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Hope is in connections we make, say final Soup & Hope speakers



At a talk she gave in Sage Chapel March 23, Frances Yufen Lee Mehta, senior lecturer of Chinese Mandarin in the Department of Asian Studies, recounted her parents' fleeing from the 1940's civil war in mainland China, to Taiwan, her own journey from Taiwan to the U.S., and her experiences as a faculty fellow and faculty-in-residence at Cornell.

A week later, Kimerly Cornish, youth and family program coordinator for graduate student families at Hasbrouck Community Center, traced her family's many ties to Harriet Tubman.

Both of these Soup & Hope presenters see their experiences as testimony to the same tenet: that hope is found in human interconnections.

"Life is not always a smooth passage; there are ups and downs and even times of struggle and despair," said Mehta, who attributed surviving tough times to her determination, strength and hope that things would turn out for the better.

Mehta's parents had six children – five, including Mehta, who were born in Taiwan. Her mother died when Mehta was six years old. Her father was a teacher and believed in the value of an education; much of Mehta's young life was spent studying. Mehta also decided to be a teacher, because of the impact she might have on others.

Mehta was well-established in her teaching career in Taiwan but in 1990 decided to move to the U.S. with her two sons. Giving up everything to come to the U.S. was "bold," she said, "but the prospect and hope for a better life gave me strength to make that move."

In January 1994, soon after completing her M.A. in language acquisition, she accepted a position to teach Chinese Mandarin at Cornell.

At Cornell she met her future husband, Phiroze Mehta, now professor emeritus in Ithaca College's School of Music. Mehta said she loved teaching Mandarin and she loved her students, many of whom would seek her out for personal advice. In 1996 she became a faculty fellow, and 11 years later a faculty-in-residence in Court-Kay-Bauer. She and her husband held many programs of academic, cultural and social interest for the students, oftentimes with "vigorous discussions and debate."

Now a faculty fellow for the High Rises, faculty adviser to 12 student organizations and a five-year cancer survivor, Mehta said her life revolves around her work, Cornell activities and – of course – students. "I hope I have touched them as much as they have touched me," she said.

Cornish focused her Soup & Hope talk on the connections she made with others while pursuing her family's interest in and relationship to Harriet Tubman, a leading "conductor" on the Underground Railroad in the 1800s, who helped others to freedom.

For Cornish, hope is "in the everyday exchanges and activities of people.... There are always connections that can be made."

These connections extended from visits Cornish and her mother took to Tubman's residence in Auburn, New York, to an unveiling of a painting of Tubman in 2008, where her mother talked at length with the artist. When her mother unexpectedly died in July 2009, Cornish regretted not having recorded her mother's reminiscences and knowledge. She began to document and share her family's Tubman and civil rights relationships.

In 2014, Cornish presented a paper on Tubman at a conference at which a senior curator of history in the National Museum of African American History and Culture was giving a keynote address. The curator described a display of vintage hats by a milliner who lived in Philadelphia. Cornish's aunt Mildred had been a hat model in the same city; through further research she was able to determine that the milliner the curator described was the same milliner for whom Mildred had modeled.

Last November, Cornish reached out to Gloria Richardson Dandridge, a 1960s civil rights leader from Cornish's hometown, having been impressed by the work Dandridge had done. Dandridge replied that many others had been involved in civil rights then, too; she was just doing what she had to do. Cornish was able to establish a connection by sharing that she was known to Dandridge's family.

Recently, Cornish drove to the grand opening of Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad National Historical Park in Dorchester County, Maryland. There, she talked with a professor from Morgan State University, who remembered Cornish's mother giving tours of Dorchester County more than a decade earlier.

"My mother worked for something bigger than herself," Cornish said. Cornish urged the audience to "go forward and share your stories," because "you never know when a tiny story of yours is going to fill somebody else's life and motivate and inspire them to something higher."

