

EZRA

CORNELL
UNIVERSITY'S
MAGAZINE
EXTRA

This special section, a bonus issue of the university's Ezra magazine, highlights ways Cornell initiatives intersect with philanthropy and engagement of Cornell alumni, parents and friends.



CORNELL'S TRUSTEES AIM FOR THE UNIVERSITY'S LONG-TERM HEALTH

Robert S. Harrison '76 has been a member of Cornell's Board of Trustees since 2002 and became chairman in 2012; he also serves on the Weill Cornell Medicine and Cornell Tech boards of overseers. He previously chaired the board's Executive Committee and Student Life Committee; as an undergraduate, he served as a student trustee from 1975-76.

Jan Rock Zubrow '77 has been a member of the board since 1998 and became chairman of the Executive Committee in 2011; she has also chaired the past two Presidential Search Committees and was co-chair of the Cornell Tech task force.

The full conversation is available at news.cornell.edu/HarrisonZubrowQA.

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“WITH EVERY DECISION, WE NEED TO TAKE THE LONG-TERM VIEW OF WHAT IS IN THE BEST INTEREST OF THE UNIVERSITY AS A WHOLE.”

– Robert S. Harrison

How does the work you do on the board translate to the health of the university, and how do you define success in your roles?

Harrison: The board’s role is to make sure that the university thrives in perpetuity. With every decision, we need to take the long-term view of what is in the best interest of the university as a whole. That means we need to select a great president, be supportive of his or her agenda, and provide unbiased advice to guide the university’s strategic direction. We also need to be vigilant in monitoring the university’s risks, growth and financial security.

Zubrow: As fiduciaries, we have a responsibility to make sure that the board and the university are acting in a way that’s consistent with our mission and our core values. We are, in effect, the moral compass of the university, and we want to make sure the university is operating with integrity.

We measure our success by looking at metrics that relate to our three-part mission of teaching, research and public engagement. We look at research standings, internal reports on campus climate, faculty and student satisfaction, and diversity, as well as university rankings. These metrics and reports help us assess how we are doing as a university relative to our mission, goals and values.

What are some of the most significant issues the board has faced during your tenures?

Harrison: Among the most important was transforming the residential experience for undergraduates, including the creation of a freshman community on North Campus, an upperclass residential college experience on West Campus and, recently, the decision to expand North Campus to create a new community for sophomores.

A second significant issue was the expansion of Cornell’s presence in New York City – Weill Cornell Medicine, Cornell Tech and numerous other college programs – to become a two-campus university. In addition to investing in the medical college, we made a game-changing

decision to pursue and then create Cornell Tech on Roosevelt Island. If we invest in this opportunity as we should, Cornell Tech will enhance the stature of the entire university for decades to come.

A third and persistent issue is maintaining the financial strength of the university, particularly during difficult periods like the Great Recession. That financial strength is what permits us to invest in our faculty and our students.

Zubrow: The investment in the Belfer Research Building in New York City is a very big deal. Historically, our expertise at Weill Cornell Medicine has been on the clinical side of medicine, but we recognized that to go from “good” to “great,” we needed to have a significant research enterprise. Given the importance of the medical college to Cornell’s mission, we need to work hard to continue its success.

What is something each of you has learned from the other while serving on the board?

Zubrow: Bob has been an extraordinary leader of Cornell through some very difficult times, and by working with him, I’ve learned how to lead under enormous pressure. Bob stays calm, focused and sets the right tone for the university and the board. He works tirelessly and collaboratively with Cornell’s leadership and the board to always do what’s right for the university. It’s never about him ... he views every problem through a lens of Cornell’s mission and values.

Harrison: With Jan, I’ve learned how to be an effective partner within a somewhat unusual leadership structure. In most organizations, the chairman of the board is also chairman of the executive committee, but Cornell has a tradition of splitting those roles. That could create all kinds of friction, but we have never had that in the entire time Jan and I have been working together. We have listened to each other and have totally respected each other’s views; I’ve changed my mind as a result of hearing from Jan, and my guess is that she



“Our democratic approach to governance stems from our heritage and shapes our unique culture.”

– Jan Rock Zubrow

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Number of members of the Cornell University Board of Trustees

has, too. We really have become fantastic partners, and I believe it has benefited Cornell.

How does the board's democratic and representative makeup reflect Cornell's culture?

Harrison: We are the largest and most democratic board of any Ivy League college, and we're also large compared to other public and private college boards. The average size of a private university board is 29, and for public universities it's 12. Cornell has 64 board members who represent our incredibly diverse history. We have representatives from the agricultural community, the labor community and state government, as well as representatives from the faculty, the student body, employees and alumni. We're unique in the diversity of our governing body. And we're a board that listens to each other before making decisions.

