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At EA meeting, Pollack affirms the 'core work' of staff



In the last spring meeting of the Employee Assembly May 17, Cornell President Martha E. Pollack fielded questions from EA members about some of the most complex concerns affecting staff at the Ithaca and Geneva campuses. These ranged from public transportation, affordable housing and accessibility challenges to international student and staff uncertainties in the wake of changes to federal immigration policies.

None have easy answers, Pollack acknowledged, but she gave some indication on how she plans to approach them. Her first few months on campus will be spent listening, she said, learning from everyone, including staff, and coming to understand the university's culture and priorities before developing a long-term vision.

Pollack said she was drawn to Cornell's core values: its being both an Ivy League and a land-grant university, committed to world-class academics as well as outreach and engagement; its commitment since its founding to diversity; the combination of the "magical" Ithaca campus focused on scholarship and the campuses in the "world's greatest city," New York; and the opportunities that can open up for people in upstate and downstate New York through fostering the "One Cornell" concept.

In response to the question, "How can we, in the Employee Assembly, support you?" Pollack said, "Let me know what's going on." Faculty and students share their views, and staff should too, she said. "We talk about faculty as doing the core work of the university in teaching and research – but they cannot do what they do without staff, and the university can't run without staff. So, by extension, I really do believe that all you do is core work at the university as well. ... Your voices are important, and your opinions are important."

She urged the EA to work through Vice President and Chief Human Resources Officer Mary Opperman to convey their

concerns or messages upward. “She will be a really good conduit of information,” she said.

Pollack said she and Opperman have been talking about the employee survey administered last fall, focusing on the sense of disconnectedness some staff expressed in the survey, and looking at ways to align staff activity to – and make staff fully aware of their part in – the university’s mission.

“I really think that the basis of any good relationship is trust,” she said. “If people trust each other, even if you don’t agree on things, you still can make progress.”

ILR School awards staff and faculty for excellence and recognizes staff years of service

Pamela Staub, administrative assistant at the School of Industrial and Labor Relations, was recognized for 35 years of service at the ILR School’s annual Employee Recognition Ceremony May 8 in Ives Hall. Also recognized were 18 staff members celebrating a 5th-year anniversary (5, 10, 15, 20, 25 and 30 years) of Cornell service; four faculty members receiving ILR Resident Faculty Awards; and three staff members receiving Employee Recognition Awards.

Kevin Hallock, the Kenneth F. Kahn ’69 Dean of ILR, recognized Adam Litwin, associate professor of labor relations, law and history, with the MacIntyre Award for Exemplary Teaching.

Rachel Alkes and Verónica Martínez-Matsuda, both assistant professors of labor relations, law and history, received the Robert N. Stern Award for Teaching and Mentoring. Jordan Harris, ILR graduate student, was recognized with the General Mills Award for Exemplary Graduate Teaching.

Claire Concepcion and David Yantorno, in Ithaca, and Katherine Solis-Fonte, in the New York City ILR office, received Employee Recognition Awards. Noting that these awards are given to people who go beyond expectations and are based on multiple nominating letters, Hallock said that Concepcion is known for being attentive, professional, consistent and timely. Her nominators appreciated her work ethic and “clear and direct approach,” calling her flexible and efficient, with kindness and respect for all.

Yantorno, an advertising, marketing and communications expert, has helped the school adopt new digital technologies that improve communication and collaboration, brought down costs, is unfailing and goes well beyond his job description. He is “a colleague with whom we all want to work,” said Hallock.

Solis-Fonte is approachable and cooperative, optimistic and gracious, friendly and professional, according to her nominators. She is “generous with her time, and is always willing to help her co-workers” – and “does it all with grace, good spirit and kindness,” they say.

Celebrating 5-year service anniversaries were Lisa Csencsits, Norma Gunn, and Elona Pira; 10 years: John Barry, Lori Biechele, Rodney Bouchey, Gloria Loehle, Melissa Manning, Katrina Nobles, and Jennifer Weidner; 15 years: Christine Cotton and Lorie Sellen-Gross; 20 years: Brigid Beachler, Jasminy Joe, Joanne Kenyon, Anu Lyons, and Larisa Vygran; and 25 years: Alice Torres.

Nominate staff, managers, supervisors for three awards

Nominations are open through June 30 for the President’s Award for Innovation in Diversity and Inclusion, and the employee excellence awards for individuals and managers. Recipients will receive a monetary award, and all nominees will be invited to

a luncheon with President Martha E. Pollack and Mary Opperman, vice president and chief human resources officer, in the fall.

