

**Cornell University  
West Campus Program Planning Group  
A Vision for Residential Life**

**May 9, 2000**

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**Cornell University**  
**West Campus Program Planning Group**  
**A Vision for Residential Life**

**INTRODUCTION**

*I would found an institution where any person  
can find instruction in any study.*

Ezra Cornell, 1865

*Cornell is a learning community that seeks to serve society by educating the leaders of  
tomorrow and extending the frontiers of knowledge.*

*In keeping with the founding vision of Ezra Cornell, our community fosters personal  
discovery and growth, nurtures scholarship and creativity across a broad range of  
common knowledge, and engages men and women from every segment of society in this  
quest. We pursue understanding beyond the limitations of existing knowledge, ideology,  
and disciplinary structure. We affirm the value to individuals and society of the  
cultivation and enrichment of the human mind and spirit.*

*Our faculty, students and staff strive toward these objectives in a context of freedom with  
responsibility. We foster initiative, integrity, and excellence, in an environment of  
collegiality, civility and responsible stewardship. As the land grant university of the  
State of New York, we apply the results of our endeavors in service to the community, the  
state, the nation and the world.*

Cornell University  
Mission and Values Statement 1994

Our founder's commitment and the university's mission statement have guided our committee's deliberations. We propose this new post-freshman residential model for Cornell so that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century our university can create a learning community of faculty, students, and staff that will foster personal discovery and growth, as well as nurture scholarship and creativity, in an environment of collegiality, civility, and responsible stewardship.

May 9, 2000

The committee is convinced that the learning which occurs outside the classroom is as important in college life as the knowledge acquired in courses. We believe that students can learn from each other as much as from faculty. Learning in college happens everywhere: in class, at dinner, in the residence halls. Sensing this in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Cornell's founders originally established Morrill Hall with classrooms, as well as residential quarters for faculty and students. Ezra Cornell and A. D. White, borrowing from the Oxford-Cambridge model of residential colleges, assumed a seamless continuum between formal and informal learning and mentoring. We believe our recommendations realize that Cornell ideal. We believe that faculty affiliated with a living-learning house for upperclass undergraduates will benefit enormously by acquiring a deeper understanding of and involvement with the young men and women they teach. Students, in turn, through interaction with faculty in an informal setting will come to view faculty in a more encompassing and multi-dimensional light. Most importantly, we believe the living-learning houses will help Cornell fulfill its primary mission: producing intelligent and thoughtful graduates who will become leaders in the community of the United States and the wider world beyond.

## **BACKGROUND**

The West Campus Program Planning Group began its work in October 1998. The committee, comprised of faculty, students, and administrators, was responsible for translating into a programmatic plan the recommendations of the report "Transforming West Campus," which was submitted to Vice President Susan H. Murphy on September 23, 1998. That committee, comprised of four faculty, two students, and two administrators, was chaired by Dean of Students John Ford. It had been charged by Vice President Murphy to provide recommendations for the upperclass residential experience on West Campus after 2001, when all freshmen would reside on North Campus. Many

sophomores and upperclass students would, it was assumed, continue to opt for the revitalized and thriving Greek system and living off campus. The Ford committee, therefore, was asked to provide a vision for housing the approximately 1,800 post-freshman students who, it was anticipated, would prefer to live in university housing on West Campus. The Ford committee met frequently for six months and also visited many campuses of peer institutions, where it recognized that many of these peers were also rethinking the undergraduate experience, especially in terms of integrating more closely residential and academic life. Convinced, therefore, that providing a new option for housing upperclass students was important if Cornell were to continue attracting the best students, the Ford committee recommended to Vice President Murphy that West Campus be transformed over time so that those Cornell upperclass students who wanted to live on campus could have the opportunity to live in a residential living-learning house with faculty leadership. The committee's core recommendations (see Appendix A for full report) were:

1. Institute a post-freshman year living environment on West Campus that has faculty leadership (reflecting all of the undergraduate schools and colleges) as its primary principle.
2. Develop living-learning houses, each with faculty leadership and involvement. (The "personality" of the living-learning houses will evolve and change over time as developed by the house faculty head and student residents.) These houses might be given the names of well known Cornell Professors, such as Carl Becker and Alice Cook.
3. Redesign and/or construct four or five living-learning houses on West Campus to support the concept of faculty leadership and involvement. These houses should have appropriate facilities for encouraging interaction among

members of the community. Facilities should include living quarters for faculty and staff, as well as graduate students, for each living-learning house. In addition, each house should have communal dining, seminar rooms, offices for staff, office space for faculty fellows who do not reside in the house, and social space. Creative use of technology to support the community in its pursuit of the educational mission should also be provided.

