ADAM HOWELL: Good morning. Welcome. Thank you all for joining us. My name is Adam Howell. I'm chair of the Employee Assembly. I'd like to welcome you all for joining us at this, our first in a series of short topical summer webinars on very important issues that are critical to staff. We'll be talking today about workforce equity and anti-racism at Cornell.

And since we only have 30 minutes, I'm not going to take up too much time. I just want to remind everybody that we do have a schedule for these forums. They could be subject to change. Things are somewhat fluid right now. But the schedule is available on the Office of the Assembly's website, assembly.cornell.edu, as well as our Employee Assembly meetings, which are also open to everyone. And we always love it when people attend those.

So again, since we have very little time, I'm going to turn it over to our friend and partner, Vice President and Chief Human Resources Officer Mary Opperman. Mary, welcome. Thank you so much for being here, and I'll let you kick things off.

MARY OPPERMAN: Great. Thank you, Adam, and thank you again to the EA for hosting this series. I'm going to be very brief. The purpose of this conversation, and many others that we're having on campus, is to dive deeper into the issues of racism, systemic racism, institutionalized racism, oppression.

And why are we doing that? We have had diversity and inclusion efforts here as long as I've been here, and many of you know I've been here a long time. And we've worked very, very hard inside those efforts to recruit a diverse group of talented individuals to support Cornell's mission. And in many cases, we've been successful. What we haven't been successful at is retaining that talent for as long as we hoped that they would stay. We have lost our non-white talent at a higher rate than we have lost our other talented employees, our majority employees.

Why is that? It really boils down to culture. It really boils down to some of the issues that we have to understand in order to build back the culture where everyone here feels that they have a place where their talents can thrive and where they truly feel like they belong. And so while I think these conversations of late have been difficult, I believe that they are the first step in creating the environment that we all want.

And so with that as a very brief introduction, I'm going to turn it over to Angela and then Avery.

ANGELA WINFIELD: Good morning, everyone. I'm Angela Winfield. I'm the Associate Vice President for Inclusion and Workforce Diversity. And I'm also one of the Presidential Advisors on Diversity and Equity representing the staff population. Avery will share a little bit more about what the presidential advisors do.

But what I'd like to share with you is just a little bit about what my team does and how important now is because right now we have a real opportunity. My team has been working long and hard for many years, and as Mary said, Cornell has been doing this work for a long time. Whether or not we've been successful in every realm, obviously, the answer to that is no. We've had successes in some areas, but not others.

And right now, with the current national climate, the focus on race and racism, it's a real opportunity for us to look even harder and even closer at the different aspects of employment. So what are we doing? And we are doing things on the recruitment front, the hiring front, retention, looking at what the climate is for our staff of color and our diverse staff.

What is going on? What is the experience? We've dug into that. We've done the Belonging at Cornell survey. And we've also done some responsive programming immediately, and we're looking at longer term. And by programming, not just training, but looking systemically. What are the policies? What are the practices? What are the things that we need to actually look at and address to improve the situation for our staff?

So those are things that we're doing. That's very brief. I'll turn it over to Avery to talk a little bit, and then I look forward to giving you some more detail about the things that are happening and will be happening. Avery.

AVERY AUGUST: Thank you, Angela. Good morning, everyone. Thank you for joining us. My name is Avery August. I'm a professor in the College of Veterinary Medicine. I'm also the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs at Cornell, and I'm one of the Presidential Advisors for Diversity and Equity. That is a group of three individuals, myself, Angela Winfield, as she indicates, and Vijay Pendakur, who is the Dean of Students.

And the three of us are advisors to the president on issues around diversity, equity, and inclusion here at Cornell. And we spend significant time thinking about how can we make our institution more inclusive such that, as Mary says, everyone here feels like they belong. And you may have heard some of the things that we've announced, including the survey that was deployed earlier this year that Angela referred to. We're digesting the results of these surveys.

