

Resolution to Amend the University Bylaws to Allow Cornell Faculty to Earn a Graduate or Professional Degree from Cornell University

Whereas: Currently the University Bylaws stipulate that “No member of the University Faculty may be a candidate for a degree administered by Cornell University.” forcing these faculty to pursue graduate studies at a competing institution which may lead to faculty retention issues. Additionally, some cases of dual career faculty retention could be addressed with additional opportunities for faculty pursuing academic degrees at Cornell.

Whereas: Academic scholarship is changing to include greater emphasis on interdisciplinary activity, understanding, and collaboration. In some cases, this may foster an interest in faculty to obtain advanced degrees in more than one disciplinary area. Some current faculty at Cornell may wish to pursue a Ph.D. or professional degree (e.g., J.D.) in a field beyond their core discipline.

Whereas: The General Committee of the Graduate School agreed In November 2010 to changes that would be necessary in the Code of Legislation to allow University Faculty to be a candidate for a Cornell degree. The General Committee voted to “endorse changes in the Code of Legislation, Cornell University bylaws, and other pertinent university policies and procedures to allow tenured Cornell University faculty members, upon recommendation by their academic dean and with approval by the Provost, and upon admission by a Cornell graduate or professional degree program, to earn a Cornell University graduate or professional degree, when such pursuits are judged to provide institutional benefits and to be in the long-term interest of the university.”

Whereas: This potential policy change was discussed with the Vice President for Human Resources and with University Counsel. The next steps for considering this policy change involve the Faculty Senate and the Board of Trustees. Changes will be required to the University Bylaws, the Faculty Handbook, and the Code of Legislation of the Graduate Faculty. Because the University Bylaws trump the other two policy documents, the University Bylaws must ultimately be changed first, before changes to the Faculty Handbook and the Code of Legislation may be made, even if endorsed by the faculty. However, faculty endorsement (from the General Committee as attained above, and from the Faculty Senate) is necessary before moving this forward to the Board of Trustees.

Whereas: Including a provision in the University Bylaws to prohibit any voting faculty member to be a candidate for a degree administered by Cornell University was likely motivated during a time when the university faculty was much smaller, when parochial interests and concerns about political favors were more common and there was a perceived need to guard against department or graduate programs falling prey to favoritism or antagonism in assessing degree candidates from faculty in other departments, and when much less emphasis was placed on the value of interdisciplinary training and scholarship.

Be it resolved that: Articles XIII.2 and XIV.2 of the University Bylaws be amended to strike the sentence “No member of the University Faculty may be a candidate for a degree administered by Cornell University.” And replace it with the sentence “A tenured member of the University Faculty may be a candidate for a graduate or professional degree administered by Cornell University upon recommendation by the faculty member’s academic dean and with approval by the Provost, and upon admission by a Cornell graduate or professional degree program, when such pursuits are judged to provide institutional benefits and to be in the long-term interest of the university.”