4. Recruit distinguished Cornell faculty and provide those who participate as live-in faculty House Heads or in other important residential roles with compensatory rewards (e.g., course relief, stipends) for their leadership involvement. Develop methods of encouraging faculty engagement through providing resources for innovative teaching.

Recognizing that these recommendations were spare and skeletal, Vice President Murphy created our committee in the fall of 1998. The West Campus Planning Group, which has eight faculty, four students, and three administrators, with Professor Isaac Kramnick as chair, was asked to give programmatic detail to the visionary goals recommended by the Ford committee. Our task was to help move the vision of a transformed West Campus closer to programmatic reality; therefore, our recommendations are about program structure, leadership, and content, not about physical structures, design, construction, or reconstruction. Our concern was implementing the core concept of the Ford committee report – that is, the conviction that a student’s residential experience should be integral to the Cornell learning experience. The committee assumed that our students should live in a community that is both residential and intellectual, one that presents an opportunity for close daily contact with faculty and graduate/professional students.

The committee met throughout the spring semester of 1999 and discussed the issues of faculty leadership, student governance, models of academic and social programming, possible organizational structures for each house, and circumstances surrounding the transition to this new model. To address these many issues the full committee was subdivided in the fall of 1999 into two subcommittees: the Academic Issues Subcommittee chaired by Professor Andrew H. Bass and the Student Programs and Services Subcommittee chaired by Professor John L. Ford, Robert W. and Elizabeth C. Staley Dean of Students. The recommendations of these subcommittee reports\* form the foundation of this final report, and we thank the respective subcommittee members and chairs for their fine work.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **1. West Campus Living-Learning Council**

Transforming West Campus will require oversight by a special body, comprised of faculty, students, and staff, rather than by an all-faculty governance council. We still believe that the principal tasks of the council are to create new opportunities for faculty to engage as mentors, teachers, and leaders in the intellectual life of the West Campus through its residential communities. The Council will provide both the structural and procedural focus for nurturing the gradual and progressive implementation of a new era in the living-learning experience for Cornell's post-freshman undergraduates. Thoughtful dialogue, already taking place among faculty, students, and staff, will provide the starting point in the Council's efforts.

The committee recommends that a West Campus Living-Learning Council, as described below, be created and charged with its mission in the

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\* The subcommittee reports can be found at [http://www.campuslife.cornell.edu/Residential\\_Initiative/](http://www.campuslife.cornell.edu/Residential_Initiative/) or are available in 311 Day Hall or by calling 255-7595.

spring of 2000. Its principal mission will be oversight and direction of the living-learning units on West Campus as well as a support for new initiatives brought forth by the membership of the living-learning units. The Council will be an active partner with Campus Life in the transition planning for West Campus. At the present, it is presumed there will be five living-learning houses encompassing the 1,800 students residing on West Campus.

The Council should have ten faculty members with a faculty leader (House Dean), and a faculty associate for each house. The President will appoint the faculty to the Council and designate a Council Chair from among the ten faculty members. It is hoped that each of the undergraduate colleges will be represented. The Council will also include five undergraduate students, one graduate student, and five staff members. A single undergraduate student will represent each house, chosen by the students of each house through the house governance structure. The graduate student will be chosen from among the graduate assistants and represent all the houses. The staff members will be the administrators (House Directors) of each house. Selection of alternates for students and staff will be encouraged to ensure full representation.

There will also be three advisory ex-officio members of the Council: the Dean of Students, the Assistant Vice President for Student and Academic Services responsible for Campus Life, and a student liaison appointed by the Student Assembly.

