

Summary of Richard Bensel's Presentation to the Faculty Senate  
(Provost Initiative and Compliance with Article 13)  
December 16, 2015

Dear Fellow Senators:

I hesitate to impose upon you this summary. However, as you know from the agenda, we will only have fifteen minutes on Wednesday and the issues are somewhat complex. In addition, many of you will not be able to attend this session because it was postponed. For those of you who will be away, this summary might be useful as well. When we meet on Wednesday, I will only present a brief overview of the following and reserve the rest of my time for questions and comments. Thanks for your time!

There are two basic and interrelated questions that I think this session to address:

- 1) What might be the implications of the Provost's initiative for education policy at Cornell?
- 2) How, in this case, can we improve the participation of the Faculty Senate in carrying out our responsibilities for advising the central administration with respect to education policy?

As you will soon see, I think that there are no clear and easy answers to these questions. All I will do is propose what we need to construct answers. The first question to address is the implications of the Provost's initiative for education policy at Cornell and why it is important to the future of liberal education in Ithaca.

The Provost's Initiative

Here's what I see in the announcement by the Provost of "Planning Grants for Cross Campus Programs Between Ithaca and Cornell Tech Campuses" (see the attached appendix for the text of that memo). Interpreting the announcement in the absence of clear information about the university budget is a little bit like reading tea leaves but here goes. The Provost, when asked to clarify this memo, stated that it only involved about \$200,000 in seed money given by a donor and that no decisions had been made about the actual design of these cross campus programs. When questioned about the how the construction of the Cornell Tech Campus was proceeding, he said that there were some problems. In what follows, I will proceed as if the design for the planning grants were to be expanded into a full-scale structure for cross-campus teaching. This, of course, is clearly incorrect but my purpose is to demonstrate that, whatever form that design might take, the implications for Cornell education policy are quite significant. That being the case, the Faculty Senate should be involved from the very beginning, including the drafting and evaluation of planning grants.

- 1) When expanded into a full-scale design for cross-campus teaching, the "cross campus programs" appear to entail a substantial subsidization of the Cornell Tech campus by the Ithaca campus. How large that subsidization would be depends on how many grants are accepted and what the final design might be. But we should note that the proposals must present "sustainable financial models in the long run, with support from the relevant deans to cover short-run deficits." The deans

referred to here are stationed in Ithaca so this apparently implies a redistribution of funds to Cornell Tech.

- 2) While it is theoretically possible that faculty funded by the Cornell Tech campus might submit proposals to teach in Ithaca, the clear implication is that this would be a more or less one-way street: Ithaca faculty will be traveling to New York, not in the other direction.
- 3) As it stands now, the program design would probably veil the cross-subsidization between campuses by making the proposals appear to be funded by the Ithaca campus. Faculty apply to their respective deans on the Ithaca campus for grants that then oblige at least some of them to travel to New York to teach. The funding appears on the Ithaca budget but the teaching is delivered to Cornell Tech.
- 4) This would be a very expensive way to fund teaching in New York because travelling faculty will not be permanently relocated (and must thus rent lodging). That means that the grant proposals must include living expenses. It is likely, for that reason, that the grants will simply assume that the Ithaca campus will cover all salary plus, at least, travel and rent in New York.
- 5) Almost all viable grant proposals should include graduate training in either Computer Science, Electrical and Computer Engineering, Operations Research, Information Science, Law, Business Administration, Information Systems, Connective Media, or Health Tech and the Built Environment. Because some departments and colleges on the Ithaca Campus will have more successful applications (e.g., many departments and programs in the humanities and social sciences would appear to be ineligible) and because we can assume that faculty detailed to New York will be replaced in Ithaca at least temporarily (and thus compensated by the central administration), there will also be a substantial redistribution of faculty and funding between departments and colleges on the Ithaca campus.
- 6) In the fourth paragraph, the Provost notes that classrooms and housing in New York will not be ready for almost two years. That fact and other aspects of the program suggest that Cornell Tech is facing rather significant budgeting and development challenges. The Ithaca campus would thus be subsidizing Cornell Tech in a period when the latter, apparently, is or will soon be running a substantial fiscal deficit and, thus, cannot fund its own programs. Because this is a very inefficient program, we might infer that the fiscal stress in New York is fairly serious.
- 7) All of this might suggest why the Provost has been reluctant to release budget information that might disclose cross-subsidization between campuses and colleges. But it also suggests that that information, when and if it becomes available, should be read quite carefully. From the very broadest perspective, a comparison of the Ithaca and New York budgets might show both of them to be balanced when, in reality, the former is subsidizing the latter.

As I said at the beginning, this is a lot like reading tea leaves! My purpose is to demonstrate that the Provost's initiative has significant implications for education policy at Cornell and that the Faculty Senate should be involved from the very onset.