Surveys show faculty, staff mostly positive about work at Cornell

According to two universitywide surveys conducted in fall 2016, most faculty and staff members are "very satisfied" or "somewhat satisfied" with their work and the collegial environment at Cornell, while lower levels of satisfaction are related to finances and overall direction of the university.

The Academic Work Life Survey and the Employee Survey were last done in 2010 and 2011, respectively.

"We appreciate the faculty and staff taking time to respond to the surveys," said Provost Michael Kotlikoff. "Their input is of critical importance as we continue to develop strategies to improve work-life experience while furthering our research,

teaching and engagement mission.”

The 2016 survey results show perceptions have not changed significantly, and Kotlikoff has called for two working groups to delve deeper into the surveys’ findings.

The Academic Work Life Survey, with a response rate of 55 percent, elicited feedback from tenured and tenure-track faculty, librarians, lecturers, research and extension associates, academic visitors, postdoctoral fellows and visiting professors. The Employee Survey of nonacademic staff had a response rate of 70 percent.

The surveys’ summary results have been posted on the [Institutional Research and Planning website](#).

Faculty and staff indicated similar rates of satisfaction, with about 80 percent of academics and 81 percent of staff somewhat or very satisfied with their jobs at Cornell.

Those responding to the 2016 academic survey were most satisfied with library resources and services, teaching schedules, and the quality of Cornell’s graduate and professional students. They also gave high marks to their department or unit being a “good fit” for them and having a dean, chair or department head whom they can trust and who creates a collegial and supportive environment.

Lower levels of satisfaction were related to current salary, startup funds, support for securing or managing grants, and funding for graduate students.

Female faculty members were less satisfied than their male counterparts on their rank, benefits, salary, office space and staff support, classroom space, and access to teaching assistants, grants and funding. Asian faculty were more satisfied than white faculty with classroom space, but less satisfied with other aspects. Underrepresented minority faculty were more satisfied than white faculty with staff support and library resources. They also had higher levels of satisfaction overall in 2016 than in 2010.

“While we’ve made steady gains in increasing the numbers of women and underrepresented minority faculty over the past 10 years, we continually look for ways to improve how we support the faculty we have recruited. In the past five years, we’ve focused on better supporting academics throughout their career stages with policies and programs,” said Yael Levitte, associate vice provost for faculty development and diversity.

She pointed to the implementation of an automatic tenure clock extension for a faculty parent of a newborn or newly adopted or foster child and a moratorium on meetings held after 5 p.m. as ways to support work-life balance. The provost’s office also offers a menu of faculty development programs and mentoring lunches. “These positive changes should hopefully impact how supported faculty feel in the future,” she said.

Overall, staff ratings have remained steady since 2011. “We have been heartened to see that four-fifths of our staff again would recommend Cornell as a good place to work and feel their supervisor treats them with respect,” said Mary Opperman, vice president and chief human resources officer.

Opperman also noted positive gains were made in performance reviews, supervisor feedback, and supervisors’ support of their staff for professional development opportunities or in balancing work and family responsibilities. Many staff say recent organizational changes have had a positive change on their work, and have created new opportunities for them. In addition, concern about job security among employees has decreased about 10 percent since 2011.

Other areas – workload, staff recognition and consistency universitywide in workforce policy administration – are issues that remain a concern for many respondents.

“We need to look more closely at the data to better gauge the effects of our efforts to address these concerns,” Opperman said.

Academic and nonacademic perceptions of the overall direction of the university are not as positive. Approximately 39 percent of tenure and tenure-track faculty agreed that Cornell was moving in a positive direction, while 54 percent of other academic professionals and 54 percent of staff responded that Cornell was moving in a positive direction. Forty percent of staff say they understand the strategic goals and objectives of Cornell – a drop of about 10 percent since the last survey.

