

## Cornell University University Assembly

### Cornell University Assembly

Minutes of the August 21, 2020 Meeting

2:00 PM – 3:00 PM

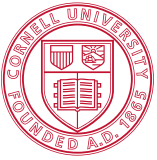
Zoom Meeting

#### I. Call to Order

- a. R. Howarth called the meeting to order at 2:00pm
- b. R. Howarth apologized for the short notice of the meeting and conveyed to the assembly that Provost Kotlikoff had notified him that he would be late to the meeting. R. Howarth stated that the Executive team had decided to proceed with the meeting beginning at 2pm and suggested that the UA spend a full hour with the Provost. This would mean that there would most likely need to be a vote for a meeting extension.
- c. A member of the assembly noted that he was not aware of the delay and would be happy to leave and come back at 2:30 if that was a preference of the assembly.
  - i. R. Howarth responded by stating that the meeting was public, and the member was welcomed to stay. In the wait for the Provost, the UA would talk in general on what to discuss with the Provost as well as a few other business items that had come up.
- d. R. Howarth stated that in terms of rules of the meeting, he would give preference to UA members to speak and ask questions. Additionally, he asked meeting attendees to not use the chat and stated that he would prefer the conversation to be fully captured in the recording without side conversations in the chat.

#### II. Roll Call

- a. *Present:* C. Duell, D. Hiner, A. Howell, L. Kenney, C. Levine, R. Mensah, J. Pea, C. Van Loan, P. Thompson, R. Howarth
- b. *Members not Present:* A. Barrientos-Gomez, K. Barth, U. Chukwukere, B. Fortenberry, A. Hong, G. Martin, D. Nyakaru
- c. R. Bensen notified the assembly that his name had not been called.
  - i. R. Howarth responded by saying that he had been informed that R. Bensen's appointment had run out as of the end of May.
  - ii. R. Bensen asked if C. Van Loan could speak to his membership.
  - iii. L. Kenney noted that there were voting members who were called who have graduated as well as other members included in the roll call whose terms had ended including those of the EA.
  - iv. R. Howarth stated that he was responding to the information as it was conveyed to him by the various assemblies. He also noted that he just received a message that Provost Kotlikoff had joined the meeting.

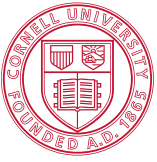


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- v. R. Bensel asked C. Van Loan once again to speak to his membership and noted that he wanted to participate in the meeting.
- vi. R. Howarth stated that R. Bensel was welcomed to participate in the meeting and C. Van Loan also pointed out that since this was a public meeting, the assembly should just proceed. R. Howarth added to that by saying that he did not believe there would be any voting taking place at the meeting and he would like to proceed to the discussion with R. Bensel.
- vii. R. Bensel rose to a question of information and noted that he had asked three times for the questions that were sent in to be sent to the members of the UA. He noted that he would like a “yes” or “no” decision on whether or not UA members were able to have access to the questions before the session begins.
  - 1. R. Howarth stated that he received a summary of the questions late in the morning and he had gone through them. His intent was to have direct questions for Provost Kotlikoff to the extent possible and to interject with questions from outside the assembly as time allowed. He had chosen not to share the questions he had received beyond those being asked.

### III. Business of the Day

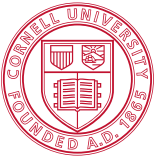
- a. R. Howarth welcomed Provost Kotlikoff. Additionally, he informed the assembly members that the UA had an emergency need to appoint more members to the UHRB panels which would be critical given campus reopening. R. Howarth also stated that he had met with P. Thompson, U. Chukwukere, J. Pea, and the Acting Judicial Administrator B. Krause in the morning and came up with a strategy. They had the power to make the emergency appointments but wanted the full UA to weigh in on the matter. R. Howarth stated that their thought was to have an online discussion over the next five days to get diverse candidates if possible with the Executive team acting in what it thought to be the best interest of the community by Wednesday. R. Howarth conveyed to the assembly that he had contacted M. Wessel of the University Council who had stated that she was almost ready to share code revisions with the UA at which point the UA would hold a public discussion on them.
- b. Discussion of recent events related to the reactivation of the campus
  - i. R. Howarth noted that the immediate context of the meeting was that the UA had received information from a graduate student who also worked as an RA in one of the dorms and was very concerned about several processes.
  - ii. Provost Kotlikoff stated that he, along with several other administrative officials including VP Lombardi and VP Opperman, had met yesterday with