The predominance of faculty in the West Campus Living-Learning Council does not suggest an unequal partnership among faculty, students, and staff. It reflects the particular goals of the Council to create new opportunities for faculty to serve as mentors, teachers, and leaders in the development of the intellectual scope and fervor of the living and learning communities. It also

reflects the renewed commitment of the faculty to form a partnership with students and staff to help fulfill those goals.

We recommend that the responsibilities of the Council include:

- Definitions of the roles of the faculty, graduate/professional students, and administrators in house life, their recruitment, selection, authority, and remuneration for specific house responsibilities. As part of its process, the Council would be encouraged to seek input from current and past Faculty-in-Residence regarding the interactive roles of faculty, graduate/professional students, and administrators.
- Recommendations of candidates for Dean of House positions to the President.
- Definition of programmatic relationships between the upperclass environment of West Campus and the predominantly freshman North Campus.
- Creation of advising and career services in the houses.
- Creation of academic services in the houses, e.g., library, writing, math tutorials.
- Creation of resident and non-resident visitor programs.
- Development of marketing and communications strategies for the houses in conjunction with Campus Life.
- Mechanisms to establish and maintain relations with Cornell schools and colleges.
- Development of the process for house and room selection, in conjunction with Campus Life.
- Oversight for the institution of the intra-house governance model, which has at its core the principle of student governance. The intra-house governance structure (House Council), not the West Campus Living

Learning Council, will be responsible for intra-house programming policies and rules. See below for recommendations on the intra-house governance structure.

- Strategies to incorporate transfer students into the house system.
- Strategies for recreation on West Campus, in conjunction with Recreational Services.
- Definition of relationships of West Campus to the larger “neighborhood” of program houses, fraternities, sororities, and cooperatives.

## **2. Academic Programming**

One of the principal and early concerns of the West Campus Living-Learning Council should be developing diverse models for formal and informal academic programs. Important elements will include establishing collaborative relationships in the Houses between faculty and students and balance between social and academic life.

Our committee examined the University of Pennsylvania’s “preceptorial” system, where short, often non-credit and free courses were offered by faculty for a weekend, over several weeks, or one night a week, on a range of topics often suggested by students. These courses are designed to give students the opportunity to get to know faculty as well as to promote learning, not for a grade, but for its own sake. We also looked at the Stanford sophomore seminars, where faculty from all parts of the campus, including the medical school, offer short, more topical courses than are usually offered by departments, often in residential settings.

We also explored options closer to home, such as the Cornell faculty in residence “Brainstorms” series of talks and mini-courses developed by Professor Andrew Bass and the Knight Writing Program’s new funding for a program

similar to freshman writing seminars that will be for sophomores and could be house based.

We recommend, therefore, that the West Campus Living-Learning Council should explore ways to encourage formal academic offerings such as house-based classes, seminars, sections, and study groups. Examples of classes that might be offered include, but are not limited to, sophomore writing seminars, recitation sections of large classes, informal seminars by faculty fellows, service learning courses, student-requested seminars by specific faculty, and seminars and talks by distinguished visitors, e.g., A. D. White Visiting Professors. An atmosphere conducive to informal, more spontaneous activities should be fostered as well. For example, offerings could include forums on contemporary affairs, burning issues of the day discussions, film series, theater and musical performances, literary and poetry readings.

Our committee also urges that each house has at least one apartment for campus visitors – such as, A. D. White Professors, artists, public figures, alumni – who, living in a house for a period of time, will informally interact with students.

### **3. Dining**

Essential to building a community of students, faculty, and staff is a dining hall in each house, where informal interaction is encouraged in a natural setting. We therefore recommend that the efforts already underway by Dining Services to explore strategies for efficient delivery of dining within each house continue aggressively. The committee reaffirmed the community-building aspect of in-house dining facilities and offers these practical suggestions. Establish a minimum mandatory meal (e.g., five meals a week) requirement. Late night dining in at least one house, especially Monday through Thursday

nights, and late evening snack options in all houses. The mandatory meal recommendation is rooted in the conviction that community is enhanced through mealtime interactions and discussions. In addition, such a requirement would make the program more feasible financially.

