



Cornell University Student Assembly

Cornell University Student Assembly

Minutes of the Thursday, February 8, 2018 Meeting
4:45pm-6:30pm in Willard Straight Hall: Memorial Room

I. Call to Order & Roll Call

- a. J. Kim called the meeting to order at 4:45 pm.
- b. Roll Call:
 - i. *Present*: D. Barbaria [0], A. Chowdhury [1], O. Corn [0], V. Devatha [1], O. Din [2], O. Egharevba [0], H. Hassan [2.75], R. Herz [5], M. Indimine [1.5], S. Iruvanti [0], G. Kaufman [0], J. Kim [0], S. Lim [0], L. Lipschutz [4.25], D. Nyakaru [0], G. Park [0], M. Peralta-Ochoa [1], E. Shapiro [1], J. Sim [1], I. Wallace [1]
 - ii. T. Ball (*unexcused*) [0.25], R. Cornell (*excused*) [1.5], L. Lipschutz (*excused*) [4.25], S. Park (*excused*) [1.5], S. Romero Zavala (*excused*) [0], C. Schott (*excused*) [1.25], D. Tokunboh (*excused*) [2.5], M. Valadez (*excused*) [1]

II. Presentations

- a. Campus Sustainability Office
 - i. Sustainability Engagement Manager Kimberly Anderson presenting.
 - ii. K. Anderson presented Recyclemania to the Assembly.
 1. Recyclemania is a competition between colleges and universities reducing overall waste and ensuring that waste that is made is sorted and diverted appropriately.
 - iii. V. Devatha asked whether electronics disposal and recovery is only an available option in a time period previously referenced by K. Anderson.
 1. This weekend is March 12th through 16th.
 - iv. K. Anderson responded in the affirmative.
 - v. V. Devatha asked what students who wish to safely and sustainably dispose of electronics should do in the long term in this regard.

- vi. K. Anderson said that recycling electronics is a possibility year-round on campus, including in locations such as the Cornell Store. She also referenced the Campus Sustainability Office's (henceforth CSO)'s intent to spread awareness of battery disposal and plastic recycling locations on campus through the Cornell Maps system.
- vii. V. Devatha asked of his fellow Student Assembly members how many had previously encountered the Cornell Maps system.
 - 1. Some members, though fewer than half, indicated that they had.
- viii. I. Wallace requested that K. Anderson remain in the Memorial Room for a few minutes following her presentation for a conversation regarding a committee that he is a member of.

III. Open Microphone

- a. No speakers at the open microphone.

IV. New Business:

- a. Resolution 28: Puerto Rico Debt and Disclosure
 - i. Rahul Mukherjee said that the Cornell University administration must increase transparency in regard to its partnerships, citing Harvard University, Yale University, and Princeton University as Ivy League institutions that are more transparent with their partnerships. He also said that Cornell should reconsider its partnerships, and that it would be unethical for the University to profit of Puerto Rican debt holdings.
 - ii. V. Devatha asked whether or not another institution would pick up any Puerto Rican debt holdings should Cornell divest, and also asked a question regarding lobbying Congress to make a change in this regard at the federal level.
 - iii. Zachary Schmetterer said that if Cornell were to divest, the debts would go back onto the open market, and that students all over the Ivy League are addressing the issue of Puerto Rican debt holdings. He also said that other organizations employ full-time lobbyists, and that the Student Assembly should first direct their attention to the resolution, and once support builds up further, that attention should be directed toward federal change.
 - iv. V. Devatha inquired as to whether there has been a concerted effort across the Ivy League to address this issue, and whether or not this is the sort of thing that Hedge Clippers is doing.

- v. Z. Schmetterer said that Hedge Clippers is a research institution that seeks knowledge on the operation of hedge funds. He also said that this and other organizations addressing this issue are cited in the resolution's evidence packet, in a letter addressed to President Martha Pollack in October of 2017
 - 1. This letter can be found starting on page 27 of the evidence packet of Resolution 28.
- vi. J. Anderson commended the work that Christopher Arcé in particular put into this resolution, and motioned to amend the resolution such that C. Arcé's name would be at the top.
 - 1. Amended unanimously.
- vii. T. Ball asked Z. Schmetterer whether or not there is any way to view open-market data (aside from Cornell giving full transparency) to see if Cornell has divested from Puerto Rican debt holdings. He also asked whether or not Hedge Clippers had yet received a response from the administration regarding the aforementioned October letter.
- viii. Z. Schmetterer said that he did not recall hearing of a formal response, and that one would be appreciated. He also said that because of the confidentiality policy, it is likely that student will never be able to access information regarding the specific holdings.
- ix. T. Ball said that in the past, the Student Assembly has passed resolutions asking the University to divest from non-sustainable forms of energy, and whether or not there was anything that the Assembly should add to the resolution as to get a response from the University.
- x. Gina Giambattista made a statement regarding community input on divestment from fossil fuels, and said that while Cornell did not divest, the Board of Trustees did debate and make amendments to their policies due to the community-wide input and support for such an endeavor.
- xi. V. Devatha asked G. Giambattista whether or not the resolution needs to be passed unanimously in order for it to be brought before the Board of Trustees.
- xii. G. Giambattista said that this was not necessary, and that the fossil fuels resolution became an amplified, community-wide issue.
- xiii. J. Kim talked about President Pollack's response to SA Resolution 14, and that while Cornell takes that issue seriously, that certain stipulations in the resolution would violate their confidentiality

agreement. He further explained that Baupost may also have a confidentiality agreement with Cornell.

