S.A. Resolution #23

Establishing the Position of the Vice President of Oversight, Accountability, & Reform and the Creation of the Oversight, Accountability, & Reform Committee

ABSTRACT: This resolution seeks to create the executive position of the Vice President of Oversight, Accountability & Reform and the Committee of Oversight, Accountability, & Reform.

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Content Warning: This resolution mentions sexual harassment (specifically lines 38-39).

Whereas, the Student Assembly is not immune to concerns regarding: oversight, blind spots in accountability, and lack of needed reform;

Whereas, the concerns of oversight, accountability, and reform permeates and pertains to all committees and assembly members;

Whereas, oversight, accountability, and reform are intrinsically tied to one another;

Whereas, oversight is needed to: inform the general public and ensure that assembly policies reflect the public interest; gather information to develop new legislative proposals or to amend existing resolutions; ensure executive compliance with constitutional intent;

Whereas, accountability is needed to: empower members, groups, or committees to not only recognize the critical gaps between current and desired results, but to also take ownership for closing those gaps;

Whereas, reform is needed because: democracy is imperfect and the Cornell Student Assembly has living breathing governing documents, and therefore requires constant maintenance and internal changes to reflect the corrections to those imperfections and the shifting of needs for our constituents;

Whereas, this is not a direct effect from the actions taken by specific assembly members or committee chairs, rather concerns coming from committees, committee presenters, and the general voting body in very recent history regarding, but not (in the slightest) limited to;

1. Racist and sexist dog whistle terminology used by committee members when referencing presentors;
2. Behavior resembling sexual harassment by Assembly members to other members of the Assembly and/or members outside of the Assembly;
3. Comments about fellow Assembly members that are perceived as derogatory, circulating intra-assembly;
4. Certain conduct and behavior exhibited by committee chairs;
5. The demographic composition of certain committees;
6. The low retention rates of people of color on both committees and the Assembly;

1 https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/97-936.pdf
2 https://www.partnersinleadership.com/insights-publications/why-is-accountability-so-important/
7. Apportionment of the college based seats when compared to the number of students in each college; 3
8. Disruptive behavior during committee meetings towards presentors; 4
9. Rude behavior while citing future committee decisions outside of the formal S.A forums; 5
10. The historic underlying distrust of the Student Assembly, its intent, and actions on campus.

Whereas, we advocate for and endorse personal accountability when addressing others actions— and recognize that there are some actions that should not be left up to a singular member to address;

Whereas, we understand that each committee and member practices oversight, accountability, and reform individually or in collective ways—but we also know the value of a holistic sense of oversight.

Whereas, there is no standardized system and accompanied person in place to address sensitive concerns that impact the innate nature and dynamic composition of the assembly;

Whereas, the Vice President of Oversight, Accountability & Reform (VP of OAR) will have a system set up to address related external and internal complaints that are seen as affecting the day-to-day or holistics functions of the assembly in terms of oversight, accountability, and reform;

Whereas, the position would not resemble a human resource department in a corporate office, the likes of risk management, a codified form of therapy, or an outlet for emotional or mental relief—rather it will function as a source of advocacy, a voice for Student Assembly’s accountability, and an avenue to create intra-reform assembly;

Whereas, historically, these unique concerns of reform and oversight have been unfairly burdened upon the President, Parliamentarian, and Executive Archivist—in which it is none of their duties or responsibilities;

Whereas, the holder of this seat will not be the standard bearer of ethics or morality, rather will act as (1) a form of oversight that has not been given and can not be had until the creation of this position; (2) an internal monitor for accountability when addressing potentially sensitive subjects; and (3) an avenue of reform for the Student Assembly bylaws, internal conduct, Charter, and potential future governing documents;

Whereas, an investigation, fact finding action, or inquiry at the behest of the Committee of Oversight, Accountability, & Reform will not be viewed as a strictly bad inquiry—rather an expressed want to better our Assembly;

Whereas, due to the nature of an inquiry or investigation by the Committee of Oversight, Accountability, & Reform—meetings will be closed to the public and members will be required to sign non-disclosure agreements (NDAs).

