

(The official version of President David J. Skorton's "State of the University Address" at Cornell University on 2010 is online at <http://www.cornell.edu/president/speeches/20101029-state-of-university.cfm>. This copy on the 4Humanities site is reproduced with the permission of President Skorton, and includes a bookmark to the part of the address that comments generally on the need to support the humanities and arts (paragraphs that we have here also visually highlighted).

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State of the University Address

2010 Trustee-Council Annual Meeting

As prepared for presentation

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By

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President

Cornell University

I want to welcome you, as Cornell's leaders and my partners, to the 2010 joint meeting of the Cornell University Board of Trustees and the Cornell University Council. I am grateful for the leadership that Pete Meinig and Mitch Lee, respectively, provide to the Board and to Council, for the support and encouragement that Nancy Meinig, a member of the Cornell Class of 1962, gives to Cornell—and to Pete, and for the wisdom of Cornell's most recent presidents—Dale Corson, Frank Rhodes, Hunter Rawlings, and Jeff Lehman. I want especially to join with Pete in recognizing Frank Rhodes and in wishing Dale Corson a speedy recovery. And, we all should join in wishing Frank a happy birthday!

I can tell you this morning that Cornell is on a new trajectory as we approach our sesquicentennial in 2015. Our mission, values, and overarching goals have not changed. But we approach the milestone of 150 years with a sharper focus, a higher, but achievable, aspiration, and the resolve to move forward as “One Cornell.”

The evidence of the success of our collective work—involving Cornell's on-campus communities, trustees, overseers, council members, alumni, parents, and friends—lies in plain sight: We are implementing changes in administrative organization and management that will save us \$75 million to \$85 million annually by fiscal year 2015—and we are on track toward a sustainable budget that includes growth. Just as important, we have re-examined many aspects of the university—not just how to cut our budget, but how to be a better university—to be the university we'd like to be.

Three recent polls—national and international in scope—summarize the character of Cornell. The World University Rankings by London's *Times Higher Education* captured the rarified intellectual atmosphere of Cornell—placing us at #14 among the world's great universities, up

from #15 last year. *U.S. News & World Report* ranked Cornell 7th, along with Dartmouth and the University of Chicago, in economic diversity among schools of our caliber, based on the percentage of our undergraduate students who qualify for federal Pell Grants for low-income students. In 2009–10 we had the highest number of Pell Grant recipients at Cornell in at least five years—and although we had the same percentage of Pell Grant students in 2004–2005 and 2009–10, the actual number of Pell Grant recipients was up by over 100 last year. Cornell was the only Ivy League university to earn a place on the *Wall Street Journal*’s “top 25” list of universities where corporate recruiters turn for talent—coming in at #14 overall and at #7 in engineering.

Intellectual power. Access for students of talent and promise, regardless of economic circumstances. Skills sought after in the marketplace. That is our Cornell.

Our future, and our ability to excel in all three spheres, will be based on the people of Cornell and how we treat them.

First, our exceptional students, who make us proud by their accomplishments in the classroom, lab, and studio; on the athletic field; and in their public service. They are the reason we are here and why Cornell is such a vibrant place. We believe that it is imperative for America’s top universities to educate the next generation, regardless of background or financial means, in order for our nation to stay competitive in the global marketplace and contribute to the solution of the world’s problems.

Even in the depths of the Great Recession, Cornell maintained its need-blind admissions policy and strengthened its commitment to need-based financial aid. Beginning with the 2011–2012 school year for new students, we will match the parental contribution and need-based loan level

of other Ivy schools to which our applicants are accepted, and will also strive to match the need-based parental contribution and need-based loan levels for Cornell applicants who are also accepted at Stanford, Duke, or MIT. Philanthropy is critical to our ability to provide need-based financial aid. I am pleased to report that Cornell alumni, parents, and friends have already contributed more than \$191 million for scholarships through the *Far Above* campaign, and we continue to make progress toward our \$350-million scholarship goal through matching gifts.

Second, the Cornell staff: the people who keep Cornell moving forward and make it possible for faculty and students to do their jobs. Although they have borne the brunt of personnel actions to decrease budgets, members of the staff have continued to serve the university with dedication and excellence. As we approach our sesquicentennial, we need to continue to value and learn from our staff colleagues, attract and retain a diverse workforce, continue to provide opportunities for job skill training, and collaborate with the local community to keep Ithaca and Tompkins County desirable places to live and work.