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the RA representatives from North Campus. The representatives had stated their demands and concerns. Provost Kotlikoff noted that it was a terrific meeting and that these students had the best interest of other students as their core concerns. He noted that everyone was in agreement that the fundamental issues revolved around communication on what was available including PPE availability, how to get more PPE, and whether students were being constrained and their health was being put at risk. He stated that he thought all of these concerns were addressed at the meeting and noted that the entire goal was to provide individuals with the equipment, including PPE, that they needed. The second issue that was brought up was that of the stress the RA's were under some of which preceded COVID-19 and some of which related to COVID-19. The stressors were mainly being caused by being understaffed, seeing more students, being responsible for more students, and being concerned about their conditions. Provost Kotlikoff conveyed to the assembly that there was a good discussion on those issues as well and how to move towards resolving them but that those issues were more complicated, and he did not want to underestimate the significance of them. The last elements of discussion revolved around longer-term concerns including compensation and issues of hazardous pay that were more complicated. He noted that the administration was in agreement with the representatives and planned to undergo a mutual process involving starting to discuss those issues on a formal basis. The representatives had also requested that the University formally attest to that which Provost Kotlikoff noted that the administration agreed to with VP Lombardi sending a document to the students that would be publicly released soon.

- iii. Provost Kotlikoff noted that there was understandable anxiety amongst students, faculty, and staff and the administration was aiming to address the anxiety by having as much transparency as possible including the use of a COVID-19 dashboard that would give the community a color-coded alert level. He noted that there were delays in things while focusing on the health needs of the community; these delays included things like delays in student enrollment which was launching next week. He added that there was also a concern among West Campus RA's, and he planned to meet with them and VP Lombardi as well to help address their concerns. Provost Kotlikoff noted that there were several concerns that he had issues with, however. For example, in the letter from the North Campus RA's, it had been stated that quarantine students moving into their dorms before being tested was a



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significant breach of the policies. He stated that the universities assumptions did not rely on perfection and mistakes were bound to occur. The task was complicated, and the Frasier modeling took into account a lot of the mistakes and so far the university was well below its positivity rate assumptions. Some of those assumptions were that 2% of students coming from non-quarantine areas would be positive and 4% from quarantine states but the university was an order of magnitude lower than those assumptions.

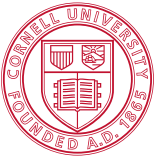
- iv. Provost Kotlikoff noted that after NY imposed its quarantining orders against several states, the university did not have the capacity to quarantine that many students, but they had accepted every student that had applied (roughly 400 students) for a need to use Cornell-provided quarantine facilities. He noted that the university did its best to address the reasonable equity concerns that faculty had. However, there were roughly 20 students that came in after the testing center had closed on the first day and were sent to their dorms along with students that had tested earlier in the day, but it was not an issue that was a significant policy breach. Provost Kotlikoff noted that he understood the anxiety but out of the 400 students, only 1-3 ended up being positive which was well beyond the positivity rate assumptions, so it was not a major policy breach.
- v. R. Howarth noted that he thought that transparency of information especially by using the dashboard would go a long way towards helping relieve anxiety.
- vi. D. Hiner thanked Provost Kotlikoff for coming to speak with the assembly and noted that it was good to know that the administration was speaking with the RA's to address some of their issues. D. Hiner stated that given the fact that the university has a high visibility in the community and nationally, what the senior administration was doing to ensure the policies were being adhered to and followed on the ground.
  - 1. Provost Kotlikoff noted that every enrolled student needed to go through a training video, a test on the training video, and then signing of a Behavioral Compact. Additional changes in ventilation within classrooms had been completed along with training videos and FAQs for students and faculty on how to behave in certain situations. Provost Kotlikoff noted that the administration was doing everything it could to maintain compliance with the understanding that 100% compliance may not be possible. Fundamental to everything would be the surveillance testing with undergraduates being tested twice a week throughout the semester and that was



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designed to pick up any infection before community spread occurred. He also noted that along the lines of compliance, the compact would be monitored by roughly 100 staff going around campus for monitoring and roughly 300 students doing peer-to-peer assessments. Additionally, there would be MPH students going around campus taking data. Lastly, Provost Kotlikoff stated that it was up to every community member to model good behavior and say something when they observe rules being broken. There would be anonymous means of reporting members not adhering to the rules. Provost Kotlikoff also stated that the language of the code also including room for judicial code violations to be brought forth against individuals breaking the compact. He also mentioned that the systems in place (testing, daily health checks, etc.) were there to minimize transmission but if they were not working, the university would shut down based on the data.