1. The Baupost Group is a hedge fund with investments in Puerto Rican debt holdings, the president of which is Seth Klarman '79.
- xiv. D. Barbaria asked whether or not Joel Malina, who the organizers of the resolution had spoken to previously, gave any indication of a university response.
- xv. Z. Schmetterer said that he is awaiting a response, and that J. Malina expressed interest in a meeting next week.
- xvi. C. Schott recommended that the proponents of this resolution set up structures that would continually press the administration on this issue, since Cornell still has not divested in the past, even when the voice of the entire campus was raised. He also asked whether or not the proponents had communicated with other universities.
- xvii. R. Mukherjee said that he is part of an organization that meets with representatives of other Ivy League institutions and that this organization is meeting at Cornell this year. He voiced his intent to have conversations about outreach efforts, and that more updates in this regard will come in the future.
- xviii. A member said that the Student Assembly must vote on this resolution, and that the issue at hand is of neocolonialism as well as finances.
- xix. S. Iruvanti asked what the Student Assembly could do to further address this issue once the resolution is passed.
- xx. Z. Schmetterer advised that the Assembly reach out to organizations on byline funding, and to try to get more assemblies to look at this resolution and pass similar ones.
- xxi. C. Schott asked that people particularly interested in this cause continue to put pressure on the administration in this regard as time goes on.
- xxii. S. Iruvanti asked the executive board whether or not the Assembly could work with Dustin Liu to bring this resolution to the attention of the Board of Trustees once it is passed.
 1. Dustin Liu is a student-elected trustee.
- xxiii. J. Kim responded in the affirmative.
- xxiv. S. Iruvanti said that it could be beneficial for this to go through other assemblies as well, in the name of expediency.
- xxv. Z. Schmetterer said that even though people are passionate about this issue, it might be best for this resolution to be tabled such

that someone from another organization speak in regard to the resolution.

- xxvi. J. Kim said that he would send emails following this meeting to Joel Malina, President Pollack, and the provost to ask administration representatives to speak in regard to this resolution at the next Student Assembly meeting.
- xxvii. A community member asked to what extent the Student Assembly could investigate Cornell's endowment holdings, and recommended that the Assembly investigate other potentially unethical holdings the University might have.
- xxviii. G. Kaufman stated the importance of the amount of money that Cornell may have invested in Baupost, saying that Baupost brings Cornell a higher-than-average rate of return on investment, and that if this investment were to be moved to something else, then the resulting impact on the annual operating budget could be worth millions of dollars lost. He clarified that he intends to vote on this issue and that the finances do not outweigh the morality, but that if Cornell invests in something with a lower rate of return, then many good programs will go unfunded.
- xxix. Z. Schmetterer said that Harvard is Baupost's biggest investor, and that their investment is worth \$40 million, and that Cornell's is therefore likely to be in the range of \$1 million to \$10 million. He said that if Cornell divests and ends up investing in an organization with a lower rate of return, there won't be much effect on the endowment.
- xxx. G. Kaufman said that since typical hedge fund investments are \$20 million, Cornell would lose at least \$2 million of endowment, since 10% is the average rate of return. He also remarked that the actual investment is likely to be more, since Seth Klarman recently donated a building to Cornell.
 - 1. The building referenced is Klarman Hall on Cornell's Central Campus.
- xxxi. Z. Schmetterer said that they do not know how much was invested, and that he is awaiting the results of the due diligence investigation, and that he is confident that they can move forward on this issue regardless.
- xxxii. A community member expressed his full support for the resolution.
- xxxiii. O. Din voiced his support for the resolution.
- xxxiv. Natalia Hernandez '21 voiced her support for the resolution.

xxxv. J. Kim closed discussion and automatically moved the resolution to next week's Business of the Day, and that by that time he will hopefully have heard from an administrator to talk and answer questions.

xxxvi. Tabled with a majority.

