Resolution on Academic Decision-Making Processes
from the University Faculty Committee

April 5, 2000

WHEREAS, deliberation on academic issues constitutes the core of a university faculty's function, and

WHEREAS, following a pattern set with the reorganizations of the Division of Biological Sciences and the Department of Computer Science, the Cornell administration once again ignored the very clear wishes of the faculty* for consultation on an academic matter by moving ahead with the creation of e-Cornell as a for-profit enterprise for distance learning, without permitting time for due deliberation by the faculty through their governance structure,

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Senate instructs the Dean of the Faculty and the University Faculty Committee (UFC) to draft a written agreement between the Faculty Senate and the President, covering the process by which decisions of the central administration on academic matters will be handled, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Senate instructs the UFC to present the agreement at the May 10, 2000 meeting for formal Senate ratification.

Rationale:

The confidence of many Cornell faculty in President Rawlings and members of his administration has been shaken by a series of decisions that they have made on major academic issues, without consulting the faculty through its duly constituted governance structure - the Faculty Senate.

The support of the President for the establishment of e-Cornell as a for-profit distance-learning enterprise, in the face of a 65-1 vote by the Senate asking that it be consulted first, represented the most recent example of his apparent disregard for faculty opinion. This decision precipitated a crisis, which was somewhat ameliorated when, in a meeting with the UFC on April 4, 2000, President Rawlings made it clear that the "shell" corporation known as e-Cornell need never come to fruition if other models of distance learning were found to be preferable. The recently appointed Provost's Advisory Committee on Distance Learning has been given the mandate to explore all possible models for distance learning at Cornell.** It is also instructed to present its findings to the Senate for their review. The President additionally agreed to present his decisions on distance learning to the Senate prior to their being submitted to the Board of Trustees.

Despite these helpful developments, this incident, in the context of the earlier events cited above, brought into focus the need to clarify the relationship between the Faculty Senate and the President and Provost concerning advice and decision making on academic matters that may be under consideration by the central administration.

*65 to 1 vote by the Faculty Senate on March 8, 2000 stating "that the Faculty Senate expects to participate with the Administration and Trustees in the development of principles and plans for distance learning including any potential establishment of a for-profit corporation. Such plans, once formulated, should be presented to the Faculty Senate for faculty review."

** See letter from President Rawlings below.
April 3, 2000

Memo To: J. Robert Cooke  
From: Hunter R. Rawlings III  
Subject: Distance Learning  

After several discussions with you, we have constituted the Provost's Advisory Committee on Distance Learning. In keeping with your suggestion, we asked Professor William Arms to chair the committee, and I am pleased to report that he has accepted the invitation. Of the six additional faculty members on the committee, three are your nominees. As you will note from the attachment, the charge to the committee is broad in scope, and the committee will consult with and give reports to both the faculty and the administration. I look forward to the deliberations and recommendations of a first-rate committee.

cc: Provost Randel, Vice Provost Sansalone, Professor William Arms

Attachment

**Provost’s Advisory Committee on Distance Learning**

**Charge:** To advise the President, Provost, and the University on all aspects of distance education. In particular to study and make recommendations about the relationship of Cornell University to other organizations that use Cornell’s name or resources for distance education. The committee will consult with and submit reports to both the University administration and the faculty.

**Committee Membership:**

William Arms (Engineering); **Chair**

Don Greenberg (AAP/CS)

Peter Martin (Law)

Barry Carpenter (Arts & Sciences)

Peter Lepage (Arts & Sciences)

Deborah Streeter (CALS)

David Lipsky (ILR)

Bob Swieringa (JGSM)

Mary Sansalone (ex-officio member, administrative staff)