

Dean of Faculty Report 2011-2012
William E. Fry - Final Report

The past four years have been some of the most tumultuous for the university in recent memory. The structural budget problems discovered with the advent of the global recession in 2008 led to major budget reductions, staff layoffs and attrition in the university faculty. The actions taken to address the problems have led to major changes in the university. Fortunately, the majority of those necessary actions have been taken, but some effects still linger in some quarters of the university. There are now fewer staff and fewer faculty than there were four years ago. I'm grateful for the faculty hiring program initiated by the Trustees. This program will help considerably.

Also in the past four years the opportunity to create a new campus in New York City has created additional excitement and much activity. The challenge to create the new campus is one that Cornell could not ignore. The Provost led a wonderful effort to compete for this new campus. I thank both the Provost and the President for involving many faculty in the development of the proposal. The Provost met several times with several University Faculty committees to obtain feedback on several aspects of the proposal. I know that individual faculty were also involved in developing the proposal. Of course, there are some faculty who feel that the process should have been even more transparent and public, and that faculty should have been involved in the decision making. However, there are even more faculty who understand that a proposer cannot be totally transparent in the construction of a proposal to meet a deadline. There remains a very significant concern on the part of some faculty that effort directed to the New York City campus will divert needed attention away from Ithaca. It is crucial that the Ithaca campus not be harmed by the new venture in NYC.

During these four years, the President and Provost have met several times each semester with the University Faculty Committee (UFC), which is the executive committee of the University Faculty Senate. The Provost and his staff have also met (sometimes intensely) with the Committee on Academic Programs and Policies (CAPP) and with the Financial Policies Committee (FPC) in connection to the budget difficulties and the NYC Campus. I applaud these meetings; they do much to create the communication that is crucial to implementing change successfully. This does not mean that all faculty believe the administration to be sufficiently consultative on major issues; clearly some faculty feel the administration to be insufficiently consultative. Consultation will always be an issue on which the faculty and administration need to work.

The Board of Trustees (chairs of committees) has also continued a practice of meeting with the University Faculty Committee in October and in March. These meetings illustrate to each group that the other cares about the well-being of the university. It also turns out that these groups are on the same side of some issues. I thank the Board Chairs, Pete Meinig and Bob Harrison for supporting these meetings. The meetings allow important communication on important subjects.

Activities of the University Faculty (Senate)

The University Faculty have been very concerned about the well-fare of students. The Senate passed a Resolution asking that faculty not surprise students with additional assignments just before or just after breaks in the semester. Several faculty have contributed to an on-going discussion of mechanisms to lessen undue stress on students. There is a significant desire on the part of many faculty advisors to be able to interact more readily with their advisees.

The Senate passed several resolutions that have an impact on the functioning of the University. I highlight two here: i) They supported the idea that “Clinical Professor” should be a title available to the Johnson Graduate School of Management. This title is more respectful of senior persons who are appointed from the business world and who are willing to teach in the Johnson School. ii) They agreed that the Bylaws should be amended to allow a Cornell University faculty member (with the proper approvals) should be able to obtain a Cornell degree. (This prohibition had been in the Bylaws for a long time and there was no institutional memory as to why this prohibition should exist. The change was approved because of convincing arguments as to why it made sense to enable a small number of faculty to pursue Cornell degrees.)

Academic calendar. A disparate group of university members has been meeting for the past two years to identify changes to the academic calendar that might alleviate some of the student stress and to also improve the work-life issues for faculty and staff. The committee has been ably led by Professor Jeff Doyle (chair), Professor Kathleen Walsh (vice-chair) and supported wonderfully by Registrar Cassie Dembosky. Additionally, there were other faculty, associate deans, undergraduate students, a graduate student, and staff on the committee. After much discussion, many requests for comment, and several revisions of a proposal, the committee proposed a new academic calendar to the Senate. The new calendar modified the current calendar only slightly in the fall, but suggested more substantive changes in the spring. The major changes were to honor Martin Luther King day as a holiday, to institute a break in February on the Monday of Presidents Day and the following Tuesday, and to reposition spring break. These changes created three partial weeks in the spring semester where there had not been any previously. These changes also shortened “senior week” slightly. Both changes were hotly debated. The committee learned very personally that no one in the university liked all aspects of the proposed changes.

The proposed calendar was adopted by the University Faculty Senate on 9 May 2012. There was a hotly contested debate and students were invited to address the Senate. The undergraduate students who spoke were opposed, stating that student opinion had not been obtained. However, the adopted calendar had been revised as result of two Resolutions on two different dates from the Student Assembly. Almost all demands in the two resolutions were met in the adopted calendar. The graduate student who spoke indicated that the process had been transparent and consultative. There were two undergraduate students and one graduate student on the calendar committee. The opponents of the proposed calendar stated many reasons for their opposition, but the hot button item seemed to be shortening of senior week. There are diverse views on the importance of a long “senior week” to the health and safety of Cornell students.

Continuity of Faculty Governance.

There were elections for Faculty Trustee and Dean of the University Faculty during the spring semester. There were outstanding candidates in each election, and you can be proud that such outstanding faculty are willing to serve in these roles.