#### **4. House Governance**

The committee explored the overall purposes served by a self-governance model for the house system. A self-governing structure will enable the predominantly undergraduate house residents to develop a greater sense of ownership for their living environment as well as leadership opportunities to take active roles in the programming activities of each house. A strong intra-house structure will foster interaction among faculty, students, and staff relating to house policy and the establishment of rules and enforcement, thus reinforcing the ideal of partnership and community representation.

The committee recommends that an elected House Council for each living-learning unit, comprised of faculty, students, and staff, is established with responsibility for intra-house programming, policies, and rules. The senior member of the House Council will be the Faculty House Dean who resides in the house and is accessible to all its members. The Dean will help focus the intellectual and social activities within the house and work with and through the House Council to provide engaging opportunities for full participation by all house members. The House Council will include committees for Charter and Constitution, Budget and Finance, Elections, Community Standards, Programming (e.g., music, sports, dining, speakers), Recruitment, and Facilities. The chairs of the house committees will represent their committees on the House Council.

#### **5. Graduate Resident Tutors and Undergraduate Peer Counselors**

The committee is nearly unanimous in believing that replacing undergraduate resident advisors with graduate and professional student resident tutors best facilitates the integration of living and learning for upperclass undergraduates. Graduate resident tutors will link the undergraduates with faculty and will contribute through their specialties to the general learning community. Thus, we recommend that Resident graduate and professional student tutors replace undergraduate resident advisors in the living-learning houses. The graduate and professional student tutors should receive the same training presently required of undergraduate resident advisors.

Discussions among committee members, especially student members, led to the understanding that there will always be issues that undergraduate students prefer to talk over with peers, so we also propose the creation of House Peer Counselors. We recommend, therefore, that a House Peer Counselor program using the Dean of Students' model of educating and training peer counselors should be implemented. The Dean of Students' model, called EARS (Empathy, Assistance, & Referral Service), is a student leadership training and education program. The program consists of four main areas of focus, all of which are led and carried out by student volunteers under the supervision of an advisor. The areas of focus are counseling services, counseling training, outreach workshops on topics of interest to the Cornell community, and leadership opportunities for student staff in areas such as program administration, public speaking, and presentations. Committee members agree that the peer model provides further student leadership development opportunities and aligns philosophically with the House Council structure proposed earlier. We also recommend exploring further development of the peer support program, considering peer services, such as in-house math tutoring, computer support, and library assistance.

## **6. Recreation**

The committee believes that a recreational facility would draw students from around the neighborhood and provide a center for program activities during the many years of construction we anticipate as necessary for transformation of West Campus. We recommend, therefore, that a recreational facility should be constructed as the first step in the redevelopment of West Campus. The recreational center should contain multi-purpose space to accommodate program delivery, social, and community interaction.

## **7. Transition**

The committee reviewed the West Campus Transition Plan for 2001, developed by Campus Life in conjunction with the input of many students across the campus. The committee commends Campus Life for their efforts in developing this plan and recognizes that additional work is planned by Campus Life in the upcoming year. Therefore, we recommend that the efforts to seek broad student and staff input into implementation of the work planned for West Campus in 2001 should be continued by Campus Life. Dedicated collaboration will provide a foundation upon which to build the living and learning houses. The committee also recommends that construction of the first living-learning house begin simultaneously with construction of the recreational facility to signal the vitality of the West Campus program and to provide the impetus to fulfill the goals of the new community. While the opening dates of the two facilities may not coincide closely, a tangible sign of the emerging new community will be critical to the initial recognition of the program as reality.

## **8. Transfer Students**

The committee believes that upperclass transfer students have special needs that can best be addressed within the House system, rather than in a separate transfer center. We therefore recommend that the needs of transfer

students should be met through programming in the living-learning houses. The committee recommends that Campus Life gather the pertinent information relating to the special needs of transfer students by the fall of 2002. Focus sessions with admissions staff, transfer students, and other groups with specific knowledge about transfer student needs should be considered. From that information, and other sources available, programming should be developed to reach out from West Campus to the off-campus population as well as to those who reside within the living-learning units.