Zubrow: Our democratic approach to governance stems from our heritage and shapes our unique culture. It's part of our DNA. We live and breathe these core values through the broad representation on our board and how we make decisions.

We are a truly democratic university, and we have a much broader view of what it means to be an academic institution. Our public-private mission and the value we place on both the liberal arts as well as the applied fields – and the belief that those are equally important – colors everything we do. I think that is the richness of our culture.

How has trustees' focus on the long-term interests of the university proven crucial to decision-making?

Zubrow: Having a big-picture, long-term view is central to the most important decision that the board makes: the selection of a president. To provide broad input, we constitute a committee with representatives from different constituencies: trustees, faculty members, students and employees. When we come together, one of the first things I ask of the committee – and what I tell them again at the end when we are about to vote – is that you put on your “university hat” and vote as a citizen of the university. When it comes to the final vote, the committee members make their decision based on what's right for the university, and not based on the views of a narrow constituency.

Harrison: Our decision to create the Cornell SC Johnson College of Business is the single best example in my experience of trustees focusing on the best interest of the university rather than being protective of their individual colleges.

We have always had trustees who were very strong advocates of the Hotel School, the Johnson School and the Dyson School. They attended those schools and have been fiercely loyal and supportive for decades. Integrating

those schools into a unified college of business was the single most contentious issue that we faced during my tenure on the board. At the end of the day, the decision was unanimous, and part of the reason it was unanimous is because of the advocacy of people who put the university's long-term interests above all else.

Cornell alumni vote for two alumni-elected trustees each year. How would you answer the question 'Why should I vote?'

Zubrow: We have alumni-elected trustees on our board, and that's a very unusual thing. If you're an alum and you want to have a voice in the governance of the university, this is your opportunity; you shouldn't pass that up. It is your right, and you should express that right. We get some of our best trustees from our alumni-elected trustees – both Bob and I started as proud alumni-elected trustees.

Harrison: The board of trustees is extraordinarily important in setting the future course of the university, and an alumni-elected trustee has exactly the same role to play as any other trustee. I think that voting is the very least an alum can do to give back to Cornell. While we love to see alumni devoting their time, expertise and financial resources to Cornell, voting for alumni-elected trustees is the easiest way to start getting involved, reconnecting and making a difference.

Opposite page:

From left, Cornell President Martha E. Pollack; Daniel Huttenlocher, vice provost and the Jack and Rilla Neafsey Dean of Cornell Tech; former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg; and Robert Harrison celebrate following the ribbon-cutting ceremony at Cornell Tech in September 2017.

Below, top:

Jan Rock Zubrow at a campaign celebration in 2008.

Below, bottom:

Harrison and Zubrow in the procession for Pollack's presidential inauguration ceremony in August 2017.



Joe Wilensky

Microgrants advance female students and faculty

Call them seed funds. Call them springboards. Call them tangible votes of confidence. Student microgrants awarded by the President's Council of Cornell Women (PCCW) are designed to boost the success of female students.

African-American women will foster community and leadership during a luncheon. The Women's Law Coalition will hold a career day. A theater Ph.D. student will document LGBTQ voices for "The Loneliness Project."

These and 10 more student-initiated projects and events have received funding this year with awards of up to \$500 to cover a wide range of program expenses that can quickly add up on slim budgets.

"Securing this funding means being able to provide the best experience for all the participants and judges," said Sonya Tao '19 of Smart Woman Securities, which holds an annual stock pitch competition.

For Olivia Shi, a graduate student in health administration, PCCW's microgrant comes as an "immense help" as she and her fellow members of Cornell's Women in Healthcare Leadership Club plan an annual spring symposium.

All the microgrants represent one of several PCCW philanthropic initiatives that benefit Cornell female students and faculty. With the effort now in its second year, alumnae organizers say that modest amounts can go a long way.



Above: Last year's winners of Smart Woman Securities' annual Stock Pitch Competition, which received funding this year to help undergraduate women in finance apply what they have learned.

Left: Members of Les Femmes de Substance (pictured at last year's annual retreat) aim to foster community and leadership for African-American female students. The group was awarded funds to host a networking luncheon.



"When I see the energy of Cornell students, I am inspired to support them in any way I can. It doesn't have to be a lot to make a difference," said Jennifer Perez-Rossello '91, a former PCCW chair who spearheaded the program.

"It's exciting to see what students do with the funds and the difference they make for the women who are currently at Cornell as they work hard to make an impact on each other," said PCCW Chair Heidi Grenek '92, M.Eng. '93.

"It's energizing when you see the creative ways that people put money to good use and impact others."

- Heidi Grenek '92, M.Eng. '93

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