.

And we actually thought we had a platform that would work. It doesn't look like it's going to. So we're-- I wouldn't say back to the drawing board-- because the content of what Cassie's been working, we're in pretty good shape. But fingers crossed we'll find something. And anyone who has ideas, Cassie already gave you her email. So you should just send all your emails to Cassie.

HEI HEI DEPEW: Thank you. So we've concluded the Qualtrics portion. I'm going to move over to the Q&A that we're receiving live online through Zoom. Thank you all to the staff who have participated in Qualtrics and the Q&A. I want to start with a question from Christina Kaputsos, who asks, is there any initiative being put in place to foster emotional intelligence practice amongst staff or teams?

MARY OPPERMAN: So I would-- unfortunately, I don't have Kathy Burkgren here. But I know we do have programs on EQ. And so what my suggestion would be, is if you go on our website and go to the training sessions, you should be able to see what we have there. But let me broaden it beyond just a training program to say, there are a number of aspects of emotional intelligence that are just pivotal. And you can actually see the value of having worked on your emotional intelligence right now.

And so for me, I already know where some of my growth opportunities lie-- not just in emotional intelligence, but that list is very long. But on the emotional intelligence area, I have done the work and know where I need to grow. And you know what I find? Is that where I start to stumble-- if I look back-- it's some of the areas I still have work to do in. So if you find that the training programs are not what you're thinking we need, let Kathy Burkgren know, and we can see what else we can put together. Linda, did you want to add to that?

LINDA CROLL HOWELL: I think that that's correct. There might be a little bit around wellbeing that we're doing. We're spending some time-- when I say we, I'm referring to Michelle or me, who has been working a little bit with talking about wellbeing in organizations and teams. So I think that could piggyback a little bit on the emotional intelligence side of things. So I will mention this to her, as well, and maybe she and Kathy can have a conversation about that.

MARY OPPERMAN: And what we know is that people who have exercised the resilience muscle-- they know how to bounce back from difficult circumstances-- do better in times where they have very little control. And one of the challenges of the situation that we're in is that while we can control from a safety standpoint-- we can wear our masks, we can socially distance, we can stay home, we can practice hand washing and sanitizing our hands-- and we have control over that, but we don't have control over others.

And we don't have control over the macro issues. And that really drains our resilience. And so having the skills to replenish your resilience, during times like this, is incredibly important-- not just for your professional wellbeing, but for your personal wellbeing. And so I do think this is a good time to understand where you are in some of the aspects of emotional intelligence. And commit to yourself to understand them and work on them. Not sure we answered the question, but--

HEI HEI DEPEW: Thank you. Moving on to another question from the Q&A. Adriana Levy asks, would it be possible to have some events on campus, but limit it to 10 people with mandatory sign-ups?

MARY OPPERMAN: Yeah. It's a great question. Probably not right now. And I'll tell you why. We have-- when the students-- right now, we aren't ready to do that-- to be able to figure it out, manage it, police it, make sure it's safe. We're just not in that space right now.

And then we have to deal with the return of the students. So I don't see that, honestly, I don't see that in the near term. I can understand why we'd want to try. But I don't see that in the near term.

HEI HEI DEPEW: Thank you. Moving on to another question from the Q&A from Pilar Thompson. Will there be consistency when keeping regular employees working remotely? I have heard lots of people that can work remotely in their roles say, I would prefer to get back to the office, and have been asked to be let back in.

MARY OPPERMAN: Yeah. So it's a great question. We do know that for some people, working remotely does not work for them individually. And we know why-- internet problems, no space to be able to work in. So, you know, it's lovely if you have a room or a part of a room where you can do your work. But not everybody has that luxury. And in some cases, candidly, it's not safe to be home.

And so we are looking at return to work in two ways. One is, can the job and the work of the job remain remote? And then second, can the individual in that job work remotely? And so what we are finding is that for some people, they can do some of their work from home, but they cannot do all of their work from home.

And so we're beginning to take those in, and the colleges are looking at them one by one. But we need to, then, add that to our density plans. Right? Our occupancy requirements and the like. But we are getting that information, college by unit.

HEI HEI DEPEW: Thank you. Also from the Q&A, a comment, or kind of a question from Loreen Geiger, who asks, there used to be a Big Red Tour that included tours of buildings by seasoned employees and alumni that included stories and history of the buildings. Then we had lunch where more stories were shared. It was really informative, and personally, made me feel more invested in Cornell. Is there any decision about moving this to a virtual platform?