And really, the goal of the group is to think about Cornell in all of its aspects, all of its facets, and think about how we can make the campus more inclusive such that everyone belongs. One of the things that I wanted to touch on that Angela raised is this issue of-- and Mary-- is this issue of climate and culture. We all come from different backgrounds. We come from different parts of society. We come here with different experiences. And so we not only have our climate and culture here at Cornell, but we have our climate and culture where we live and where we come from, what we experience.
And when I think about all those things, and I think about the more recent events and the number of conversations that have been happening over the last few weeks, I'm thinking of something that Martin Luther King said and that President Obama paraphrased. And that is that the arc of history runs long, but it runs towards justice. And the reason I say that, and the reason I enjoy that quote, is because we've spent a long time getting to where we are now. And it will take a long time for us to get where we want to be. But we continue to improve as a society. And I'm hoping that we continue to improve even faster with the conversations that are happening now. Thank you for joining us.

ANGELA WINFIELD: So I think we're going to turn this back over to Adam and Hei Hei.

HEI HEI DEPEW: Thank you. I think we're going to begin the questions portion. We do have some questions that were submitted beforehand, so I want to turn it over to Joe Korevec, who had a question that was pre-submitted that he will ask now.

JOE KOREVEC: So the question was what is cultural competency and how do we achieve it? And my response is an understanding and respect for diverse cultural responses, and a sensitivity and appreciation for the value of those responses.

In terms of how to achieve it, I used to work at Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health. And what we did was we created a required cultural competency curriculum that provided training to students, faculty, and staff in integrated teams to increase awareness and identified ways to operationalize the lessons learned.

ANGELA WINFIELD: Absolutely. So Joe, thanks for that question. I think it's a great one, and it's really an important and timely one. So for me, cultural competence is very much what you define. It's having an understanding, and it's a continual understanding, of how to engage and interact with individuals and as a team in a way that is respectful.

And respectful can get tricky because you need to understand what's respectful to a person, but in a way that makes people feel that they're included, that they belong, and that they're part of the team. And in order to do that, that means you've got to have a little bit of basic knowledge about their experience, how your experience relates to theirs, and how to adapt and adjust and behave accordingly. So that's what cultural competence is to me. And I think it runs the gamut across identity, but including race and other aspects of identity.

One of the things that we're doing, we've had the Inclusive Excellence Academy that we run through my department for many years. And we continue to offer those programs to the staff population on an ongoing basis. We usually have at least two seminars a month on that. And immediately, given the current situation and climate, we've had some responsive training.

So we've had programs around why people are protesting, which gets into the history of race and racism in the nation, and how it's come to this point. We've also done programming on urban policing. I'll be partnered with Joe Margulies, Professor of Law and Government, to talk to us about policing and what happens there.

And then we've also done a third program on allyship, how to support my black colleagues right now. And even though we're looking at race specifically right now, allyship goes across identities. So those are three programs that we've done immediately. We've done over 15 total in the last two weeks, two and 1/2 weeks, and we will continue that for the summer.

The more, I think, exciting development is that my team, the Department of Inclusion and Workforce Diversity, along with Organizational Development and Effectiveness, which is also in Human Resources, and e-Cornell, are partnering to develop a more comprehensive program that has six primary objectives that walk all the way through why is diversity, equity, inclusion, anti-racism, why is that important here at Cornell? How does that align with our values? What are the expectations of staff and employees

here with respect to those items? It walks through through that, to how to have difficult conversations, or how to have conversations with people with differing perspectives than your own.

And then we get into how do you speak up and intervene when you see, experience, or witness behaviors that are inconsistent with our values? And then ending with how do you incorporate and integrate these principles into your work and your function regardless of what your function is because, as you know, Cornell is a very complex organization with people and staff in various different roles.

And the final module really helps people understand, ground, and incorporate practices, real practices and behaviors that will change experience in their role. What is their locus of control? What is their scope? And how can they help contribute to a more positive climate?