V. Approval of Minutes

- a. Motion to approve the minutes of the February 1st Student Assembly meeting – approved 21-0-0

VI. Announcements and Reports

- a. Dining Committee Liaison
 - i. O. Egharevba said that the Dining Committee had its first meeting on Tuesday, and that a focus group came to the meeting and spoke in regard to long term plans, especially in reference to the University Housing Master Plan and the necessary changes in dining as a result. He also mentioned his support for late-night dining, a proposal brought up in the Committee meeting.
- b. Health and Wellness Committee
 - i. O. Corn said that the Health and Wellness Committee has not yet met this semester, but at their last meeting in Fall 2017, the Committee was focused on the upcoming tobacco referendum.
 1. This referendum, if successful, will launch a two-year initiative for the Ithaca campus of Cornell University to become tobacco-free.
- c. Environmental Committee
 - i. T. Ball said that he was unable to attend the most recent meeting of the Committee, but that last semester, the Committee was working on three "green" initiatives.
 1. Keeping track of how many plastic bottles are used on campus.
 2. Imposing a tax on plastic water bottles sold on campus.
 3. Turning off the lights that are often left on in academic buildings at night.
 - ii. V. Devatha asked if the Committee was working with Take Back the Tap.
 - iii. T. Ball responded in the negative, saying that the initiative is similar, but that its main goal is to tax plastic water bottles and use the resulting revenue to subsidize the cost of reusable water bottles on campus.

- iv. G. Kaufman stated his doubts regarding the efficacy and use of a tax on water bottles, saying that it would make water more expensive for people.
- v. V. Devatha advised T. Ball to take messages such as that from G. Kaufman back to the Environmental Committee, since he is the “bridge” between it and the Student Assembly. He also said for T. Ball not to take G. Kaufman’s comments as a personal attack.
- vi. D. Barbaria told G. Kaufman to go to the Committee meeting and reach out to the chair if he has objections.
- d. City and Local Affairs Committee
 - i. The Student Assembly currently has no representation on this committee at this time; V. Devatha said that any interest should be vocalized.
- e. Academic Policy Committee
 - i. C. Schott was unable to attend the meeting, but will be at this weekend’s meeting. He also referenced two policies still on the table from last semester.
 - 1. The display of class means on transcripts.
 - 2. New policies regarding finals.
 - ii. O. Egharevba mentioned a poll designed to measure students’ opinions regarding course pre-enrollment, so as to improve the system. He also voiced his personal dislike for the system as it stands.
 - iii. E. Shapiro was unable to attend the meeting.
- f. Financial Aid Review Committee
 - i. M. Valadez said that the Committee is continuing its discussion regarding its potential return to byline funding, as well as the potential use of endowment funds to create a third branch of the Financial Aid Review Committee that would grant short-term loans to low-income students, particularly to aid in down payments for off-campus housing. She also said that the Student Experience Grant goes live in one month, and requested assistance in advertising this.
- g. Appropriations Committee
 - i. G. Kaufman said that the Committee is currently reviewing the results of byline voting from Fall 2017, and that they have not yet met this semester due to a lack of tasks to accomplish. He also referenced Slope Day, and that the Slope Day Programming Board (henceforth SDPB) requested \$20,000 of funding for Slope Day 2018.

- ii. R. Herz said that the Student Assembly's Slope Day liaison is not recognized by the SDPB, and that \$10,000 of the money that the SDPB has requested would go to the purchase of water bottles for attendees.
 - 1. This cost was formerly subsidized by Cornell Dining, but the organization no longer has the money to do this.
 - iii. V. Devatha mentioned that the Student Assembly does not have the money to fulfill this request.
 - iv. G. Kaufman asked if the Assembly could appoint R. Herz as the Slope Day liaison.
 - v. T. Ball said that he is the liaison, but that communication between the SDPB and the Student Assembly has been minimal.
 - h. Infrastructure Fund Committee
 - i. I. Wallace referenced a resolution regarding gender-neutral bathrooms, as well as public support for the creation of a crosswalk near Risley Hall.
 - i. Communications Committee
 - i. S. Lim said that the Committee has a new website and are taking new photos of Student Assembly members.
 - ii. J. Sim said that all members should have been added to the website by now.
 - iii. V. Devatha said that chairs of committees will be reached out to by a member of the Communications Committee in the near future.
 - j. Elections Committee
 - i. Travis Cabbell said that there are two candidates for Minority Liaison At-Large, and that campaigning could begin at 7:45 pm that night. He also said that Student Assembly members are able to endorse candidates, and that the Committee is working toward spring elections, which will happen in early March.
 - k. Diversity and Inclusion Committee
 - i. M. Valadez referenced the prospect of having a diversity and inclusion conference, which would bring in emerging leaders of byline organizations to share diversity initiatives they have come up with. She mentioned that the projected time period for the conference is fast approaching, and asked that anyone who knows of organizations with good diversity and inclusion initiatives to contact her.
 - 1. The projected time period for the conference is the end of February.
 - l. Net-Print Task Force Committee

- i. J. Sim said that the task force will be meeting for the first time on Tuesday, and that there are seven members so far. He also said that the Residential Student Congress will be joining the meeting.
- m. Culturefest
 - i. J. Kim asked that anyone interested in getting involved with Culturefest to reach out to him or M. Valadez.

VII. Adjournment

- a. J. Kim adjourned the meeting at 6:33 pm.

VIII. Executive Session

Respectfully Submitted,
John Hannan,
Clerk of the Assembly