5 https://cornellsun.com/2017/11/14/students-criticize-s-a-conduct-at-community-engagement-forum/
Therefore be it resolved, the Cornell Student Assembly establish the Committee on Oversight, Accountability, and Reform—to be chaired by the newly established Vice President of Oversight, Accountability, and Reform;

Be it further resolved, that the Student Assembly Bylaws, Article II, Section 1 be amended to read:

The officers of the SA shall be a President, an Executive Vice President, a Vice President of Internal Operations, a Vice President for Finance, a Vice President of External Affairs, a Vice President of Diversity and Inclusion, a Vice President of Oversight, Accountability, and Reform, a Director of Elections, a Parliamentarian, and an Executive Archivist. These officers shall perform the duties prescribed by this Charter and by the parliamentary authority adopted by the SA.

Be it further resolved, that the Student Assembly Bylaws, Article III, Section 7 be amended to read:

Article 7: Vice President of Oversight, Accountability, and Reform

1. The responsibilities of the Vice President of Oversight, Accountability, and Reform are as follows
2. Chair the Oversight, Accountability, and Reforms Committee;
3. Establish the working rules of the Oversight, Accountability, and Reform Committee that are distributed to the entire Student Assembly (including committee members) and undergraduate students elected directly to the University Assembly to ensure transparency;
4. To lead the investigations, inquiries, and/or fact finding actions at the behest of the Oversight, Accountability, and Reform Committee with as much discretion and anonymity as possible and used when needed;
5. To, when necessary, report findings and recommendations for actions to be made to the Student Assembly;
6. Work in conjunction with the Vice President of Internal Operation to oversee all attendance and outreach requirements;
7. Work with the Parliament and Executive Archivist to annually evaluate the appropriation of college seats, the creation of positions, and the overall composition of the Student Assembly;
8. Work in conjunction with the Vice President of Finance to assist, if needed, with oversight of Byline funded organizations including: funding/ spending research and Appendix B recommendations;
9. Work with the Vice President of External to coordinate any public release of reports, if deemed necessary and in the most appropriate way possible.

Be it further resolved, that the Student Assembly Standing Rules, Section 2, Subsection B, Rule 10 be amended to read:

10. At the discretion of the Vice President of Oversight, Accountability, and Reform—requests can be issued in ordered to appear before the Committee to any and all Student Assembly members or directly elected undergraduate representatives to the UA in efforts to fact find, investigate, or inquiry as seen needed by the Oversight, Accountability, and Reform Committee.
Be it further resolved, that the Student Assembly Bylaws, Article V, Section 3 be amended to read:

The Executive Board shall hold meetings at least once a week during the academic year. Special meetings of the Board may be called by the Executive Vice President and shall be called upon the written request of four members of the board.

Be it further resolved, that the Committee of Oversight, Accountability, and Reform be established by amending the Student Assembly Bylaws, Article VI, Section 3, Subsection F to be:

Oversight, Accountability, and Reform Committee - The committee will pursue any necessary oversight and accountability concerns of SA members and directly elected undergraduate representatives to the UA. Oversight and accountability concerns consist of, but are not limited to: general body attendance, resolution voting, liaison role accountability, committee attendance, committee conduct, and general representative accountability. The committee will also evaluate all complaints submitted by community members that are against any SA member, SA committees, or directly elected undergraduate representatives to the UA. The Vice President of Oversight, Accountability, and Reform shall serve as chair with a vote only in the event of a tie. The committee shall consist of eight voting members, three of which are current SA members and/or directly elected undergraduate representatives to the UA. Each voting member will serve a semester long term, contingent on an invitation back to the committee. At the second SA meeting of each academic year, the executive committee will present a slate of any new (non-SA) members to the committee for SA confirmation, which the SA must approve or disapprove in its entirety. The SA must approve any new vacancies during an academic year. All committee meetings will be closed. Only committee voting members will be permitted to attend unless specifically invited by the Vice President of Oversight, Accountability, and Reform. The composition of the committee can change for specific meeting types, in which members of the SA Executive Committee or other student representatives can be given an ex-officio status—this is to be voted on by the OAR committee as a whole and only when initially decided on by the Chair. The committee has the ability to investigate any SA member, directly elected undergraduate representative to the UA, S.A. affiliated committee, or Committee Chair if they have received a notice from any member of the Cornell Community. After a full investigation, inquiry, or fact finding action—a written report may be presented to the SA, which will include a brief summary of the situation being investigated and any necessary actions the committee recommends. The complainants name and others that are not SA members or directly elected undergraduate representatives to the UA shall be redacted from the report if permission from any the individual(s) is not given. Adoption of the (possible) recommendation(s) requires a three quarters majority vote of SA voting members. Rejection of the (possible) recommendation(s) requires three quarters of SA voting members. If recommendation or report are not approved or rejected, it will be tabled indefinitely. The Vice President of Oversight, Accountability, and Reform shall present reports to the SA at both the complainant(s), OAR Committee’s, and Chair’s discretion.

