

Proposed Resolution: Inclusion and Prioritization of a New Natatorium in the ‘To Do the Greatest Good’ Capital Campaign

Faculty Senator Co-sponsors:

Ashleigh Newman
Yuval Grossman
Carrie Adler
Doug Antczak
Alexandra Blackman
Elizabeth Bunting
Thomas Bjorkman
Abigail Cohn
Laura Goodman
Kelly Hume
Steven Jackson
Carolyn McDaniel
Thomas Overton
Itziar Rodriguez de Rivera
Tracy Stokol
Joe Wakshlag
David Zax

Committee Sponsor:

Faculty Advisory Committee on Athletics and Physical Education

Background:

This resolution arises from the imminent need for Cornell University to develop plans, fundraise, and construct a new natatorium.

Many Cornell community members utilize the aquatic facilities on Cornell’s Ithaca campus including students, faculty (both current and Emeritus), and staff. It is estimated that over 600 students use Cornell’s pools from the following groups: varsity swimming and diving teams, physical education classes (beginner, intermediate, and conditioning swimming; diving, scuba diving, lifeguarding, synchronized swimming, and kayaking), swimming and water polo club teams, physical therapy, inner tube water polo intramural, naval reserve officer training corps (ROTC), and autonomous underwater vehicle club. In addition, in fiscal year 2018-2019, 1,875 students and 742 faculty, staff, and retirees swam during open swim offerings resulting in 23,987 total swims (43% of which were students, 57% non-students).¹ Cornell recreation services also offers Aqua Fit and Zumba classes. The pools also serve children ages 4 – 14 enrolled in the Cornell University Big Red Sports (CUBS) summer camps.

Swimming and other water-based exercise have proven benefits for both physical and mental health, including an increase in self-esteem in college students.² In particular, swimming during the winter has been shown to improve

¹ 2019 Summary on Cornell pool use.

² [Health Benefits of Water-based Exercise](#), Center for Disease Control and Prevention.

Howley, EK. [4 Reasons Why Swimming is Great for Mental Health](#). *U.S. Masters Swimming*. January 6, 2021.

Zhang, Hui, Luo Shi. [Empirical Analysis of the Influence of Swimming Training on Mental Health and Positive Emotions of College Students](#). *Revista Argentina de Clinica Psicologica*; Buenos Aires. Vol 29, Issue 1, 2020: 242.

Muhamad, TA et al. [Effects of Swimming on Self-Esteem among Female College Students](#). *Asian Social Science*. Vol. 9 No. 16; 2013:74-80.

general well-being.³ This is relevant for the Cornell community, as many suffer from the winter blues and Seasonal Affective Disorder due to Ithaca's long, cloudy winters.⁴ The COVID-19 pandemic has also resulted in an increase in depression symptoms⁵, bringing to the forefront the need to prioritize preventative measures that benefit mental health.⁶

While Cornell has three pools on campus [two in Teagle Hall (1951) and one in Helen Newman Hall (1963)], they are 71 and 59 years old, respectively, and no longer meet industry standards for a modern facility. Two are six-lane, 25-yard pools, and the third is a "learn to swim" four-lane, 20-yard pool, all with insufficient surrounding deck space. A modern natatorium is an eight-lane, 50-meter by 25-yard pool that is at minimum 9 feet deep, with 14 foot depth in the diving well (for 3-meter springboard diving). The main pool in Teagle Hall is the sole facility that can be used for swimming and diving competition, as Helen Newman lacks diving boards and swimming starting blocks, with undersized swimming lanes that are too narrow and shallow. Even at Teagle, the varied depth is not ideal for water polo play, and swimming and diving cannot occur concurrently, as the diving well is integrated into the 25-yard main pool footprint. The smaller pool in Teagle Hall is used for physical therapy, physical education classes, and aspects of varsity use (e.g., cooling down for meets), but cannot be used for competition, water polo play, or the underwater vehicle club, due to the truncated length and/or insufficient depth.

