

## Formal Announcement of the Call To Engagement From Jeffrey S. Lehman to the Cornell Community

**November 20, 2003, Barton Hall**

In my inaugural address, I asked the Cornell community to consider how our university should evolve during the years leading up to our sesquicentennial in 2015. I believe that Cornell, with its unique set of animating principles, history, and contemporary structure, can make contributions to humanity that no other university in the world can make. We have a shared responsibility to reflect carefully on how to pursue that goal.

I hope that during this academic year the broad community of Cornellians -- faculty, students, staff, alumni, and other neighbors and friends near and far -- will engage a set of important questions and will share the fruits of that engagement. Before enumerating those questions, however, I want to offer some of my thoughts and hopes about the process.

I am not asking you to consider all the important issues that face Cornell. Rather, I am asking you to approach a subset of those issues, a subset that touches the core of our identity. In challenging us to think about Cornell's fundamentals, I anticipate that much of the discussion will reaffirm what we find good about our university. I nonetheless encourage us to reflect on all of Cornell, even the aspects that are its greatest strengths.

To be sure, it is not my intent to revisit or second-guess major commitments that Cornell has made; I am fully dedicated to their successful realization. This exercise is about the future - the new commitments we should be making to ourselves and to others, so as to ensure that Cornell is the university we want it to be when

we celebrate our 150th birthday.

These are not matters that lend themselves to easy, consensus to-do lists, or to simple, one-sentence answers. They are complex, difficult subjects about which reasonable people will disagree. Accordingly, responses will be most helpful if they convey people's approaches to the questions and the ways they think about them, rather than simply generating a list of agenda items. When a group considers a topic, I hope that they will produce a response that conveys the broad heterogeneity of reaction within the group rather than stating a simple "bottom line."

I am asking our community to begin this discussion over the coming weeks. The opportunities for thought and conversation are varied and numerous. Members of the senior administration will help develop and organize discussion among all of our stakeholders, but many of you will want to engage, instead, in smaller group discussions or in individual reflection. I encourage you to take whatever opportunity arises to give consideration to these questions. We invite you to share the results of your deliberations by sending an e-mail to [calltoengagement@cornell.edu](mailto:calltoengagement@cornell.edu) or simply sending a note to the President's Office at 300 Day Hall. My colleagues and I will be reading the ideas you write down and mixing in our own views. By next fall, I expect to have framed an initial set of goals for myself and for our university that will reflect the dreams and aspirations of Cornellians everywhere.

Thank you, in advance, for participating in this exercise. I look forward to joining with you in the conversations that these questions stimulate. It is a great privilege for me to serve as Cornell's president and to lead what I trust will be an extraordinarily stimulating conversation.

## Call to Engagement: Eight Questions

The Call to Engagement invites discussion of the eight questions provided below. These questions are intended to explore fundamental issues regarding the future for the university. There are no right or wrong answers. Your input is valuable because each voice in this discussion serves to enrich the voices that have come before and will come after. Each voice will nurture a better understanding of what can be possible on the horizon for Cornell.

1. What should we be teaching our students? What intellectual dispositions, character traits, and essential knowledge should we be nurturing? How can we inspire our undergraduate, graduate, and professional students to become intellectual and moral leaders of their communities? How can we prepare them for well-rounded lives that incorporate artistic, athletic, cultural, humanitarian, political, and social dimensions?
2. How should we be teaching? Have new technologies and research on how students learn created possibilities for better pedagogy, or are they mere distractions? What kind of mentorship, inside and outside the classroom, should we provide our students at the different stages of their educations?
3. Whom should we be teaching? What mix of undergraduates, graduate students, professional students, and non-degree students will best help Cornell achieve its educational mission?
4. Where should we be present? As our world has changed, we have added new places where we teach those who would earn Cornell degrees. How much should we be extending ourselves, our resources, and our reputation around the globe?
5. What does our land-grant mission mean today? What forms of extension and public service are the best modern expression of Senator Morrill's program for having outstanding universities contribute to the practical education of society? Should we do more to

ensure that the fruits of our research become part of the fabric of the larger society?

6. How should we collaborate? We already collaborate with other great universities in the United States and around the world, on projects large and small. What other institutional partnerships, international and domestic, might permit a scale of endeavor that would allow us to accomplish things we cannot do alone? With whom might we collaborate, closer to home, to enhance the up-state New York economy and/or strengthen our ties to New York City?
7. Should we be identifying special domains of research emphasis where Cornell is unusually well situated to make enduring and significant contributions? Can such an identification be reconciled with the highly adaptive decentralization that has been one of the hallmarks of research innovation at Cornell? We have already identified some candidates for special emphasis: information science and computing technology, post-genomic life sciences, and nanotechnology. Additional themes that have the potential to draw on multiple disciplines where Cornell has great strength might include: technology and society; race and religion; globalization's consequences; humanity's relationship to the natural and built environment; peace, liberty, and security; and global health.
8. How should the university be organized? Our complex web of institutional structures and processes has, for the most part, provided a healthy mix of stability and flexibility. But are some features anachronisms? Do new forms of knowledge production and dissemination require different structures? Might organizational changes better enable faculty, students, and staff to achieve their individual and institutional ambitions?