

Dear Members of the Faculty Senate,

Thank you very much for all the work that you did on the racial justice and equitable futures initiatives over the past year.

The working groups, which included both faculty and students, developed thoughtful, detailed proposals around each of the three initiatives under consideration: a research center, student education, and faculty education. We thank them for putting a very significant amount of effort into these proposals.

We followed the thoughtful and nuanced discussion in the Senate and thank the dean and associate dean of the faculty, and all of the participants, for the careful and respectful consideration of these reports. Difficult issues do not always result in complete consensus, but we are grateful that the Senate did not shy away from these conversations.

It is clear from the vote of the Faculty Senate that there is strong support for the creation of a Center for Racial Justice and Equitable Futures that, as described in the summary of the working group's report, will "serve as a central node that connects and amplifies scholarship on racism, indigeneity, ethnicity, and bias." As further noted, "faculty participation from our ethnic studies fields and programs [will be] essential", as will be "the engagement of faculty from across the colleges and disciplines who work in areas where issues of justice and equity are critical." For the Center to be successful, this scholarship must be firmly grounded in our academic programs, and the provost will begin the process of moving forward with deans and faculty leaders to establish the Center.

The votes on the other two initiatives are more mixed. As you all know, there were three resolutions on each of these initiatives—student education and faculty education—and each of the six resolutions passed with a plurality of votes: none received majority support. Additionally, the resolutions directly conflict with one another on a number of key aspects about how these initiatives would be implemented if pursued.

While there is disagreement about the specific steps to be taken to better inform students and faculty about issues of racial justice, the commitment of faculty to address these issues emerges clearly from the discussion and the resolutions. As the resolution from the working group on an educational requirement for students correctly notes, the university bylaws place graduation requirements in the units that grant degrees. Therefore, the next logical step is to ask each college and school to take stock of the Faculty Senate resolutions, and determine how best to be responsive to the recommendations that students be ensured an educational experience that enables them "to thrive and lead in a multiracial democracy," while achieving a focused and broadly consistent approach across the university. As they are engaged in this work, it makes sense for the faculty in the colleges and schools also to explore ways of enhancing "faculty engagement with diverse colleagues, students, members of the staff, and with the broader community." Note that while these descriptions of the student and faculty education programs are taken from the working group proposals, all of the resolutions support these goals; what differs across the resolutions, as noted above, are the details of implementation. Resolving those differences is the purview of the faculty itself. Accordingly, the deans of each school and college should work with their faculty to develop

programs that address the aims outlined in the resolutions, with the goal of having these programs in place by the fall of 2022.

We embarked on this work as a university almost a year ago, soon after the murder of George Floyd, but more importantly after decades of work by our faculty, staff, and students to continue to move Cornell towards being the kind of inclusive environment that our founders envisioned, one where justice of all kinds, including racial justice, is pursued. Some have questioned whether this work can be done while continuing to honor our also critical commitment to academic freedom and free expression. The openness of the discussions at the Faculty Senate has, in our view, demonstrated that there is no incompatibility, and in fact, we note that many of the resolutions themselves call for involvement of the Academic Freedom and Professional Status of the Faculty Committee. We look forward to seeing the next steps in this process as the faculty throughout the campus engage with this work.

Sincerely,

Martha E. Pollack
President

Michael I. Kotlikoff
Provost