Kotlikoff said the changes Cornell has experienced since the last surveys were given may account for some of these perceptions. “The 2016 surveys were administered following a sustained period of budget reductions, organizational changes

and the implementation of a new budget model, and during a time of extended leadership transition at Cornell,” he said. “I have discussed these issues with President-elect Martha Pollack, and we look forward to better understanding the views of faculty and staff, and using them to inform future institutional plans.”

As with the 2010 and 2011 surveys, the deans and vice presidents will be given custom sets of data for their areas, aggregated to maintain survey respondents’ confidentiality. The working groups will meet with these senior leaders to further their analysis and develop next steps.

John Gutenberg, 'father of community relations,' to retire

John “Gutie” Gutenberg, former mayor of the city of Ithaca and special adviser to Cornell’s Office of Community Relations, was recognized “for 27 years of meritorious town-gown service” by the Cornell Board of Trustees’ University Relations Committee at its March 23 meeting in Ithaca. Gutenberg will retire from the university April 14.

An Ithaca native, former owner of a Collegetown grocery store (Egan’s IGA), father of four and grandfather of 13, Gutenberg was a member of Ithaca’s Common Council in the 1970s and early ’80s, and served three terms as mayor from 1984-90.

He has been an advocate of positive town-gown community relations ever since.

“As mayor and while working at Cornell, Gutie stressed the importance of bridge-building, of having higher education, government and our shared communities steadily work together when and where possible,” said Joel Malina, vice president for university relations. “He has been a remarkable town-gown advocate both on and off campus, helping to address Tompkins County’s challenges and opportunities with local officials and Cornell leadership for the benefit of all.”

Gutenberg is considered by his colleagues, friends and neighbors as the “father of Cornell Community Relations.” He was hired into Cornell’s Office of Community Relations in 1990 as assistant director, and served several years as director, before cutting back on his hours, prior to his retirement next week.

Since announcing his retirement, Gutenberg also received the key to the city from Mayor Svante Myrick ’09 and proclamations from Cornell, the city of Ithaca and the Tompkins County Legislature.

Noting Gutenberg’s “large heart, steady hand and ability to find solutions that advance the common good,” Interim President Hunter Rawlings said: “With Gutie’s involvement and leadership, Cornell has navigated through a variety of community-campus challenges, and – importantly – numerous shared opportunities. ... I respect this Ithaca native for his integrity, his love of Tompkins County and Cornell, and his enduring wisdom that has served all of us so well.”

E-scrap Week is coming

Members of the Cornell community can recycle their home and office electronics at no charge Monday, April 10-Friday, April 14, 8 a.m.-3 p.m. at the Cornell Recycle Center, 251 Solidago Road (turn onto Palm Road from Rt. 366 and follow signs for CU Recycle Center).

Electronic items to recycle at this event include: Almost anything with a cord, such as computers, TV's, microwaves, telephones, cables, extension cords, power strips, printers, monitors, answering machines, fax machines, typewriters, pagers, cameras, VCR/DVD players. Also CD's, remote controls, stereo/tape/record/8 track tape players.

All recycled items collected will be destroyed and recycled. All hard drives are shredded.

No **light bulbs, refrigerators or batteries** will be accepted.

For more information: email R5 Operations recycle@cornell.edu or call 607-254-1666.

Admitted students visit campus in April

During the month of April, about 5,000 admitted students and family members will visit campus as guests of Diversity Hosting Month and Cornell Days. The students will attend classes and stay overnight in the residence halls. Groups of visitors will also enjoy walking tours of campus.

“We hope you will join us in welcoming the students and their families to our campus,” said Shawn Felton, director of undergraduate admissions. “Some may be exploring college life for the first time, and Ithaca will be a new experience for many. Admitted students and their families will need help finding their way around campus and advice about local shops and restaurants. They may ask about the experience of living and learning here. Please take the time to answer their questions and share your enthusiasm for the Cornell and Ithaca communities.”

Felton continued, “We understand this is a busy time of year, so we appreciate your efforts to engage with our newly admitted students. Your friendly assistance will have an impact on how they feel about Cornell – and that will be very important as they decide whether to join our community.”

