

**Transforming West Campus**  
**Recommendations Submitted to**  
**Vice President Susan H. Murphy**

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**Respectfully Submitted by:**

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

**EDNA R. DUGAN, Director of Finance and Administration, Student and  
Academic Services**

**EUGENE C. ERICKSON, Professor Emeritus of Rural Sociology**

**JOHN L. FORD, Robert W. and Elizabeth C. Staley Dean of Students;  
Professor of Policy Analysis and Management; Chair, West Campus Group**

**DONALD H. KING, Associate Director for Community Development,  
Campus Life**

**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.