While Cornell's current aquatic facilities have long been out-of-date and inferior to our Ivy League and many non-Ivy League peers (see Appendix 1), in recent years, there has been increased closures of the pools, including those of longer duration, due to unsafe water quality conditions and failed regular maintenance. In response, an independent study of Cornell's pools was conducted in 2019. It was concluded that while the pools may be able to function within the laws of New York State (8-hour turnover rate for pools built before 1973), the current turnover rates are not effectively maintaining water quality and need to be far lower (0.8-3.3 hours) to do so, when accounting for the high usage.⁷ High patron load was concluded to be a contributing factor to the poor water quality. Therefore, reducing the patron load/ pool usage has been pursued as one way to prolong the life of these facilities. As a result of this decision and the periodic pool closures due to poor water quality, there has been progressively reduced pool availability for all the stakeholders detailed above. This has been the source of increasing frustration for Cornell pool users, as publicized in the Cornell Daily Sun.⁸ In 2020, \$750,000 was invested in all three pools for new sand filters, repair of some plumbing, as well as structural shoring. The decision was made to use wooden beams, instead of the more expensive steel, because the steel would last longer than the lifespan of the pools they were supporting. These improvements are expected to extend the life of the pool by approximately five years, but are in no way a permanent solution to the aged facilities' problems. In addition, Teagle Hall needs a new roof, which is estimated to cost between ten and twelve million dollars and would require all occupants to vacate for at least a ten-month period with additional relocation costs. A better investment of the University's money would be to put these funds towards the construction of a new natatorium. Cornell Facilities Management warns that the pools face imminent catastrophic failure at any time despite these recent palliative measures. No other college or university in Appendix 1 is without a functioning pool.

One consequence of no pool on campus would mean the termination of the beginning swimming class (PE 1100), in which people of color represented 89.7% of enrolled students from 2018 – 2020.⁹ Students who have

³ Huttunen P, et al. 2004. [Winter swimming improves general well-being](#). *Int J Circumpolar Health*, 63:2, 140-144.

⁴ Cornell Health. Beating the Winter Blues: [A Guide on Getting Through Winter at Cornell](#). October 2019.

⁵ Ettman, CK et al. [Prevalence of Depression Symptoms in US Adults Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#). *JAMA Network Open*. September 2, 2020.

⁶ Lieber, M. [What regular swimming does for the body and mind](#). CNN health. July 16, 2021.

⁷ Helen Newman and Teagle Halls Pool Study. 2019. Counsilman-Hunsaker Aquatics for Life.

⁸ Kempff, Brendan. [Cornell's Pool Problem Needs a Fresh Solution](#). Cornell Daily Sun. September 23, 2021.

⁹ Cornell University PE 1100 enrollment data. Fall 2018 – Spring 2020.

completed this course out of necessity report undergoing a transformative experience starting with reluctance, fear, and dread to one of immense pride and accomplishment when they learn how to swim and pass Cornell's swim test (see Appendix 2).¹⁰ For over a century, Cornell University has sent the message that swimming is an important life skill through the swim test graduation requirement. Learning to swim helps to break the cycle of parents who do not know how to swim and therefore do not encourage their children to learn to swim.¹¹ In the United States, an average of 3,957 unintentional drowning deaths occurred each year from 2010-2019.¹² Drowning death rates for American Indian or Alaska Native and non-Hispanic Black persons are higher than that of White persons¹³, likely due to generational inequities in access. Implementing community-level interventions such as basic swimming instruction are encouraged as means to reduce racial disparities in drowning rates. Therefore, providing Cornell students access to pools and swimming instruction is a matter of diversity, equity, and inclusion importance, as well.

Even if all three existing pools were fully operational, they no longer meet the ever-expanding demands of the Cornell community. Due to the limited number of lanes and inability to have multiple groups in a pool at one time, the pools are used up to 15.75 hours per day (6:00 am – 11:15 pm) to accommodate all stakeholders. Even then, there are groups (particularly club teams) that are not able to schedule their desired number of hours per week or groups that cannot get pool time at all. In contrast, at Ithaca College for example, their 50-meter pool can accommodate eighteen, 25-yard, lanes of swimming, *as well as* diving at the same time. This maximizes the number of occupants in the facility at one time, allowing for increased availability and at more ideal times of day.

In addition to the inadequate swimming pools, the programmatic changes over the life of the facilities no longer provide sufficient and equitable use for visitors. When Teagle Hall was originally constructed, it was built as a male-only athletic facility and the modifications for female and transgender and gender non-conforming persons are inequitable and insufficient. In 2018, the University Assembly passed U.A. Resolution #12: Increasing Access to Gender Neutral Bathrooms on Campus¹⁴ to expand inclusion and comfort. The Student Assembly similarly passed S.A. Resolution #21: Availability of Accessible Gender-Neutral Bathrooms and Locker Rooms on Campus.¹⁵ Although the current facilities have been either modified or are being prioritized to meet this resolution, they will not be equitable in their distribution to all parties due to design and structural limitations to the buildings. The pools are also not handicap accessible. A new facility designed with these programmatic requirements would be the most cost efficient and effective way to address this University priority, as accessibility deficiencies for Teagle alone are estimated at 5.9 million dollars.

