

**To: Provost Kotlikoff, Vice Provost August, Vice Provost Nishii, Dean of Faculty DeRosa, and members of the Part-Time Bachelor's Degree Program for Non-traditional Students Committee**

**From: Faculty of the American Indian and Indigenous Studies Program**

**Re: AIISP Faculty Statement on Part-Time Bachelor's Degree Program for Non-traditional Students**

**Date: March 30, 2022**

The faculty of the American Indian and Indigenous Studies Program (AIISP) wish to make a number of observations about the October 28, 2021 Proposal for a Part-Time Bachelor's Degree Program for Non-traditional Students (PTBDNTS) and the other documents that have followed it.

We are in agreement with the Cornell Academic Programs and Policies Committee (CAPP), Educational Policy Committee (EPC), and the Committee on Academic Freedom and the Professional Status of the Faculty (CAFPS) that there are serious concerns related to the PTBDNTS proposal, including staffing and labor for the new program, and the potential to create two-tier systems for both Cornell education and Cornell faculty labor. We also have concerns about how this new program has been effectively presented as a "done deal" without adequate consultation and approval from existing units that will be enmeshed with this effort. The Provost's March 21, 2022 clarification statement did little to allay our unease.

Beyond these very important general considerations, Indigenous students specifically are targeted as one of the potential audiences for PTBDNTS. Thus AIISP is directly implicated in the proposal in a way that most other units are not. We have three particular issues with the way the proposal has been framed to date.

### **1. Consultation, Agreement, and Workload**

Given the focus on Indigenous education in PTBDNTS, one of our faculty should have been named to the original committee. This did not take place, despite our having faculty with the exact expertise needed.

Next, on page 7 of the original proposal, the following statement appears:

Providing culturally appropriate advising and support will be essential through partnership with Cornell's American Indian and Indigenous Studies Program, and with student services staff and faculty who could provide opportunities for engagement and social connection.

*We note that this statement was made without any consultation with AIISP, although the text implies that we have agreed to it. We have not.*

Given PTBDNTS' emphasis on Indigenous students, we think it is incumbent that courses in Indigenous Studies be offered in it so that students enrolled in the program have an option to learn the history and current situations of Indigenous Nations and explore alternatives for maintaining sovereignty and sustainability. There are no courses even remotely like this in eCornell's current offerings. While our tenure-track faculty would be the best people to create such content, none of

us currently is willing to make this commitment. We observe that this is essentially at present an unfunded mandate that has been imposed on the program's already overtaxed faculty and staff.

## **2. A Second-Tier Education for Indigenous Students**

We are vastly troubled by the possibility that Indigenous students could be earmarked for a degree program that is centered on asynchronous learning and possibly being staffed by contingent faculty or graduate students. While it is certainly true that there are non-traditional Indigenous students and Indigenous individuals who are not willing or able to leave their home communities, we point out that in-person learning is vastly preferential (by Cornell's own reckoning). The optics and ethics of slotting Indigenous students into a suboptimal alternative are unsettling to say the least.

## **3. The Program is Not Adequate Redress for Indigenous Dispossession**

The language of the original PTBDNTS proposal states

As a land-grant institution benefiting from Native American and Indigenous lands granted to New York State by the federal government under the Morrill Act of 1862, a PT bachelor's degree would also allow Cornell to better fulfill a role in enhancing access to educational opportunities for these communities. (page 7)

In her December 8, 2021 presentation to the Faculty Senate on the proposed program, VP Niishi further stated that Cornell has a "distinctive commitment" to Indigenous students due to "the land that was given to us in the Morrill Act."

These statements suggest that the program's planners see PTBDNTS as in some way providing redress for the benefit Cornell has received, and continues to receive, from Indigenous dispossession.

The AIISP faculty emphatically state that the administration's actions to date and this program cannot be considered adequate redress for Cornell's acquisition and management of Indigenous lands taken through force and fraud in the course of a national genocide. Significant new action is required to address the revelations about Cornell's history documented in the March 2020 *High Country News* "[Land-Grab Universities](#)" study. The land-grab issue is a thread that runs through all Cornell properties, past and present: Cornell has benefited directly, or financially, from those lands while Indigenous peoples were excluded. Indigenous Nations in New York and the fifteen states where Cornell Morrill Act scrip was deployed have literally paid for Cornell with their lives and lands. How can we continue to make their descendants pay for a second time?

Cornell needs to provide much more than a part-time degree program to account for its "distinctive commitment" to Indigenous communities. Minimally, both in-person and any eventual online program should provide tuition and cost waivers or reductions for Indigenous students. There should be much more beyond this, but cost reduction for Indigenous students enrolled in all Cornell degree programs is a fundamental first step. Ideally, this should move in the direction of full-ride packages for students from Indigenous communities affected by Cornell's past and present landholding activities.