So that's a little bit of the work that's being done. And I say a little bit because it's just one step, and there's going to be things that build off of that programming. I'm very, very excited about what's being built and what's being developed, and we do hope to roll it out relatively soon.

HEI HEI DEPEW: Thank you, Angela. We also received two additional questions online. But I want to invite anybody participating online right now, if you have any questions, please enter it into the Q&A section on the bottom of the screen, and then I'll read those questions out loud.

So I want to turn it over to Jean Lawless, who had submitted a question online beforehand, and allow her to ask that question now. Jean?

JEAN LAWLESS: Hi. Good morning. So the question was raised, what is cultural competency and how do we achieve it? My short answer to that was cultural competency is never fully achieved. It is a way of living that embraces honesty and openness, humility and grace, and that fosters dialogue and action, including policy, that adjusts to the constantly changing world environment. Thank you.

MARY OPPERMAN: Angela or Avery, would you like to react?

AVERY AUGUST: Maybe I can provide a slightly different, maybe more personal context to that question and some of those answers. And I think the questioner, Joseph, is spot on. Angela's explanation and her descriptions of what we do here at Cornell is spot on. But I want to maybe add a personal answer.

So I'm an immigrant to this country. I came here as a teenager. And when I think about this question of cultural competency, that's one of the lenses in which I look at that word. I had to adapt to the culture of this country in a way that allowed me to be able to integrate and interact with the individuals around me.

And so that meant, as the recent questioner raised, a continual understanding and learning of the individuals around me with whom I interacted, understanding their experiences, understanding why certain things happened that may not have made

sense to me before. And in that understanding, in that continual learning, it allowed me to better interact with them.

And in a similar fashion, if others are doing the same thing, then we both evolve towards better interactions and better understanding of each other. And so that's sort of how I've internalized and personalized this idea of cultural competency, is this understanding. And it's actually work on my part--it's good work, but it's work on my part-- to understand those of whom I interact with.

ANGELA WINFIELD: Yes. I definitely agree with that, Avery. I definitely agree with that. And I think it's individual work, but it's work of all of us, and that we have to look at our behaviors, look at other people's behaviors, really try to understand and bridge that gap. And when we think about cultural competency, that it means that the dominant groups-- we're a predominantly white institution-- need to look at this issue as well.

It's not just the work of diverse folks, minority folks, the underrepresented to understand, work, and learn how to interact, but it's all of our work. Dominant groups also need to look and de-center and say, well, what does it mean when we have someone like Avery-- so when we have someone from an immigrant background coming from, how do I respond and make that person feel like they belong and that they're welcomed?

Now for someone like me, I have intersectionality in my identity. So I'm blind, I'm black, I'm a woman. I bring that, and I need to grow so I can interact with other people, know how they interact with me. But I also need for people to delve into that themselves so they can be more culturally competent when interacting with me. So I think it's a two-way street. It's a great point, Avery.

MARY OPPERMAN: So can I just say something quickly before we get to the other questions? Thank you both, Jeannie and Joe, for raising your points. I think they're really important. I do want to stop on the point that Angela just made, which is this is the work of everyone. And it is an opportunity for those of us who are passionate about and committed to the idea that every system, every institution, every system will be more effective, will solve problems better, will be more than they are today if we bring diverse ideas and talents into that system. It's a core belief of mine.

But I will say that I had not done the hard work of understanding why programs that we were offering weren't necessarily getting at the issues that we have now identified and talk more openly about around racism, systemic racism, and oppression. Why do we have to do that? Why can't we just jump into new programs? And as somebody who always wants to solve things, that's my instinct, is to hurry up and get new programs.

But I think we have work to do. The white population has work to do to understand where we fit in this conversation and how we can be allies. And I have a colleague in the division who has challenged me to come up with a word that is more active than ally because I think he's right. Being an ally could denote that I'm sort of standing in the back cheering on people who are making change, and that's not the role I want. I want to be active and engaged in the work to rebuild our systems into more inclusive and effective systems. I'll stop there.