## **9. West Campus "Neighborhood"**

The committee sought to define the designated "neighborhood" and the goals of programs and services for students living near the living-learning units. One objective is to help living-learning house members recognize that they are part of the greater university community. Literature on the formulation of college house environments cautions program developers to maintain a balance between the internal activities of a house and the "external" activities provided in the surrounding community. The committee realizes that the intellectual and social growth gained by interaction among the house members can be enhanced by interaction with others living in the neighborhood, either in co-operatives, fraternities and sororities, or in the traditional Collegetown residence halls. The committee concluded that a natural way to forge living-learning units/neighborhood connectivity is the establishment of a recreation center, recommended above.

For the initial phase of living-learning house development, however, the committee recommends primary focus on house programming rather than delivery of programs and services to the many constituencies which reside in the West Campus neighborhood. Without significant expansion in resources, such pursuits could hold back successful establishment of the living-learning houses. Therefore, the committee recommends that as living-learning units are established, they should be encouraged to develop relationships with residents of nearby fraternity and sorority houses, co-ops, as well as students living independently in the neighborhood. The recommended House Council should found an Outreach Committee responsible for building and maintaining relationships in the neighborhood and across the university community.

## **CONCLUSION**

Cornell stands at the threshold of a fundamental transformation of the undergraduate experience. Our committee is proud to have played a part in that process. We urge those who follow us to utilize the work of our committee (documented in the minutes) to guide future efforts that will be needed in developing specific job descriptions for the house deans, house directors, and graduate assistant/tutors. We recommend close attention to the minutes of the committee meetings regarding programming impact on facilities.

We encourage investigation and development of programs in the arts as an essential part of the college experience. We urge those responsible for West Campus planning to utilize the wealth of resources at Cornell, such as the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, the Center for Theatre Arts, the Music Department, and the University's libraries. Relationships need to be explored with existing Program Houses that hold strong traditions of residential living and learning on campus, and with such vital elements of student life at Cornell as the Public Service Center, University Career Services, and Cornell Abroad.

We encourage our successors to implement this program, which we regard as a landmark opportunity to enhance fundamentally the undergraduate experience at Cornell.

## Appendix A

### Transforming West Campus

#### Recommendations Submitted to Vice President Susan H. Murphy

September 23, 1998

#### Respectfully Submitted by:

**ROSS BRANN**, Milton R. Konvitz Professor of Judeo-Islamic Studies and  
Department Chair, Near Eastern Studies

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**DONALD H. KING**, Associate Director for Community Development,  
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**ISAAC KRAMNICK**, R. J. Schwartz Professor of Government and Department  
Chair, Government

**MICHELLE A. SCHAFFER**, Class of 2000; Student Assembly Vice President of  
Public Relations

**KAREN M. TAXIER**, Class of 1999

#### Background:

Housing is a much studied issue at Cornell: President Rawlings noted last year that there have been twenty-three housing studies since 1966. Cornell is not alone in studying residential life issues; recent studies show that many of our peer institutions already have, or are developing, housing arrangements that link residential life more closely to the intellectual mission of colleges and universities. Many faculty and administrators at Cornell have come to believe that housing arrangements contribute to a critical competitive advantage for Cornell in attracting the best students. Our heightened concern for housing-related issues comes at a time of transition for the American residential-based university in general and Cornell in particular. Higher education has been preoccupied with re-examining the intellectual foundations of the undergraduate experience and in enhancing undergraduate education by fostering new opportunities for meaningful faculty-student interaction.

In October 1997, President Rawlings announced a dramatic break from Cornell tradition with a plan to house all freshmen on North Campus. This plan recognized the special affective and developmental aspects of a successful freshman year experience. In March 1998, Susan Murphy, Vice President for Student and Academic Services, created a committee of faculty, students, and administrators to give her advice for the future upperclass residential experience on West Campus. The committee's work was set within the context of the Board of Trustees' Residential Communities Policy Statement of May, 1996 and the President's Report on Residential Housing of October, 1997. Vice President Murphy outlined the goals of the group as follows:

- to create a living/learning environment capable of attracting sophomores, transfers, juniors and seniors to West Campus;
- to integrate learning components into the undergraduate residential environment, through increased faculty leadership and involvement and linkages with academic programs;
- to define creative programs, both residential and non-residential, which promote faculty/student interactions, and
- to enrich students' sense of community and nurture their intellectual and leadership interests.