Nomination criteria are broad and the process is brief – only 3 to 4 questions – and can be submitted without sharing the nominator’s name with the nominee. The awards committee would like to hear about what makes this person stand out: how the nominee is highly skilled in their work or area of expertise; respectful and supportive of colleagues or employees; looks for opportunities for growth personally and within their organization; or supports diversity or improved engagement and opportunities for diverse staff. Nominations are online for the following awards:

- [The President’s Award for Innovation in Diversity and Inclusion](#)
- [Individual Excellence Award](#)
- [Management Excellence Award](#)

An additional winner will also be chosen for the President’s “Far Above the Cayuga Waters” Award from the individual and management award nominees.

Visit the [Employee Excellence Awards website](#) for more details and to access the nomination forms.

Arts & Sciences advising chief honored for kindness to students

The career of David DeVries, associate dean of undergraduate education in the College of Arts & Sciences, was celebrated with music from the Big Red Pep Band, as well as kind words and a serenade from Glenn Altschuler, at a retirement event May 8 in Klarman Hall.

“David is one of the most compassionate people I have ever encountered,” said Altschuler, the Thomas and Dorothy Litwin Professor of American Studies and dean of Continuing Education and Summer Sessions. “David cares deeply for students, while at the same time understanding that being candid and applying rigorously the rules and of regulations of the institution is in the student’s best interest, as well as in the interest of fairness.”

During his talk, Altschuler also took some liberties with the Maurice Chevalier song “Louise.”

“Every little breeze seems to whisper DeVries,” Altschuler crooned in his best Chevalier impersonation. “Birds in the trees seem to twitter DeVries.”

Colleagues in the admissions and advising offices shared similar sentiments.

“There was a certain wisdom that David has that makes you want to do your job better and be a better individual,” said Richard Keller, an advising dean who worked with DeVries for the last six years. “I also connected with David because of his sense of humor. It was so inviting and so relaxing. He made everyone in that office feel special.”

Pat Wasyliw, another advising dean, joined the office the same year as DeVries.

“David would always see the right path to take,” she said. “He balanced compassion for students with respect for the college and would always look for the most positive solution.”

DeVries’ work was also celebrated at the dedication of Klarman Hall last spring, as the family of a Cornell student helped by DeVries donated funds for the David N. DeVries courtyard, which sits at the south end of Klarman Hall.

“David offered our students calm and compassionate advice and was a valued leader in the college,” said Gretchen Ritter ‘83, the Harold Tanner Dean of Arts & Sciences.

DeVries has been with the College of Arts & Sciences since 2000, coming to Cornell after teaching for eight years at Hobart and William Smith Colleges, serving as associate dean of Hobart College during his last two years there.

“I had a wonderful staff, which made life easier, and there was a lot of laughter in that office, which made our work more manageable and bearable,” DeVries said, adding that he will miss the staff and students greatly.

DeVries has published essays on a variety of subjects including Chaucer, the Pearl-poet, medieval London, the Scottish medieval poet William Dunbar and on the poetry Herman Melville wrote in reaction to the Civil War. He has a Ph.D. in English Literature from New York University.

Plans for the future include travel and a few writing projects “that have been on the back burner for a while,” DeVries said, including some work probing family diaries from the late 1800s and early 1900s that he discovered at the farm where his mother was raised.

With full team, Financial Affairs focuses on the future

Over the past two months, Gerald Hector, vice president for financial affairs, has filled three key positions in the Division of Financial Affairs (DFA). With his leadership team complete, he is setting his sights on the strategic work he began shortly after arriving at Cornell last summer.

William Sibert '85 became the university's new controller May 1. He recently served as vice president for finance and controller for MPI Research in Michigan. Previously he was chief operating and financial officer of a startup technology firm, Priva Technologies, in California. A former U.S. Marine Corps captain with a Master of Science degree in accountancy, Sibert brings to the position valuable experiences in industry and “his advocacy for building a culture of excellence wherever he leads,” said Hector. Sibert succeeds Kim Yeoh, who served as interim controller since April 2016.

Reporting to Sibert will be John Harabedian, the university's new tax director, and Carol Rickel, the new director of the University Finance Service Center.

Harabedian comes to Cornell from a similar position at Rutgers University. “John brings more than 20 years in higher education tax experience and advocacy, as well as conducting extensive research on tax issues concerning higher education,” Hector said.

Rickel is a financial professional with extensive experience in process improvement, business analysis, financial reporting and management of transactional accounting. Hector said, “Carol's experience will be key in our collaborative campuswide effort to look at all aspects of our day-to-day operations around payment processing.”