The new Faculty Trustee is **Barbara Baird**, the Horace White Professor and Chair of Chemistry and Chemical Biology. She joined the Cornell faculty in 1980. Dr. Baird has led a number of programs at Cornell; recent positions include Director of the Nanobiotechnology Center (a Science and Technology Center of the National Science Foundation), Director of Graduate Studies in Chemistry, Director of Cornell's NIH training grant in Molecular Biophysics, Co-Director of the W.M. Keck Foundation Program in Molecular and Cellular Biophysics of Signal Transduction. Dr. Baird has served on the Council of the NIH National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases and on scientific advisory/review committees for Los Alamos National Laboratory, Brookhaven National Laboratory, and centers at several universities. She is Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science and a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. The Baird research laboratory integrates biochemical, biophysical, and nanotechnology approaches to investigate basic mechanisms by which cellular receptors mediate transmembrane signals in immune and other physiological responses.

The new Dean of Faculty is **Joe Burns** (Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering), the Irving P. Church Professor of Engineering and a Professor of Astronomy. He has taught courses in the Arts College (mathematics, astronomy and physics) and Engineering. Joe has developed significant connections across campus. Two brothers, his wife and son graduated from five different Cornell Colleges. Burns has chaired T&AM, directed its graduate program and served on the Graduate School's General Committee. He was Vice Provost for Engineering and Physical Sciences during 2003-2007. He has served on many advisory panels for NASA and the National Research Council, where he led the first decadal survey of planetary science. A former Vice President of the American Astronomical Society, he also chaired its divisions of planetary science and of dynamical astronomy. He's a fellow of two professional societies, a member of three

Faculty accomplishment

Weiss Fellows: Three new Stephen Weiss Fellows were announced in 2012. These faculty are the best teachers in the country. They are:

George W. Hudler (Plant Pathology and Plant-Microbe Biology). Professor Hudler's course, Magical Mushrooms, Mischievous Molds has become a marvel in Cornell's undergraduate program. Present enrollment in this course now exceeds 500 students. He has expanded the curriculum in recent years to include an optional laboratory/discussion to provide more hands on experiences. Student assessments of this course are really extraordinary, especially for a course of this size. Hudler's advanced undergraduate course, Pathology of Trees and Shrubs is also a masterpiece, some years earning the highest rating from every student enrolled in the course.

Ravi Ramakrishna (Mathematics). Professor Ramakrishna has accumulated an outstanding record of achievements in teaching, research and departmental service. He has earned plaudits from current undergraduates, faculty, and former students whom he continues to assist in their careers. He has won rave reviews for teaching, not only in his areas of research expertise, but also when engaged in the daunting task of teaching mathematics in required large classes to non-majors (Math. 192, Calculus for Engineers). He is praised for his ability to engage the students from the moment he walks into the classroom and holds their attention for the full hour of the class. Ravi has achieved this record while teaching ten different courses over the past ten years, class sizes ranging from hundreds of students in large introductory course to twenty or fewer students in upper level courses.

Yervant Terzian (Astronomy). Professor Terzian teaches Astronomy 101: The Nature of the Universe. Students state that Terzian motivated students with only a high school level of physics to become passionate about his course. He evoked comprehension and wonder for the study of astronomy. Terzian provided personal mentorship during his studies at Cornell and in some cases he was a valuable advisor in “important life decisions” later in their careers. He is praised for his efforts outside the classroom specifically in helping form the Armenian Students Organization. The time and enthusiasm that Terzian put into the creation of this club made him an atypical and noteworthy advisory outside of the classroom.

The rest of us.

The Cornell faculty are comprised of an outstanding group of individuals who are sometimes “otherwise thinking”, always innovative and extremely active in their teaching and scholarship. The Web of Knowledge lists 9146 articles (not a comprehensive accounting) contributed to the scholarly literature by Cornell authors in 2011. In the fall 2011 we taught 2962 undergraduate courses for 225,550 units taken by students and in the spring we taught 2942 undergraduate courses with 214,360 units taken by students. For the most recent complete fiscal year (2010-2011), the Ithaca faculty accounted for more than \$520,000,000 in research expenditures. The Ithaca faculty made 260 disclosures of intellectual property in 2011 and 134 patents based on previous disclosures were granted.

The university’s strategic plan includes the aspiration to be widely recognized as a top-ten research university in the world. This year we ranked 15th in the overall USNews national ranking. However, in the “peer assessment” category, we were 8th. Thus our colleagues around the country regard us to be in the top 10. In global rankings, we are regularly in the top 10. These international rankings rely heavily on peer reputation and it is the faculty who create this well-justified international reputation. The faculty at Cornell are an elite group of scholars – placing this university at the very top. I am immensely proud to serve on the same faculty as these outstanding individuals.

Faculty get paid to do what they love to do; it’s a great life. We get to investigate questions that we find intellectually challenging. We are privileged to interact with very bright, challenging and inquisitive young people -- in and out of the classroom. We learn and are inspired by that interaction. It’s very important to us that Cornell remain an excellent institution, and we work hard to contribute to that excellence.