Email avpe@cornell.edu with any questions or for more information.

Touchdown a hit at Grandparents Day at Cornell Cinema

More than 100 Cornellians braved a cold and rainy Saturday in Ithaca to attend Cornell’s inaugural Grandparents Day event at Cornell Cinema on March 25, sponsored by Work/Life in Human Resources.

The *Secret Life of Pets*—an animated comedy about the lives pets lead when humans are not around—took viewers on an adventure through Manhattan and included animal antics in a high-rise apartment building while their owners are at work, getting lost on the streets, and being taken underground through the water system.

After the movie, Touchdown the Bear ran down the aisle, delighting the youngsters. Touchdown gave out door prizes, including: Cornell teddy bears donated by the Cornell Store; family memberships to the Johnson Art Museum; and a gift set from the Lab of Ornithology. Door prizes included Dairy Store ice cream coupons and other gifts. The grand prize – a week-long CUBS sports camp donated by Cornell Athletics – went to winner Hope Mandeville, retired staff member from the feminist, gender and sexuality program, who commented how happy her grandnephew Sam was.

Other grandparents said their grandchildren were mesmerized by the theater and concession stand, and loved the prizes, popcorn and drink. For some grandchildren, this was the first time they had attended a movie at a cinema. All received a Frisbee at the end of the event.

Touchdown hung around for hugs and high-fives.

Kathee Shaff is Work/Life program coordinator in the Division of Human Resources.

Office professionals program is April 26

The 29th annual Jennie T. Farley Office Professionals Celebration – one of the largest workplace observances at Cornell – will be held April 26, 11:30 a.m.-1 p.m., in Barton Hall. The complimentary event includes lunch, entertainment and door prizes, and pays tribute to the contributions of Cornell's office staff.

Registration is now open: register online by April 17 at cornellofficeprofessionals.org or contact [Traci Morse](mailto:Traci.Morse@cornell.edu) at t1m6@cornell.edu.

This event was originally organized in 1988 as the Secretaries Day Symposium by co-founders Alice B. Cook and Jennie T. Farley, who were colleagues at the School of Industrial and Labor Relations. In addition to serving on the faculty of ILR, Farley was a champion of women's rights, a member of the Cornell University Board of Trustees and co-founder of the Women's Studies Program.

Big Red Bikes is coming back

Big Red Bikes is relaunching its bike share program with a ribbon-cutting ceremony April 14 at 3:15 p.m. outside of Kennedy Hall (Tower Road side), followed by a larger celebration on the Arts Quad at 4 p.m., featuring food, biking activities and raffle prizes.

The Big Red Bikes program initially will feature a fleet of 32 bicycles, with five pick-up/drop off locations on campus for on-demand, local trips. It will be coordinated through the Big Red Bikes student organization and Cornell's Transportation Services, in partnership with Zagster, a leading provider of bike share programs for cities, universities, businesses and properties.

Anyone 18 or older can join the program by purchasing a weekly or annual pass, or simply pay- as-they-ride at \$3 per hour. The first hour of every ride is free for pass-holders; after the first hour, pass-holder rides cost \$3 per hour.

Riding the bike share is easy. Bikes can be found via the free Zagster app — available for iPhone and Android — or online at <http://zagster.com/cornell>. Each bike has a unique number which riders enter into the app to disengage the ring lock and docking cable at the touch of a button. (Alternatively, riders can obtain unlock codes via text message to use with an on-bike keypad.) A retractable cable mounted to the bike allows the bike to be secured to any fixed object throughout a trip for mid-ride stops. After the rider returns the bike to a designated Zagster bike station, the rental ends and the bike is available for the next person to enjoy.

For more information, visit <http://bigredbikes.cornell.edu>; check for updates at <https://www.facebook.com/CornellBigRedBikes>. More details about membership and how to sign up will be available on April 14. For information about Zagster, visit <http://zagster.com>.