Be it further resolved, that the Student Assembly Election Rules, Article 1, Section B, Subsection 6 be amended to read:

10. No previous or current holder(s) of the Cornell Student Assembly Vice President of Oversight, Accountability, and Reform are eligible to run for President of the Student Assembly.
Respectfully, many times executive committee positions, including: Executive Vice President, Vice President of Internal Operations, Vice President of External Operations, Vice President of Diversity & Inclusion, and Vice President of Finance—are seen as direct stepping stones to the Presidency. And where this is not illogical or reprehensible in any capacity, the exact nature of aspirational progress when mixed with politics directly conflicts with the principles of oversight and accountability. As such, the Vice President of Oversight, Accountability, and Reform will be barred from running for the President of the Student Assembly after or during their term.

Be it further resolved, that the Student Assembly Bylaws, Article II, Section 2 be amended to read:

The SA will, as soon as possible after the spring election, hold an organizational and planning meeting in executive session. At this meeting, the voting members will elect from among themselves the offices of Vice President of Internal Operations, Vice President for Finance, a Vice President of External Affairs, a Vice President of Diversity and Inclusion. At this meeting or a meeting soon after, the voting members will elect from the Cornell community (student, employee, faculty, alumnus living in Ithaca) the office of Director of Elections. Self-nomination will be in order in each of the elected offices. Elected officers should be approved by a majority vote of SA members present at organizational meeting. Additionally, at this meeting or a meeting soon after the members will affirm the appointments of Parliamentarian and Executive Archivist. The offices of Parliamentarian and Executive Archivist will be appointed by the SA President. Each nominee for the respective offices shall be subject to majority approval of the SA voting members. The newly elected officers will undertake the responsibilities of their position at the start of their term on the SA. Elections for officers shall be by secret ballots. SA voting members may have one vote for each position to be filled but may not vote for any one individual twice on any ballot.

At the second Executive Committee meeting of the Fall semester, the President will slate, at most, three names (from the already existing pool of S.A. voting members) for the position of the Vice President of Oversight, Accountability, and Reform. From this, the Executive Committee (voting and non-voting members) will choose one Student Assembly member to nominate to the S.A. by a two thirds majority vote. This nominee will then be voted on by the Student Assembly and installed by a majority vote. If the nominee does not meet the threshold of a two third vote by the Executive Committee or a majority vote by the Student Assembly, the process restarts with the slating process—in which initial nominees may be recycled into the slating process.

By a unanimous vote of the entire Executive Committee (including ex-officio and normally non-voting members), they can recall the Vice President of Oversight, Accountability, and Reform. The individual will continue to hold their elected seat, but a new slating process will begin as detailed above.

Be it further resolved, that the election process for the Vice President of Oversight, Accountability, and Reform will take effect after the elections in the Spring of 2020 for the next calendar year, similar to a timeline of electing Vice President of Internal Operations, the Vice President for Finance, the Vice President of External Affairs, and the Vice President of Diversity and Inclusion. That being said, the initial holder of the Vice President of Oversight, Accountability, and Reform will be nominated based on the entirety of the executive committee (voting and non-voting members) by a two thirds majority vote, to then be voted on and installed by majority vote of the entire assembly for the duration of the Spring 2020 semester;
Be it further resolved, that any numbering or lettering changed by these above amendments in the Student Assembly Bylaws, Student Assembly Standing Rules, and/or the Student Assembly Election Rules be amended to allow for correct sequential order and aestheticism;

Be it finally resolved, that this resolution in its entirety is to be used as the initial framework for the VP and Committee of OAR, in terms of limits to the office stated in the “whereas” statements, the conduct of the VP of OAR, and to understand the great importance of this role.

Respectfully Submitted,

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Executive Vice President, Student Assembly

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Undesignated Representative At-Large, Student Assembly

Indigo Pavlov ‘22
Vice President of External Operations, Student Assembly

Women’s Issues Liaison At-Large, Student Assembly

Moriah Adgehe ‘21
Vice President of Finance, Student Assembly

Minority Liaison At-Large, Student Assembly

Colin Benedict ‘21
Vice President of Diversity & Inclusion, Student Assembly

Minority Liaison At-Large, Student Assembly

(Reviewed by: Discharge petition of 14 members, 12/04/2019)