Vice President Murphy's committee began its deliberations in March, meeting regularly in Ithaca and at selected other campuses. The committee assumed that the Faculty-in-Residence and the Faculty Fellows programs would be strong building blocks in new residential initiatives and that the Greek system would continue to flourish at Cornell, as would the cherished option to live off-campus. Similarly, we assumed there would be needs like transfer housing or a language house that would persist in the future. Our principal concern has been to articulate a transformative vision of residential life at Cornell in the next century for upperclass students who choose to live on campus, recognizing that transitional and implementation plans need to be developed soon.

Recommendations:

1. Institute a post-freshman year living environment on West Campus that has faculty leadership (reflecting all of the undergraduate schools and colleges) as its primary principle.
2. Develop living-learning houses, each with faculty leadership and involvement. (The "personality" of the living-learning houses will evolve and

change over time as developed by the house faculty head and student residents.) These houses might be given the names of well known Cornell Professors, such as Carl Becker and Alice Cook.

3. Redesign and/or construct four or five living-learning houses on West Campus to support the concept of faculty leadership and involvement. These houses should have appropriate facilities for encouraging interaction among members of the community. Facilities should include living quarters for faculty and staff, as well as graduate students, for each living-learning house. In addition, each house should have communal dining, seminar rooms, offices for staff, office space for faculty fellows who do not reside in the house, and social space. Creative use of technology to support the community in its pursuit of the educational mission should also be provided.
4. Recruit distinguished Cornell faculty and provide those who participate as live-in faculty House Heads or in other important residential roles with compensatory rewards (e.g., course relief, stipends) for their leadership involvement. Develop methods of encouraging faculty engagement through providing resources for innovative teaching.
5. Develop a Faculty Living-Learning Council with general responsibility for governance of the living-learning experience. This Council should report to the President to link more closely the living-learning experience with the broader mission of the university.
6. Charge the newly formulated Living-Learning Council to work with colleges and departments to integrate academic life (teaching and advising) into the West Campus living-learning experience. Provide residentially-based support for specific classes or academic programs, such as tutorials or computer-based services as needed.
7. Encourage and facilitate student leadership and governance within each living-learning house through a joint faculty/student/staff governance structure.
8. Provide in all the living-learning houses sophomore programming which focuses on the upperclass options available at Cornell (selection of major, study abroad, honors and/or research connections). In addition, provide linkages to public service, career services and internship possibilities.
9. Provide common community space for the West Campus "neighborhood" of fraternity, sorority, co-op, and living learning houses that includes classroom, social meeting, theater, library, music, and recreation/fitness facilities to meet

students' needs. This common space will provide the opportunity for a shared upperclass experience for the various houses in the West Campus "neighborhood."

Rationale:

Residential life at Cornell is much more than dormitory housing. It is an important part of a student's growth and development as a social and cultural being, an important moment in forging individual identity. It is also a time for students to explore the world of ideas outside themselves with others, with their peers and with their teacher-mentors. In the freshman year developmental issues do, and should, dominate residential life, receiving more attention than academic exploration in the residence halls. For sophomores, juniors, and seniors in university housing, however, the balance shifts from developmental concerns to intellectual community - hence our core recommendation is faculty and graduate student leadership in the newly configured living-learning houses. When added to the plans for an all-freshman North Campus, these recommendations offer a comprehensive undergraduate residential experience in the next century for Cornell upperclass students who wish to live on campus. This experience will make available increased faculty-student interactions for those undergraduates who desire it, so that the two groups come to know each other beyond the formal interactions of the classroom, and so that students can be drawn more fully into the intellectual life of the university.

This vision is innovative and bold but is not disconnected from the history of Cornell. The partnerships developed among students, faculty and staff will support Cornell's mission of educating students in the broadest sense. Our vision will remedy, we hope, a deficiency which, as Morris Bishop noted in his *History of Cornell* (1962), worried many earlier in the century: "Our courses are more exacting and better organized than they used to be, our equipment incomparably better, our teaching methods more efficient, but the student has less opportunity for education by mere association." It is with the hope of providing future Cornell students a transformative educational experience that we offer these recommendations.