The third group critical to the future of Cornell is our alumni. Thanks to the leadership of our trustees, overseers, members of Council, and many other alumni, parents, and friends, Cornell just completed a very strong year in fund-raising—with new gifts and commitments for the year ending June 30 up 77% over the recession-driven declines of the previous year, for a total of \$466 million. Last year, in fact, Cornell had the top results in the Ivy League for new gifts and commitments. The Cornell Annual Fund recorded its eighth consecutive year of growth, up 12%, with over \$27.3 million given by more than 32,000 donors. So in terms of long-term commitments and current-use dollars provided through philanthropy, we are doing extraordinarily well, and we are grateful.

I want particularly to note a few transformational gifts from Cornell's alumni and friends: A gift of \$25 million from the Dyson family to name the Charles H. Dyson School of Applied Economics and Management has greatly strengthened Cornell's already strong programs in this field. A gift of \$10 million for the College of Veterinary Medicine from an anonymous trustee donor will establish the world's first canine genomics program and is the largest gift in the history of the college. Several very significant gifts have been made for the Cornell Center for a Sustainable Future, including a gift of \$5 million from Yossie Hollander to help address energy needs and help farmers in developing countries and a truly transformational gift of \$80 million for the Cornell Center for a Sustainable Future, now to become the David R. Atkinson Center. Cornell Presidential Councillor David Atkinson '60 and his wife, Pat, who made that extraordinary gift, are with us today. David and Pat, would you please stand, so that we can recognize your vision and generosity?

With the talented leadership of the staff in Alumni Affairs, we are finding new ways to reach alumni. The Cornell Alumni Leadership Conference, for example, the first ever in Washington, DC, brought together nearly 800 alumni volunteers last January for workshops, educational programming, and fellowship. Associate Vice President Chris Marshall, Vice President Tommy Bruce, and I have conducted over a dozen webinars—hour-long, interactive, online conversations on a variety of topics targeting alumni audiences around the world. We have launched CornellConnect, an online alumni directory and event registration tool that handles 1,400+ events a year. And we are developing social media tools for Alumni Affairs and Development to use in its communications, marketing, volunteer management, alumni outreach, engagement measurement and analysis, prospect cultivation, and donor stewardship.

A fourth—and a most critical—group essential to the core academic mission of the university is the faculty—and the time for faculty renewal is now.

The strength of Cornell's faculty across the disciplines is reflected in our high standing in the comprehensive national study of research doctoral programs released last month by the National Research Council. Sixty-one of Cornell's 81 doctoral fields in the Graduate School here in Ithaca and 7 doctoral fields in the Weill Cornell Graduate School of Medical Sciences were ranked in the study. No other private university in the U.S. had as many graduate fields ranked as did Cornell. Almost half of those fields (29) were included within the top-10 range of rankings on an overall measure, and over 75% (47) were within the top-20 range on an overall measure. Our NRC top-10 ranges of rankings went across the board—here in Ithaca and at Weill Cornell—and included eight fields in engineering, physical, and mathematical sciences; seven in agricultural sciences; seven in the humanities; six in biological and health sciences; and three in the social and behavioral sciences.

For the past decade, Cornell generally has been among the top five universities in funding from the National Science Foundation (NSF), and we were #1 in FY 2008. We recently received \$109 million in awards from NSF to boost X-ray science and accelerator physics at Cornell. This funding will allow us to continue operation of the Cornell High Energy Synchrotron Source (CHESS), a national center for synchrotron X-ray research, and to continue development of a next-generation X-ray source, the Energy Recovery Linac.

Currently, though, we have the oldest faculty in the university's 145-year history. Today 47% of Cornell professors are over 55, compared to about 25% in the early 1980s, and many of them will retire within the next decade. During the recession, we suspended or cancelled many faculty

searches and our hiring dropped to 43 in 2009–10, the second lowest number of new faculty hires in the last 30 years. In the coming decade, we need to hire upwards of 800, and perhaps as many as 1,000, new faculty members to enhance the faculty and replace those retiring. Now is the time to build the faculty of the future and with it the future of Cornell.