HEI HEI DEPEW: Thank you, all. Online, we elicited the question, how do we support one another? And we received a response from Oliver Goodrich, who indicated, "As a white man, I am concerned that we're not being sensitive to and considerate of the needs of our POC, and specifically black employees. I've heard several black colleagues share their concern that the chosen reading material seemed to have been chosen without their participation in mind. For example, the majority of black staff don't need to learn how to be anti-racist."

ANGELA WINFIELD: So I think that's a great question and a great point. So what is the work of different folks from different identities in this conversation? Mary just highlighted the importance of white people and their role and what that means. We're also looking at ways to support our Black, Indigenous, and people of color, those communities as well.

We have colleague network groups that have been in existence and that are doing really good work, and also really good healing and support. There is a time-- a lot of our communities of color are dealing with a lot right now. Personally, professionally, emotionally, energetically, there is a lot going on.

And it's not a monolithic experience. It's a very nuanced and individualized experience. Some folks are activated and are ready and willing and able to share their thoughts and opinions and give input on what needs to change, what needs to happen. I welcome that. And then there are also folks who are just exhausted and are trying to show up and do their job every day. And that's all they have capacity for right now. I welcome that, too.

So it's about being flexible. It's about meeting people where they are and providing avenues for each of that. So I've talked about some of the programs that we're rolling out, that we're developing broadly for all folks. And then we also are looking at programs and spaces for our colleagues of color and providing spaces where they can reflect amongst themselves, talk about issues and ways to get engaged.

We've also launched a special series of the Inclusive Excellence podcast that we're calling Blackness at Cornell. It's not a platform for everyone because not everyone wants to share their story, but some folks do. And for the folks who do want to share their story of blackness at Cornell, we are using this platform as a way for people to share what it means for them right now to be black in America, in Ithaca, at Cornell. And that will be launching today. We have the first episode of that going up, and it's a really powerful episode. And it's a powerful way for people to share.
So there's a whole lot of different opportunities and spaces for folks to get what they need, whether it's education, engagement, support, or just respite.

AVERY AUGUST: Thanks, Angela. I also wanted to add-- so this is an interesting question. I think the number groups and offices within the institution have developed reading lists and resources for us to look at and read or watch. And yes, the majority on the campus, our white colleagues, have not necessarily been exposed or experienced or really appreciated many of the issues that our black colleagues have been experiencing.

And so this is a place to start. But I would also add, reading a book like the Kendi book also provided me with a validating experience, the way Kendi describes his evolution from being non-racist to being anti-racist, that they mean different things. And it also validated for me, put into words experiences that I couldn't necessarily describe. He's a great writer, and he's able to frame and articulate how he's feeling in a way that validated it. This is what it means. This is what I've been experiencing.

And so even for our black colleagues, I think it's a great book to read to sort of see how Kendi has evolved and how he's come to the conclusion that we can't just be not racist, but we actually have to be anti-racist.

HEI HEI DEPEW: Thank you. I'm going to move on to the portion where we're going to review the Q&A submitted by staff members, and I'm going to combine two questions that I received. What does Cornell do to recruit non-white talent? What are the strategies? What are the tools? And can you talk a little bit about what has been done, whether that has been faculty or for staff as well?

MARY OPPERMAN: So I can speak very quickly to the efforts that we've made up until now. But I'd also like Avery to talk a bit about some of the work on the faculty recruitment side.

So as many of you know, we've had a diversity recruiter in the past. We've had someone who has focused on trying, especially in higher level jobs, to make sure that the talent pool is diverse through to the interviewing stage. What we were planning-- and then we took a hiatus because of the pandemic-- was to focus on pipelining.