In April 2020, Cornell University published its Mental Health Review Final Report. It was stated that Cornell has a “culture of competition [that] may take on an unhealthy cycle of expectation and behavior that can reach traumatizing levels for students, faculty, and staff.”¹⁶ In examining and exploring the ways to improve the mental health of the Cornell community, the report was broken down into four sections: A) foster a healthy educational environment; B) promote social connectedness, and resilience; C) increasing help-seeking behavior, and identifying people in need of care; and D) provide mental and medical health services. In Section B under Opportunities, it reads, “It is important to note that when asked for their recommendations, undergraduate,

¹⁰ Jain, A. [A Changing Perspective of the Swim Test](#). Retracting a Former Column. Cornell Daily Sun. March 29, 2017.

¹¹ [History of the Cornell Swim Test](#).

¹² [Drowning facts](#), Center for Disease Control and Prevention.

¹³ Clemens T, et al. [Persistent Racial/Ethnic Disparities in Fatal Unintentional Drowning Rates Among Persons Aged <29 years – United States, 1999-2019](#). MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep 2021;70:869-874.

¹⁴ Cornell University, University Assembly, U.A. Resolution # 12: Increasing Access to Gender Neutral Bathrooms on Campus, March 2018.

https://assembly.cornell.edu/sites/default/files/ua_resolution_12_gender_neutral_bathrooms_amended_as_of_04.10.18.pdf

¹⁵ Cornell University, Student Assembly, S.A. Resolution #21: Availability of Accessible Gender-Neutral Bathrooms and Locker Rooms on Campus. <https://archive.assembly.cucloud.net/SA/20111103R21.html>

¹⁶ Cornell University Mental Health Review Final Report. April 2020.

graduate, and professional students consistently prioritized the need for access to free physical fitness opportunities to cope with stress and build resilience. With Ithaca’s climate, students want free and convenient indoor fitness options.” The report acknowledged “the challenge that this presents given both financial and facility constraints.” Recommendation B.2.2 under Wellbeing reads, “Prioritize fundraising for free physical fitness under Affordability within the capital campaign.” It is important to note that pool access is free to all Cornell students, unlike other fitness centers on campus that require a paid Cornell Fitness Center membership. Ideas such as “virtual fitness classes” and the use of “virtual and augmented reality” were proposed in the report as alternatives to fitness centers on campus. There is no virtual equivalent for aquatic activities, and these suggestions simply fail to meet the mental health needs of Cornell’s students, as well as faculty and staff.

In an email to the Cornell community on October 18, 2021, President Martha Pollack announced Cornell University’s new capital campaign project, “To Do the Greatest Good.” The campaign’s official website lays out the goal of raising at least \$5 billion over the next five years through the connections of at least 200,000 Cornellians.¹⁷ This campaign provides the rare opportunity to reach major donors across all of Cornell and finally raise the funds necessary to make this long overdue project a reality. A modern natatorium on par with our peers both in Ithaca and beyond, would do an enormous amount of good for Cornell and the broader Ithaca community benefitting physical and mental well-being. The fact that this need is not even listed as a university priority is disgraceful. The process of project approval, architectural planning, demolition, and construction is likely to take 7-10 years. If this process began today, this timeline is well beyond the estimated 5-year remaining lifespan of the pools. Our aged, failing facilities cannot wait any longer.

The thought of a Cornell University with no functioning pool is unfathomable and unacceptable.

The Resolution:

Whereas, participation in physical, cultural, and social activities outside of one’s primary studies or work provides individuals with a sense of belonging at Cornell and enriches their overall well-being.

Whereas, the pools in Teagle Hall and Helen Newman Hall (further referred to as “the pools”) serve a large and diverse population of Cornell community members including students, faculty, and staff in endeavors including varsity athletics, physical education classes, aquatic-based physical therapy, clubs – both academic and athletic, open lap swimming, ROTC training, and group fitness classes.

Whereas, the pools no longer meet the needs of the Cornell community as detailed above, and have a finite lifespan, which are estimated to end at any time between now and 2025.

Whereas, approving, planning, fundraising, and building a new natatorium can take up to ten years. Cornell University faces the certain reality of having no operational pool on its campus.

Whereas, Cornell University has long valued swimming as an important life skill to prevent fatal unintentional drowning, as demonstrated by over 100 years of a graduation requirement for all undergraduate students to swim 75 yards or pass two semesters of beginning swimming (PE 1100).

Whereas, providing an inviting, modern, safe, and accessible environment for aquatic activities provides Cornell students, faculty, and staff the ability to exercise year-round, which is a proven positive contributor to mental health.