### How to Proceed

Some, perhaps many, of you may agree that the Faculty Senate should be involved in the design of cross-campus programs but believe that the University Faculty Committee already exercises that responsibility for us. There are at least two reasons for believing this to be the case, both enshrined in the formal responsibilities of the UFC which include, among other things: "3. Act as an executive committee for the Senate and the University Faculty" and "4. Inform and consult the Senate on a regular and frequent basis." Among the substantive responsibilities, the UFC is also responsible for the functions outlined in Article X, XIII, and the "Resolution on Shared Governance in Matters of Educational Policy as Required" by these articles.

Realizing that the UFC has been formally delegated these responsibilities, I asked the committee to describe how it operated, particularly with respect to its relations with the Faculty Senate. Only one member replied to my questions. Here is what I learned from those replies and other information. First, the University Faculty Committee (UFC) does not keep a written record (e.g., minutes) of its deliberations. While we do learn of positive decisions made by the UFC because those are reported in the monthly agenda, there is no record of negative decisions or of meetings with the central administration. Second, UFC meetings are unannounced and ordinary senators are prohibited from attending. This prohibition even extends to senators who have proposed resolutions for the consideration before the Faculty Senate. Third and more specifically, I have asked the UFC whether or not it has met with the central administration on the Provost's initiative or other matters. Because no one has replied to this question, it is probable that it is the practice of the committee not to confirm or otherwise comment on such meetings. All of this means that the UFC in many ways lacks transparency (and this lack of transparency even extends to the practices that define the committee's relations with the Faculty Senate). None of these practices are set down in university by-laws so the committee has the ability to reform its own procedures. But that is not my point at the moment.

My point is that I think the UFC as presently constituted cannot fulfill the role which has been assigned to it. And for that reason the Faculty Senate should ask the Provost to participate in an open discussion of the central administration's plans for changing education policy at Cornell.

### Some of the Questions We Would Ask of the Provost

- 1) How does the central administration plan to involve the Faculty Senate in education policy?
- 2) How serious are the fiscal problems associated with the Cornell Tech campus and what are the future implications of these problems for funding and research on the Ithaca campus?
- 3) What steps, if any, is the central administration taking to ensure that liberal education at Cornell will be funded as generously as those programs designated as eligible for "cross campus" grants?

- 4) Might we be allowed to see the specifics of past, present, and future budgets so that we can better understand the redistributive implications of these initiatives? For one thing, there appears to be a rather significant disconnect between (a) explanations for the fiscal crisis that surprised us several years ago and (b) the continuing imposition of what were then described as emergency responses to that crisis.

I thank you all for your indulgence!

Richard

Appendix: Text of the Planning Grants memo

To: Deans, Directors, and Department Heads  
From: Michael I. Kotlikoff, Provost  
Re: Planning Grants for Cross Campus Programs Between Ithaca and Cornell Tech Campuses

In her 2015 State of the University address, President Garrett announced the availability of funds for feasibility and planning grants for academic programs that span the Ithaca and Cornell Tech campuses. In collaboration with the Cornell Tech Dean, I will oversee the evaluation of proposals and selection of grant recipients according to the criteria below. Each submitted proposal should be endorsed by one or more school or college deans.

The grants will provide seed funding for a few of the most promising new cross campus program ideas, in order to support exploration of their potential and feasibility. Proposed programs should be relevant to the Cornell Tech focus on the digital age, while broadening beyond the current plans for graduate degree programs in technology, business and law. Proposed programs should create substantial interaction among students and faculty based on both campuses, rather than being primarily oriented towards students or faculty on one campus.

Programs also need to have sustainable financial models in the long run, with support from the relevant deans to cover short-run deficits. The financial model can be developed more fully as part of the planning grant but some preliminary information should be provided in the proposal.

Seed grant funds can be used for pilots, curriculum development, investigating student demand, validating the financial model, and similar activities that will demonstrate the academic value and financial viability of the proposed program. It is expected that the grant funds will largely support administrative and travel costs related to such activities, rather than faculty release time or summer salaries.

Proposers should note that until the permanent campus opens in fall 2017, there is no available classroom or meeting space at Cornell Tech during the academic year and very limited space in the summer and during winter break. There is also no housing until fall 2017, at which time an on-campus apartment building will open. There are no plans for undergraduate residence halls or the staffing that is normally present in such facilities. More broadly, appropriate student support would need to be part of any proposal that involves undergraduates spending time at the Cornell Tech campus.

Further note that the currently planned degree programs for Cornell Tech are: MEng in Computer Science, MEng in Electrical and Computer Engineering, MEng in Operations Research, MPS in Information Science, Master of Laws (LLM), Master of Business Administration (MBA), and Technion Cornell dual MS in Information Systems with concentrations in Connective Media, Health Tech and the Built Environment.

The deadline for submissions is January 22, 2016. All proposals should be sent by email to Patty Ard, [pma2@cornell.edu](mailto:pma2@cornell.edu), with the subject line "cross-campus proposal" and must copy the endorsing dean(s). Selections will be announced by April 15, 2016.