2. R. Howarth stated that when the UA Executive team meet with B. Krause earlier, she had said that there were half a dozen cases that had been referred to her for extreme behavior and noted that it was a sign that the system was working at some level.
- vii. L. Kenney stated that she knew starting September 2<sup>nd</sup>, there would be various testing locations across the board. However, right now for arriving students signing up for testing, the site said there was no availability but technically individuals could still show up to get testing. L. Kenney asked if that had been communicated to the community and at least in the Law School and graduate programs, it had not been, and Cornell Health had to be called for clarifications.
1. Provost Kotlikoff noted that the initial problem was that students were signing up for more than one date, but they were not showing up so that issue was eliminated. However, what was still occurring was that students would signup but not show up. The university was now opening up more slots for individuals to arrive and take a test without having to signup for an appointment in addition to opening up more appointments in general. Provost Kotlikoff stated that he believed it was getting communicated to all students to not worry about signing up but to rather just go but he would need to verify.
- viii. L. Kenney asked if students with Cornell health insurance were able to go to the other testing sites such as the mall or Wegmans.



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1. Provost Kotlikoff said that the mall location was run by Cayuga Medical and his understanding for that was individuals needed to have a medical order to go there and be tested. If an arriving testee were to show up without a specific appointment or connection there, he did not think they would test the individual. However, for move-in his understanding was that it had been arranged. Starting Sunday for move-in, parents could drive-in, but Provost Kotlikoff noted that he was not completely certain. Another meeting attendee confirmed that it was indeed accurate. Provost Kotlikoff noted that they had heard the issue that students would be tested on arrival but would not be tested again until September 2<sup>nd</sup> and the university had added another testing time between those two periods to address the issue.
  2. Provost Kotlikoff noted that they were doing arrival testing which would be the nasopharyngeal swab conducted when the test was conducted at Cayuga Medical. Then there would be a shift to the surveillance testing at the Vet school and it would be faster and started before September 2<sup>nd</sup>.
- ix. R. Bensele noted that one of the RA's concerns was that there was no Director of Residential Life with the position being vacant for several months and asked what work was being done to fill that position.
- a. Provost Kotlikoff stated that he did not know and that it did not come up as an issue from his meeting with the RA's.
  - b. R. Bensele emphasized that he was not speaking for the RA's, rather he knew some of them who had been expressing those concerns.
- x. R. Bensele asked when the RA staff vacancies would be filled and as he understood it there were 9 RA's in one of the dorms for more than 400 students.
1. Provost Kotlikoff noted that pre-COVID-19, a year ago, there had been an effort to comprehensively look at the RA position. He stated that VP Lombardi had initiated this move and felt that there were many improvements that could be made with Cornell's RA program. The process had started but was set aside with all the work going on with COVID-19. What the administration had worked towards with the RA's was reinvigorating the discussion and empowering the RA's to take part in the discussion. He also noted that one of the RA's demands were to suspend the requirement of



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RA's meeting with every student due to the understaffing issues. The administration had agreed to the demand and Provost Kotlikoff noted that although it was not a perfect solution, it did go towards helping with staffing.

- xi. R. Bensei noted that another concern he had heard about was that the maintenance staff in the dorms were not wearing masks or following proper protocol. He noted that this move endangered students while belittling the protocols and weakening general compliance.
  - 1. Provost Kotlikoff stated that he had not heard that and what he did hear from the faculty on West Campus was that the noncompliance was associated with staff that were outside such as Big Red Moving. He said that the administration had raised the issue with the individuals and did not hear anything about SCL staff not following protocols, but he would follow-up with VP Lombardi.
  - 2. R. Bensei added that he did not know if the concern was accurate but that it was first-hand given to him from RA's.
- xii. R. Bensei noted that his understanding was that the protocols for the dorms were not publicly posted and told Provost Kotlikoff that he believed posting the protocols publicly would be helpful to the students.
  - 1. Provost Kotlikoff stated that the issue did come up and the administration resolved to provide posters of the behavioral guidelines that RA's could use.
- xiii. R. Howarth stated that one of the questions that had come up was that in an email dated yesterday, it was noted that graduate students were required to participate in surveillance testing, but the next paragraph indicated that they would be notified through the Daily Check website. The problem, however, was that not all graduate students were enrolled in the Daily Check since most grads were not authorized to come back to campus and that seemed like a glaring omission in the plan.
  - 1. Provost Kotlikoff stated that every student would receive a Daily Check email and that would allow members to respond whether they are on campus or not. The only way of not getting a Daily Check would be by opting out as a residential student. He noted that so far it seemed like 70% of students were planning on returning which would de-densify the dorm and provide some advantageous. He added that there would also be an opt-in for graduate students who were student facing with graduate students being tested once a week or once every other week depending on the level of involvement.