¹⁷ <https://greatestgood.cornell.edu/>

Whereas, recommendation B.2.2 of the Cornell University Mental Health Review Final Report reads, “Prioritize fundraising for free physical fitness under Affordability within the capital campaign.”

Whereas, we recognize there are many needs of the University, it would be in the University’s best interest to serve those that are of the most imminent need to its community.

Be it resolved, that the Faculty Senate implore the administration to include and prioritize a new natatorium in the list of fundraisings items donors may directly contribute to in Cornell University’s ‘To Do the Greatest Good’ capital campaign.

Be it further resolved, that a new natatorium should be of sufficient size and quality to meet the current and future needs of the Cornell community. To help ensure this, the planning needs to involve Cornell leaders with knowledge and expertise in this area including the Directors of Athletics, Aquatics, Physical Education, Recreational Services, and Head Varsity Swimming Coaches.

Appendix 1 : Specifications of Ivy League, Non-Ivy League Peer, and Regional Institutions' Aquatic Facilities

Category of school	Name of Institution	NCAA Division	Year facility built	Specs of pool(s)	Can swimming and diving competition occur concurrently?		University website +/- images, videos of facilities
					Yes	No	
Ivy League	Brown	I	2012	8 lane, 50 meter	Yes	No	https://provmrec.com/sports/2018/4/27/inside-rec-facilities-k-m-coleman-aquatics-center.aspx
	Columbia	I	1974	8 lane, 25 yard	No	No	https://peeeec.columbia.edu/
	Cornell	I	1951- 1963	Two 6 lane 25 yard; One 4 lane 20 yard pool	No	No	https://recreation.athletics.cornell.edu/hours-facilities/pool-hours
	Dartmouth	I	1963	15 lane (6 racing), 25 yard; 2 lane, 50 meter; 4 lane, 25 yard	No	No	https://dartmouthsports.com/sports/2018/9/30/1447561.aspx
	Harvard	I	1977	8 lane, 50 meter; 25 yard pool; and "smaller pool"	Yes	No	https://recreation.gocornson.com/sports/2020/5/5/recreation-activities-aquatics-index.aspx
	Penn	I	1967	6 lane, 50 meter	No	No	https://gocornson.com/sports/2020/4/2/penn-athletics-facilities-sineer-pool-bio.aspx?d=697
	Princeton	I	1990	8 lane, 50 meter; 6 lane, 25 yard; and "additional wading pool"	Yes	Yes	https://campusrec.princeton.edu/facilities-operations/locations/aquatics-facilities/dillon-pool
	Yale	I	1932	6 lane, 25 yard; 5 lane, 50 meter	No	No	https://sportsandrec.recreation.yale.edu/aquatics/kbpuh-exhibit
							https://sportsandrec.recreation.yale.edu/aquatics/practice-pool
							https://gostanford.com/facilities/every-aquatic-center/4
Non-Ivy Peer	NYU	III	2002	8 lane, 25 yard; L shape with separate diving well	Yes	Yes	https://gonyuathletics.com/sports/2011/1/21/Paladium_1201112947.aspx
	Univ of Chicago	III	2003	9 lane, 50 meter	Yes	Yes	https://athletics.uchicago.edu/recreation/aquatics/index
	Duke University	I	1972	8 lane, 25 yard with separate 17ft diving well; 4 lane 25 yard; One seasonal outdoor pool (looks like 6 lane, 25 yard)	Yes	Yes	https://recreation.duke.edu/aquatics
	Stanford University	I	2001	4 separate pools in aquatic center (all outdoor), 37m long x 20 Y wide; 50 m long x 25 m wide; 50 m long x 25 yard wide; 6 lane rooftop recreation pool	Yes	Yes	https://recreation.duke.edu/aquatics
Regional schools	Ithaca College	III	2011	9 lane 50 meter x 21 lane 25 yard indoor pool (with 32' x 75' movable floor); 6 lane, 25 yard + diving well outdoor heated pool	Yes	Yes	https://www.ithaca.edu/athletics-and-events-center/aquatics-pavilion-kelsey-partridge-bird-natalatorium-and-outdoor-pool
	University of Buffalo	I	1982	8 lane, 50 meter; separate diving well	Yes	Yes	https://www.visitbuffaloniaagara.com/businesses/university-at-buffalo-silvini-arena-natalatorium/
	Colgate University	I	1974	50 meter L shape with 8 lane 25 yard; retractable roof	Yes	Yes	https://colgateathletics.com/sports/2005/12/13/inhberry.aspx
	University of Rochester	III	2012	renovation 8 lane, 25 yard x 25 m with separate diving well	Yes	Yes	https://www.rochester.edu/athletics/aquatics/index.html
	Birmingham University	I	1989	6 lane, 25 yard and 5 lane, 25 yard rec pool	Yes	No	https://sportsandrec.recreation.yale.edu/aquatics/practice-pool
	St. Bonaventure	I	1966	6 lane, 25 yard	No	No	https://gobonvies.com/facilities/reilly-center-pool/8
	Hartwick College	III	2014	8 lane, 25 yard	No	No	https://www.hartwickhawks.com/sports/2012/2/29/GEN_0229124947.aspx
Hamilton College	III	1988	8 lane, 50 meter	Yes	Yes	https://athletics.hamilton.edu/facilities/distric-pool/4	

