Resolution in Support of Continued Employment for Cornell Staff during the Covid-19 Crisis

WHEREAS, during the Covid-19 pandemic, university staff have demonstrated resilience, ingenuity, and dedication;

WHEREAS, Cornell administration’s recently announced financial plans addressing Covid-19-related budget shortfalls include the possibilities of layoffs or furloughs of university staff;

WHEREAS, loss of employment at Cornell would impose severe financial hardships on staff and their dependents;

WHEREAS, comparable employment elsewhere will not be available for staff, particularly in the conditions of high unemployment during the Covid-19 pandemic;
WHEREAS, layoffs or furloughs of staff will have a severely negative impact on the broader community, given Cornell’s role as the primary employer in Tompkins County;

WHEREAS, significant staff layoffs during the financial downturn of 2008-09 damaged morale throughout the university, negatively affecting the character of the institution;

WHEREAS, preservation of employment of Cornell staff is essential to maintain the cooperative spirit that has sustained us thus far and is essential to our recovery;
BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED, that the Faculty Senate recognizes the vital role and contributions of university staff;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Faculty Senate urges the Cornell administration to commit to maintaining the employment of all current staff during the Covid-19 crisis;
BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Faculty Senate calls on the Cornell administration to respond to the current crisis with alternatives to layoffs or furloughs, including reassigning staff to positions that will meet the university’s critical needs.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Faculty Senate encourages the Cornell administration to charge deans, faculty and staff to work collaboratively to maintain employment of all current staff, including devising adaptable, appropriate, and sustainable staff reassignments to carry the university through this crisis and continue its flourishing when it is over.
## Faculty Cosponsors as of Early this Morning: 103 in total including 17 Senators

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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<td>Joanie Mackowski</td>
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Knight Writing Institute

Michael Ashkin
Art
Kate Navickas
Knight Institute for Writing in the Disciplines

George Hutchinson
English and Knight Institute
Brad Zukovic
Knight Institute for Writing in the Disciplines

Emily Fridlund
English / Creative Writing
We deeply appreciate the efforts that the administration and the opening committees and the entire Cornell community have made and are making to preserve our university.
Reasons to Commit to Staff Employment
Research by economists in England and Australia demonstrates that “It takes longer to adapt to the pain of unemployment than to losing a loved one.”

Layoffs “wound people not just economically, but emotionally and spiritually.”

“There’s a whole body of literature suggesting that layoffs don’t ultimately help the bottom line once the economy heats back up. Experienced and dedicated humans are hard to replace.”

“James Guthrie...associate dean at the school of business at the University of Kansas...[said]: Now ... is the time for every organization to express its values.”
Comments from Faculty Senate Webpage
June 22, 2020, 8:30pm, Anonymous:
Our staff provide essential functions that otherwise would need to be performed by faculty effort. In my department, staff also intrinsically sense and maintain academic department culture in ways busy faculty often neglect, and we function collectively better for it. I know I would not be able to write nearly as many grants, counsel students, and plan program without the essential help of each of the staff in my department. These support roles and the occasional corn hole/ice cream social they conceive/run on their own is well worth the fractional support each of us can give. No amount of automation can replace these roles, and faculty (bless us) will likely do a crappier job at it and still cost us these resources in time/money.
June 19, 2020, 10:20am, Anonymous:
Why can’t we all be in this crisis together and share the burdens it is imposing? Can we all please consider whether as faculty we already are more comfortable economically than many other people Cornell employs? If so, then is not a little sacrifice for us worth the much more tremendous value and security it provides all others who are part of our team here at Cornell that help make the university function smoothly for all of us? It certainly seems like a moral, humane, compassionate, and ultimately beneficial thing to do for everyone and for the university as a whole. If we give a little now, we may get back much more later.
June 15, 2020, 10:56am, Anonymous:
As a longterm staff member, I want to thank the faculty involved in this for being our voice. The fact that the President and Provost can’t even produce data on how many staff have already been laid-off/furloughed speaks volumes. They simply don’t care. Temporarily cut salaries and temporarily stop retirement contributions, but give us all a guarantee that they will return to where they were when the crisis ends. We’re all willing to do our part, but we need to keep our positions. This part of the state is an employment desert. For most of us, there’s no where else to work.
Comments from Senate Cosponsors
Joanie Mackowski, English/Creative Writing:

If tenured faculty believe that staff layoffs are necessary to preserve our university, then I think we’ve already lost. Tenure isn’t a mere privilege: it’s an obligation. As researchers and scholars, we work in the service of truth. Tenure exists to protect the discovery and expression of truth from abuses of power. There’s nothing true or just about terminating staff employment, and without good cause, in the midst of this pandemic. If we worry about temporary pay cuts while rationalizing that staff layoffs are somehow unavoidable, then it’s no wonder that people in the U.S. are losing confidence in higher education. To survive this crisis, we must support each other and demonstrate our values.

“[T]enure at colleges and universities will not survive…unless it is tied to the broader moral agenda of defending some kind of job security for everyone, given how important that is for human well-being, inside academe and out.”

-- Brian Leiter, professor of jurisprudence, director of the Center for Law, Philosophy, and Human Values, University of Chicago. Quoted from “Academic Ethics: Rethinking the Justification of Tenure,” Chronicle of Higher Education, January 17, 2017
Buz Barstow: Department of Biological and Environmental Engineering:

America has always been an individualistic country, but I think if you look back at the historical record, it’s gone through waves of individualism and solidarity. For much of the past 40 years, we’ve been in this hyper-individualist state, where it’s been everyone for themselves. I think this state is beginning to end, and I think our students really want it to end.
Risa L. Lieberwitz: School of Industrial & Labor Relations:

Cornell has many alternatives for addressing the current public health crisis and its financial impact. It is wrong -- and unnecessary -- to pit faculty, students and staff against each other. Consistent with Cornell’s “core values” that President Pollack articulated, deans, faculty, and staff can work together to choose principled, humane, and feasible alternatives to address the university’s financial concerns, without layoffs or furloughs. These alternatives include hiring freezes, construction pauses, borrowing against the endowment, and staff reassignments.
Chris B. Schaffer: Meinig School of Biomedical Engineering:

The consequences of a generational crisis should not be borne so heavily by the most financially vulnerable members of the Cornell community. This has been recognized with the extraordinary commitment made to maintain current financial aid models for our students. It should also be recognized by protecting the employment of staff whose positions have been threatened by the crisis. Cornell community members -- past, present, and future -- should all bear some of the burden so that no dedicated Cornell employees are laid off due to the crisis.