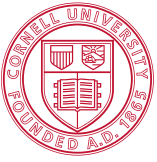




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- xiv. L. Kenney noted that as for the protocols being put up in the residence halls, would it also be emailed out to student. Secondly, L. Kenney asked about mental health since many students were in Ithaca but may not be coming to campus and if Provost Kotlikoff knew about any efforts to address mental health through either CAPS or other avenues.
  - 1. Provost Kotlikoff stated that he would take to staff in SCL to make sure the protocol was emailed to students. On the issue of mental health, he noted that this was a major issue for them especially considering students would be in their rooms much more. One of the solutions that SCL was taking was having online activities for students to join and alleviate stress along with feelings of isolation. Provost Kotlikoff noted that he would be talking to VP Lombardi to address that particular question and see what SCL was doing to help address mental health specifically.
  - 2. L. Kenney stated that it might be beneficial to have some sort of pen pal structures and have students correspond with each other to try to keep them connected but noted she did not know who to contact.
  - 3. Provost Kotlikoff conveyed to L. Kenney that emailing the VP for Undergraduate Education, L. Nishii who had also been thinking about the race and equity issues, would be beneficial.
- xv. M. Artibee, Director of Workforce Wellbeing, noted that in her purview was the handling of family life, emotional support for faculty and staff, and the wellness program which handled physical support. M. Artibee noted that on their end, her office was doing everything it could to address mental health for employees and help them through this time. M. Artibee stated that she was seeing a toll on faculty and staff and had never interacted with this many faculty and staff on issues of mental health and exhaustion. She noted that something she wanted to encourage everyone to keep in mind was that not every individual needed therapy or group support. She added that people were exhausted and struggling with their workload, and while there could be lots of support services, there would also need to be investments in the ongoing self-sustaining work that people could do. M. Artibee also noted that her office dealt with domestic violence issues people were facing and stated that the local agency had experienced a 50% increase in hotline calls in Tompkins County and they were seeing that at Cornell as well.
  - 1. Provost Kotlikoff responded to M. Artibee and noted that he did understand the stress and was worried about the underlying issues.

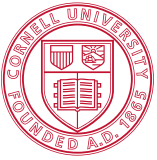




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He also added that he wanted to do a better job of raising those issues more often.

- xvi. A meeting attendee stated that from her understanding, the students that were coming back this Sunday, would be quarantining until they received their test results which was good. However, what was concerning for her was that they would still be sharing spaces such as restrooms and hallways with students still in quarantine. Additionally, for students that received a false negative, the attendee asked if there was any way to extend the quarantining past the one day after they receive their test back.
  - 1. Provost Kotlikoff stated that the ideal situation would be that if there were enough hotel spaces, every individual student could have quarantine conditions where they would have their own room and bathroom. However, that was not a possibility because there were not enough rooms in the area and the university was reluctant to put students in Syracuse or Binghamton. The science was that if an individual wore a mask and was not within 6ft of someone else for 15 minutes, the likelihood of transmission was not 0, but very low. The shared restrooms and hallways were something the university did not believe was a considerably large risk if individuals wore masks and socially distanced as much as possible.
  - 2. Provost Kotlikoff noted that most false negatives, which could be anywhere from 10-30% with the university's model assuming 20%, were either from inappropriate sampling or insufficient viral loads at the time of testing. The university's system was setup to identify individuals as soon as possible with regular testing and would pick up individuals soon after exposure that were not infectious due to low viral loads. He noted that there wasn't really a better way to go about that other than quarantining members indefinitely. The best approach to false negative individuals was mask wearing and social distancing. In addition, he conveyed that there was no 0 risk situation and even if the campus were closed, students would still be returning to Ithaca. The second testing window between move-in and the start of the semester would also help detect students who were false negatives.
- xvii. R. Mensah noted that there were students coming back on the 26<sup>th</sup> and that also happened to be the first day of enrollment with seniors starting at 9 am. R. Mensah asked how students were expected to simultaneously move-in and sign up for classes.