What will tomorrow's faculty be about? I suggest we must show the way in reinstating the value of knowledge as a priority in our society and the urgency of its pursuit, come what may. We must not retreat from the high intellectualism that has earned Cornell a place among the world's great universities—sharing broad and deep knowledge and nurturing the skills to interpret, critique, and extend it are still the best ways to teach people who will live their lives amidst wildly changing conditions. As a physician and biomedical researcher, I firmly believe in the power of the scientific method to advance knowledge. But make no mistake: the world's most significant problems won't be solved by science alone. We need scientific and technical knowledge, as well as knowledge based on research in the social sciences and humanities. And we also need people and approaches to motivate others to act upon that knowledge, recognizing its power as well as its limitations and the ethical and moral issues it might raise.

For that reason, we need to renew the faculty within *each* of the basic academic groupings—humanities and the arts; life sciences and agricultural sciences; physical sciences and engineering; social sciences; and professional schools. We also need to be strategic in our hiring—targeting appointments within those broad areas of knowledge to fields where it is important to maintain or increase strength.

Today, in addition to underscoring the need for a broad sweep of faculty hiring, I want to make a special case for our efforts to bolster the arts and humanities. Many changes are underway as part

of the strategic planning process, and they will substantially change the landscape of our campuses. It is good and important to make these changes. At the same time the provost and I want to make sure that we maintain strength in the arts and humanities. The need for investment in these areas is less intuitively obvious to many people than, say, investments to find cures for diseases or alternative sources of energy or to alleviate poverty or malnutrition. In fact some have argued, as did an English professor at another university, in a recent *Chronicle of Higher Education* column, that “[c]urricula change over time, and the humanities simply don’t have a place in the emergent curriculum of the 21st century.” Nothing, I believe, could be further from the truth.

Course work in the humanistic disciplines is often promoted, legitimately, as a way to teach basic skills of critical—and contextual—thinking, communication, and ethics to scientists, engineers, business people, and those in other applied professions. As they provide a foundation for success in a wide range of careers, they serve as well as a prerequisite for responsible citizenship. As David Feldshuh, professor of theatre, film, and dance, has written, “The ability to examine stories critically is a vital tool for any population that is to remain free and democratic.” It is in the nation’s interest and essential to our global competitiveness to have the up-and-coming generation, from all backgrounds, educated broadly and well.

But we must also recognize and support the value of the humanities as a discipline of research and critical analysis in its own right and on its own terms. The events and creations of the past cannot change, but our knowledge of them can be enhanced through rigorous study and research.

As Laura Brown, vice provost for undergraduate education and John Wendell Anderson Professor of English, and several colleagues noted in their essay “Twenty-first Century

Humanities at the Core of the University”: “Concerns about life, wisdom, survival, transformation and interaction have long been deeply embedded in the humanities. Although the methods of interrogation change from generation to generation, questions about the mysteries of life, the human trajectory, the relations between humans and nature, the quest for understanding of the universe and world we inhabit are ongoing.”

The impact of the humanities as a critical endeavor is most visible in the study of literature and the arts, but history, philosophy, law, linguistics, religion, and other humanistic disciplines can also help us grasp where we come from, and why, in order to lead us into the future. One thinks of M. H. Abrams’ *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition*; or Max Black’s *The Importance of Language*; or Milton Konvitz’s *Fundamental Liberties of a Free People: Religion, Speech, Press, Assembly*; or Daryl Bem’s work on personality theory, sexual orientation, and beliefs and attitudes; or Jonathan Culler’s *On Deconstruction*; or Walter Lafeber’s *The Clash: U.S.-Japanese Relations Throughout History*; or Michael Kammen’s *People of Paradox*; or Hunter Rawlings’ *The Structure of Thucydides’ History*.

In addition, at a very fundamental level, the arts and humanities teach us what it means to be human. As I argued a few years ago during a Dana Foundation conference on “Transforming Arts Teaching: The Role of Higher Education”: “Music teaches in a way that we cannot replicate with words. Pedagogically complex, music transforms us, touches us alone or in a shared experience.” And other creative activities, including art and literature, can be similarly powerful in their effects.