Appendix 2

PE 1100 comments (2019-2021):

- The instructor's biggest strength was her ability to push and motivate the students to try and do the swimming. I started with a fear and no prior knowledge, and I can swim now! And this is mainly because she always reassured me and helped me gain confidence, and I was able to push myself to do better and better.
- She related to us as a student, so we felt close
- The instructor's strengths were connecting with the students, and I liked how personal and enthusiastic she was
- Encouraged student to not be afraid and is very good at coming up with ideas/methods to get rid of past fears that student may have.
- The way our instructor demonstrated new ideas of swimming and how to have confidence while learning which one is afraid of.
- She was very encouraging at getting us to swim, and made class an enjoyable experience.
- Advices were personal and helped me improved greatly in swimming.
- Coach ____ really encouraged me to do my best in class since I started out as a beginner and did not know too much about swimming. After several weeks of class, I kept improving and got much better with her help. This is one of the best classes I have taken and an amazing teacher that only wants the best for her students.
- Everything went well and there was plenty of help and cautiousness when participating in this class. Overall, I would take another class with this teacher and encourage my friends to take this class as well. Thank you.
- The material I learned was appropriate to the course description and it provided me with a safe environment to destress while also learning valuable knowledge
- ...is a perfect instructor. She taught me how to swim.
- was able to learn very fast even though I had no knowledge of sports.
- Yes this class was taught appropriately. I definitely saw a huge growth from the beginning of the class to the last day.
- She is very knowledgeable on the subject, took personal interest in the students, and personalized class time for each student as we became more advanced in the subject. It was always a highlight of my day going to her class and talking with her. I appreciated how she asked me how finals were going or how I was handling my other classes.
- I loved this class and really looked forward to it every week. This class genuinely brought me happiness.
- excellent feedback, challenged us, and provided motivation
- She was able to make it feel like a private lesson even though it was in a group. No one felt neglected.
- I believe she was very effective in taking me from a not swimmer to a relatively competent one.
- [They] really loved to teach swim. She would always come in every day with a growth mindset/attitude towards learning. She was overjoyed when I learned something new and taught it to me pretty nice. She showed me a great deal of respect and I really hope to hear from her again.
- One of my greatest fears was not being able to pass the swim test, but I can say due to the competence of my teacher I can swim now.
- I signed up for this course with no expectations and I left the course gaining a whole new life skill. I had a few traumatic experiences with drowning as a child and never thought that I would be able to learn how to swim. I'm incredibly grateful that ____ was my teacher. She was so patient with me and gave me the confidence I needed to be able to trust the water. I would recommend her to anyone that wants to take swim!
- This was my first time learning how to swim and as someone who really loves water, this course taught me a lot of the basics of swimming and made me feel excited to swim. I always felt safe in the water and there was no sense of danger.
- This class was amazing. Not only did she teach me how to swim, but she helped me and my other classmates get over our fear of the water. I think they adequately adapted the lessons to fit individual skill level and moved us to new lessons when we were ready.
- The course was pretty solid. Coming in before this I did not know how to swim, nor wanted to know how to swim, now I can swim and passed the swim test.
- I did not know how to swim, I was scared to learn and I learned how to swim the first week of this class. Safety was emphasized and it felt good to have a life guard there when the teacher was working with other students.
- Extremely kind and a great swimming instructor. She knew exactly how to help each individual student learn faster and more efficiently, and have fun doing it. I couldn't have been happier to have her as my instructor this past semester. Swimming had always been a scary thought and with her help, it became possible quick easily and quickly.
- ____ is a very encouraging, attentive and fun instructor. She made my beginner swim class as least stressful as possible, in fact, I looked forward to her classes every week. Her approachable demeanor and intuitive instructions were essential at helping me learn to swim, as well as boosting my confidence in my abilities. I look forward to swimming on weekends and am enrolled in conditioning swim class next semester.