MARY OPPERMAN: What a great suggestion. So we were right in the midst of what we were calling, The Big Red Welcome. So, again, going back to where we were before this, we were seeing a fair amount of turnover. Way more than we had seen in the past. Just like everybody else, the economy was booming, people were making choices, some people were retiring, others were moving around, and so we had a lot more people coming in new. And we were reestablishing a really vibrant Big Red Welcome with the goal of trying to start that this coming year. And then all of this happened.

But I love the idea. Had not really thought about it. So I think Linda has responsibility for The Big Red Welcome, so write that one down. I hadn't really thought about the idea of trying to do it in a virtual way. So great suggestion. Thanks for that. That's fabulous.

HEI HEI DEPEW: Thank you. Another Q&A entry from online from RJ Savage. His question is, what advice or recommendations do you have of Cornell community members who are in practice being asked to be mouthpieces or apologists for the reopening plan? Neighbors and family members have been very free with their criticisms and concerns over the reopening plan, but have addressed them to individual staff members. They don't know who, or how else to respond. The Town-Gown tension feels like it has flooded, not trickled down to staff members.

MARY OPPERMAN: What a great question. Thank you for asking it. So I feel I probably get a bit of this myself. And so let me just say that I don't think individual staff members who are not part of the decision making process should feel any need to either apologize, or defend the decisions that they were not a part of. I think that puts you in a terrible position because you don't have all of the information. And it really isn't up to you.

And these are times when, you know, when we're doing the best we can. Right? We're trying to follow science. And we're trying to follow data. Trying to do the best thing for our students, and our employees, and our local community. But it doesn't mean that we are going to get everything right. And so, you know, when you get asked a question as though you can represent all of Cornell, I think the best thing to say is, I wasn't part of those decisions.

And if you've got questions, I would strongly encourage you to write to the university leadership. And the best way for them to do that is they can write to me and I'll send them along. They can write to any of the leaders that they know. Lots and lots of people are doing that. But you should feel absolutely no obligation to defend. Or if you don't-- if they're criticizing and you don't want to criticize, you don't have to do that either. You can simply say, look, I, you know, make lots of decisions at Cornell. I didn't make these.

ADAM HOWELL: So if there are no other panelists that are going to respond on that particular question, it looks like we actually ran through all the questions in the Q&A, which is great. The 15 minutes allowed us to get in a lot of live questions and regular Q&A ones. So I'm really thrilled about that. Ellen, did you want to ask--

ELLEN MILLER: Just-- maybe because it's lunch time-- but I just had a brilliant idea that we should probably figure out a way for Cornell Dairy to deliver ice cream to all the employees.

MARY OPPERMAN: Well, that's a great idea. So we'll put that one in the idea queue, Ellen. Thank you.

ADAM HOWELL: I totally agree. I could use some Cornell Dairy ice cream right now, and every day. But on that note, I want to thank you all for being here. Thank all of our staff for joining and tuning in. Of course, the Office of the Assemblies-- these wouldn't be possible without all of your great help and efforts. Mary, I want to turn it over to you if you've got anything to close us out with.

MARY OPPERMAN: So I think, first of all, let me just thank the panelists. This is a really complicated topic. And Linda and Cassie have been working hard on it. And Sue has been really generous with her time and expertise. So I really want to thank them for being here. And again, thank the Employee Assembly for everything they've been doing. I do want it-- and also the Office of the Assemblies, and also IT.

So there's lots of people that make these things happen. And you don't see them, but it just doesn't happen without them. So thank you to all of them. But I also want to say thank you to all of you. You know there's a lot of opportunity to be negative, and critical, and, actually, mean. And sometimes you just need to get that out. But I am regularly impressed by how people in our community frame their concerns and approach difficult issues with a sense of community.

And I guess I would leave you with the fact that-- or the opportunity or challenge-- that if you have colleagues who haven't quite gotten there yet, finding their space in this really complicated and sometimes disappointing time, you can help them because you demonstrate every time you ask a question. And even if the question is hard, you ask the question with an underlying belief in the overall community that you all form. Help them. Help them do that. Help them dig out from where they are. I think it's the best way we can help each other. You have a lot, a lot, you can do to support the community of Cornell. So, thank you.

ADAM HOWELL: Thank you all. And I hope you have a great rest of your day, a great week, and we'll see you next week, hopefully, at the next open forum. So take care, everybody.