Few of us have read Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, or Kurt Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse Five*, or Pearl Buck’s *The Good Earth*, or Thomas Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow*—or works by younger

Cornell-trained writers like Melissa Bank, Stewart O’Nan, and Junot Díaz—or watched a play written by Jenny Schwartz ’95, winner of the 2010 Drama Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters—without feeling enlightened, enriched, or even transformed.

Despite all they bring to the human experience, the arts and humanities struggle for funding because their value is difficult to quantify and they are not seen as contributing directly to economic growth, health, or national security. Neither Democrats nor Republicans, in my view, have done enough to rectify this through appropriate financial support for the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) or the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). Instead, these two important cultural agencies have been tempting targets for those seeking to advance particular political, social, or religious agendas or to show fiscal restraint. In the 2010 fiscal year, appropriations for both NEH and NEA remained down about a third in inflation-adjusted dollars from 1994 levels. By comparison, federal funding for the National Institutes of Health has nearly doubled in inflation-adjusted dollars since 1994 and federal funding for the National Science Foundation has more than doubled.

Federal research budgets will make it easier for new faculty members in the sciences and engineering to find the support they need to drive innovation through their research, but the arts and humanities need our help. As Kent Kleinman, the Gale and Ira Drukier Dean of Architecture, Art, and Planning, has noted, art and design are increasingly recognized as principal modes of addressing some of the world’s most complex problems—including global climate change, rapid urbanization, and the impact of technology on our social patterns. These issues, as Dean Kleinman noted, do not have linear solutions but require iterative and expansive approaches that question the very nature of the problem statement.

Another significant contributor to the vitality of the arts and humanities at Cornell is the Johnson Museum of Art, which has been led so ably by Frank Robinson, the Richard J. Schwartz Director, since 1992. Frank has raised the profile of the museum, spearheaded the museum's expansion that is now underway, and gained the respect and affection of our community and the wider alumni body. Frank will be stepping down as the Johnson Museum's director next year, and we will be mounting a national search for his successor. Frank is with us this morning, and I'd like to ask him to stand so that we can express our gratitude for his leadership.

Over the next decade, the College of Arts and Sciences expects to hire more than 100 humanists. While most will be junior appointments, the college is aiming to hire faculty at various career points in order to create an invigorating blend of perspectives and experiences and a more regular rate of retirement and renewal. Thanks to a \$2.5-million challenge grant we received a few years ago from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and additional funding commitments that the College of Arts and Sciences now has in hand, we anticipate hiring three mid-career humanists as "Mellon Chairs"—perhaps as soon as the end of this semester.

Now is the time for Cornell to step up and advocate for arts and humanities as we recruit faculty that will define our university for a generation. We need to hire the stars for future generations of Cornellians and give them the freedom—and the space, support, and infrastructure—they need to allow their thinking free rein. Faculty hiring across the disciplines is Cornell's top priority, and, within that priority, we must be a leader in hiring humanities faculty.

"Faculty renewal in the context of academic priorities and substantial retirements" is the #1 priority in Cornell's new strategic plan. We need to demonstrate our commitment to faculty renewal across the university, taking full advantage of the unique opportunity we have to be the

university we want to be—and to get out in front on faculty hiring before many of our peer institutions are in a position to do so.

To strengthen and support our efforts to build the faculty of the future across all the colleges and disciplines, we have established a \$100-million Faculty Renewal Fund, to be funded equally through philanthropy and the reallocation of university resources over the next five years. David Croll '70, chair of the Finance Committee of the Board of Trustees, and his wife, Victoria, have made a \$5-million gift to the Faculty Renewal Fund, getting the effort off to a fantastic start. David is here today. David, please stand so that we can recognize and thank you.

Building the faculty of the future, as part of our strategic view of Cornell's future, is a once-in-a-generation opportunity for Cornell. More than ever before in our history, we have the opportunity to become the university we want and need to be: A university that after 150 years still combines liberal and practical education with a commitment to providing opportunity for students of talent and promise, no matter their economic circumstances. One of the few universities in the world to be recognized for its intellectual breadth and depth, the scope of its commitment to economic diversity, and the quality of its graduates as they enter the world of work. A university that can indeed meet its 21st century aspiration: “to be recognized as a top-ten research university in the world, and a model university for the interweaving of liberal education and fundamental knowledge with practical education and impact on societal and world problems.”

As we go forward together, I hope for and am counting on your partnership. Thank you.