In addition to focusing on our candidate pools for our open positions, we also believe that there's an opportunity using pipelining to create a ready talent pool for jobs that become available because what we know is that sometimes our search process takes far too long, and talent gets scooped up by other people. And so what we want to do is create a strategy that allows us to get a good screened and diverse talent pool to a hiring supervisor quickly so that they can see the best of the best and get an offer out as fast as possible.

So those are just two things we're doing. Angela, did you want to add?

ANGELA WINFIELD: I think that covers it. We do, and we are putting an emphasis on outreach, so proactively going out and trying to find diverse talent for roles that we know are coming up, being really thoughtful about that, and making sure that we're proactively getting and engaging with and maintaining a relationship with diverse talent so when those positions become available , we do have candidate pools that are diverse.

AVERY AUGUST: Thanks, Angela and Mary. And on the faculty side, one of the things that we've been evolving over the last few years, and particularly in response to the provost's task force on faculty diversity, is to develop a clear process for ensuring that our faculty searches have the broadest pool of candidates possible.

One of the things we've developed is what's called a pipeline tool that allows departments to be able to see which universities are graduating individuals-- women

and underrepresented minority candidates-- in particular areas so that Cornell can recruit directly from those institutions. And this is in response to the refrain that we continue to hear that we can't find candidates. And so we've now provided the departments with specific institutions that they can go to in order to recruit and have those candidates be part of our pool.

One of the challenges we face here at Cornell is many underrepresented candidates look at Cornell and say, I won't apply there because I won't even get an interview or a job. And so we also have to change the perception of Cornell within the community to let the community know that we welcome applications. We would like to have them to work here.

We also developed clear guidelines on how departments' search committees should be evaluating candidates. We provide search committee training for search committees, which is mandatory, so that the search committees are able to more fairly look at letters of recommendation. Where do candidates graduate from? This idea that you can only graduate from an Ivy League institution in order to work at Cornell. These are the things that we try to address in the search committee training.

And then we also implement the strategy such that as the search moves through the process and candidates are being selected to be interviewed, that there is a check-in at each stage with either the dean or the associate dean to ensure that those pools are diverse and include candidates that we would want to see here on our campus.

And then finally, the provost and the president has provided funds for us to be able to bridge the hiring of faculty who diversify our faculty ranks such that the departments and colleges have an opportunity to bring on candidates in a way that diversifies the faculty and interacts with our students in a way that we would like.

So there's a wide range of things that we do. And then on the retention side, we've spent a lot of time working with chairs and deans and working with our colleagues to retain faculty when they're here. So there are a lot of things. I can go into more detail, but I'll stop there for now.

ADAM HOWELL: So I'm going to break in here. I think, based off the nature of these top performers, we're going to have to close it up there.

I personally want to thank you all, all of our panelists, Mary, the Office of the Assemblies, everybody, for their hard work on putting these together and participating today. These are incredibly important conversations, and I think it's critical that we have them.

Obviously, this is not the end of this topic or this series. We will be having more again. We will also be having some open forums this summer like we've done in the past. So I would invite all of you to please take a look at that summer schedule and attend those as best you can.

Again, thank you all for participating, and our attendees. And I'll turn it over to you, Mary, for some last words.

MARY OPPERMAN: Thank you, Adam. As always, thank you to you and to the rest of the Employee Assembly for your partnership during this time. You've been great, and I appreciate it so much.

Thank you to Angela and to Avery for joining today a conversation that you can't get very far on in a half an hour. It's the start of a much deeper set of conversations. I urge you to look at the programming that Angela talked about. If you Google Inclusive Excellence Academy, you'll get to the right space for a lot of what we have. And stay engaged with us as we continue to move forward.

My last comment on this is that the most systematic and systemic changes occur through persistence, resilience, and optimism. And I'm confident that if we are open to hearing about how our current state helps or hinders our shared goal of creating a truly equitable workplace, if we're committed to that, we will make a difference. So thank you all for the start of this conversation.

ADAM HOWELL: Well, thank you all, and have a great rest of your day.