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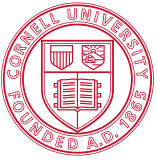
1. Provost Kotlikoff stated that he was not sure and said he would ask VP Nishii. He noted that it seemed possible for the timing to work out since it was a serial enrollment, but he would forward the concern to VP Nishii.
- xviii. R. Mensah also noted that students had received an email from the University Registrar about the deadline for Checklists being the upcoming Sunday in order to enroll. She noted that the checklist also included scheduling a test but some dates were not available so students were unable to signup and asked how students would be able to secure an enrollment if their testing dates were unavailable.
  1. Provost Kotlikoff addressed the concern and noted that his understanding was that the additional slots would be opened for that issue, but he would also check on it. He noted that slots were being opened for the arrival test so those should be available, but he would check on it.
- xix. An attendee said from some of the graduate students he had talked to, they were not receiving the Daily Check emails and from his understanding, that was because they were not cleared to be on campus. He asked if the plan was to enroll all students in the Daily Check program and how it was all taking place.
  1. Provost Kotlikoff stated that he believed everyone would get the Daily Check-in and have the opportunity to opt-out, but he would need to confirm them.
- xx. A meeting attendee asked why Cornell fundamentally thought it could pull this off with many other universities showing the difficulties of managing the pandemic. Additionally, she noted that if and when things went poorly she had not heard any plans on how things would play out in that scenario and how would students be sent home responsibly without making people sicker.
  1. Provost Kotlikoff noted that every university was different. In the case of UNC, they had a plan that did not include gateway testing, surveillance testing, and a student body of 35,000 students. He noted that Cornell in contrast, had built a lab and the additional capacity to do much more testing and identify positives before they spread. He added that a lot of the larger schools had decided to roll the dice on opening without comprehensive plans. He stated that the university was not being hubris in its reopening efforts but was planning on looking at all the data on a daily basis and making decisions off of



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the data. In addition, the university would have a green, yellow, orange, and red color code along with all the changes that would be made as the situation changed. In the event of going to the red zone, the university would look at all the ways of successfully and safely shutting down. However, it would not be just the cases that could trigger a shutdown but things such as a lack of testing availability and quarantine space could also trigger a shutdown. He stated that the university had done the work to put in protective barriers such as surveillance testing to minimize risks as much as possible and said that the university was not so committed to its system that it would not be willing to change it when necessary.

2. The attendee asked if Provost Kotlikoff could provide numbers of cases or deaths that correlated to the color scale.
  3. Provost Kotlikoff said that for red, one of the numbers decided on through modeling was 250 new cases in a week which would act as a trigger for possible shutdown after looking at all other parameters. He also added that health and safety were the priority.
  4. The attendee asked if there was also a number of deaths of students and faculty that would trigger a shutdown.
  5. Provost Kotlikoff said there were no death numbers, and the university would be trying to keep the number of sick individuals to a minimum.
- xxi. L. Kenney noted that she had heard from community members being concerned about students or parents from high-risk states breaking quarantine rules and asked if senior administration had been in contact with the greater Ithaca community and if senior administration was prepared to be in contact with not just the UA but the various constituent groups on campus.
1. Provost Kotlikoff said that the administration was in contact with the community through events such as town halls. Additionally, President Pollack had attended a meeting this week with community leaders of color with senior administration also regularly talking with community legislators and health officials. He added that there was a lot of community support for Cornell's reopening along with the anxiety. There were many people that recognized that if Cornell did not open, it would have a massive impact on the community.
  2. VP Malina also added that he had staff in community relations that held regular office hours that were open to the general public. In



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addition to the town hall mentioned by Provost Kotlikoff, there had been individual neighborhood town halls as well along with conversations with municipal leaders. In regard to the UA and assembly relations, VP Malina noted that the administrations goal was to be transparent with the assemblies and would be willing to attend meetings whenever there was an invitation to do so.

### IV. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 3:16pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Office of the Assemblies