Sibert will serve on Hector's leadership team, which includes Joshua Adams (communications and university policy), Craig McAllister (risk management and insurance), Thomas Romantic (procurement and payment services), Jeffrey Silber (sponsored financial services), Harper Watters (treasury and debt) and Robin Yager (budget and financial initiatives).

Hector noted that soon after he came to Cornell, he began meeting with the deans, vice presidents and other campus constituents to get a sense of their concerns and to begin to think about how the Division of Financial Affairs could better collaborate and be a more strategic partner with them.

“Much of the work of DFA is transactional – processing payments, reinforcing laws and regulations, and accurately recording, summarizing and reporting on the university's finances,” he said. “But that work needs to occur within the context both of the rules and regulations that govern its policies and procedures, and the processes and needs of our colleagues across campus. We need to understand their operations so we can decrease their administrative burden and better support their endeavors around scholarship, research and student enrichment.”

Hector said that conversations between DFA staff and campus constituents are critical to the division's being able to assist units and schools in meeting their goals – and also to avoid unintentional consequences that might otherwise arise when changes in DFA policies, procedures or technologies occur.

Hector is also focused on the organizational culture within DFA and wants to better empower DFA staff through professional development opportunities and better communication within the division.

He has articulated four core principles to guide the division: ownership, accountability, transparency and empowerment.

“Individuals have to own the tasks for which they are responsible and be accountable for the outcomes,” he said. DFA staff also should feel that they understand the priorities and directions of the division and have a voice in its decision-making. “Information is power in any organization, and sharing that information allows for multiple perspectives, improving the decision-making process,” he added.

Hector believes that from transparency comes empowerment, when staff believe they are valued and are contributing to the overall success of an organization. To further that empowerment, four internal groups have been formed: divisional council, budget steering committee, trust committee and excellence committee. These internal teams provide avenues for DFA staff to voice their concerns, leadership to address them, and all members of DFA to engage in conversations about the work of the division across campus and within the broader Cornell mission.

Graduation Weekend volunteers needed

Volunteers are needed to help make Cornell's [Commencement Weekend](#) special for graduating students and their families.

Commencement will be held in Schoellkopf Stadium on Sunday, May 28. In addition, assistance is needed on Saturday, May 27, at the Ph.D. Hooding Ceremony in Barton Hall. A variety of roles needs to be filled for these events.

All volunteers are invited to a reception with the president, Monday, June 5, noon to 1 p.m. in the Memorial Room at Willard Straight Hall. Lunch will be provided.

Other perks for volunteers:

- Paid [day off](#) to use by Dec. 31, 2017, for volunteering;
- Continental breakfast for volunteers;
- Refreshments for volunteers at the Ph.D. Ceremony reception;
- Thank-you gift for each event;
- Automatic entrance into a drawing to win a grand prize; and
- Chances to win door prizes at the reception on June 5.

For all volunteer opportunities, time commitments and training sessions, see the [Commencement Volunteering webpage](#). Whether you prefer to be indoors or out, or to walk, sit or stand – an enjoyable assignment awaits. [Sign up now](#).

2017 Spring Garden Fair and Plant Sale

The annual Spring Garden Fair and Plant Sale, organized since 1982 by Master Gardener volunteers from Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) of Tompkins County, will be held May 20, 9 a.m.-2 p.m., at the Ithaca High School, 1401 North Cayuga

Street.

More than 40 area growers and 12 garden groups will offer a huge variety of plants at the largest and most complete garden fair in the area. The sale will include organically grown and heirloom vegetable transplants, colorful annuals, fragrant herbs, hanging baskets, small flowering shrubs, hardy roses, fruit crops, evergreens and specialty perennials. Also offered: educational exhibits, food concessions, free soil pH testing by CCE's Master Gardener volunteers. Visitors are encouraged to bring carts or wagons to aid in transporting their plant purchases to their cars. Admission is free.

For more information about the event and a list of vendors, visit <http://ccetompkins.org/plantsale> or call Cornell Cooperative Extension of Tompkins County at (607) 272-2292.

Hasbrouck Community yard sale

The annual Hasbrouck Community Yard Sale will be held Saturday, May 20, 10 a.m.-1 p.m. at Hasbrouck Community apartments. Hasbrouck residents will be selling and/or bartering with Cornell community members and other Hasbrouck residents their personal possessions – including clothes, books, pots and pans, appliances, houseware, crafts, sporting goods and furniture. This event usually draws a large crowd – so come early!
