

Presidential Task Force on Institutional Voice

“I would found an institution where any person can find instruction in any study.”

Ezra Cornell, 1868

“I hope that we have laid the foundation of an institution which shall combine practical with liberal education, which shall fit the youth of our country for the professions, the farms, the mines, the manufactories, for the investigations of science, and for mastering all the practical questions of life with success and honor.”

Ezra Cornell, 1868

1. Guiding Principles

The principles guiding Cornell’s expression of its institutional voice should be rooted in the university’s core mission, values, and functions.

Cornell is a private, Ivy League university and the land-grant university for New York state. Cornell’s mission is to discover, preserve and disseminate knowledge, to educate the next generation of global citizens, and to promote a culture of broad inquiry throughout and beyond the Cornell community. Cornell also aims, through public engagement, to enhance the lives and livelihoods of students, the people of New York, and others around the world.

Purposeful discovery, free and open inquiry and expression, a community of belonging, exploration across boundaries, changing lives through engagement and respect for the natural environment constitute Cornell’s core values.

Core functions of the university include the capacity to perform its education, research, public engagement and service; healthcare delivery and medical affairs for humans and animals; and the ability to construct and effectively manage the infrastructure necessary to meet these obligations.

2. Executive Summary: Statement on Institutional Voice

Cornell University should exercise its institutional voice in ways that directly preserve and enhance its core mission, values, and functions. Cornell’s mission is to “discover, preserve and disseminate knowledge, to

educate the next generation of global citizens, and to promote a culture of broad inquiry throughout and beyond the Cornell community.” Through this mission, Cornell aims to “enhance the lives and livelihoods of students, the people of New York, and others around the world.” Cornell remains guided by the words, legacy, and philosophy of its founders, Ezra Cornell and A.D. White, and their capacious interpretation of a program of higher education for “any person, any study.”

As a global research institution and New York state’s land-grant university, Cornell’s mission finds expression in a variety of endeavors, chief among them the core teaching, training, research, community engagement, and healthcare delivery that links together faculty, students, and staff. Closely connected to the educational program are other affiliated activities, such as student support, that are central to implementing and executing that mission. The activities carried out in support of the mission of Cornell University are wide, impactful, and varied.

In deciding when the institution should exercise its voice, the University’s core mission, values, and functions should be front and center.¹ This includes matters related not just to Cornell’s specific mission but also to higher education generally—e.g., academic freedom, freedom of inquiry, and access to education—that are inextricably linked to Cornell’s mission. The use of institutional voice in support of this mission is appropriate but should be used with prudence and guided by principles of institutional restraint. It is not the place of the university or its leaders to speak about matters not germane to Cornell’s mission.

Restraint is similar to, but distinct from, the well-known phrase “institutional neutrality,” a term often associated with the University of Chicago’s [Kalven Report](#) of 1967. The two concepts are similar in the sense that both recommend that universities refrain from engaging in institutional speech that would needlessly entangle the university in political, ideological, or current-affairs controversies. Where they differ, though, is in the details and in their prescription. Neutrality suggests a state of mind, whereas “restraint” is destined to provide a guide for potential action, a recommendation for how the university should act if and when it makes communicative decisions. In that regard, institutional restraint is the more

¹ The reference to “values” in this sentence should not be interpreted as a vague reference to any normative framework or to any subjective moral vision, a standard that could quickly become a slippery slope. Rather, the word “values” in this context refers specifically to the university’s [core values](#) as they relate to its [core mission](#), and therefore the list “core mission, values, and functions” should be understood collectively as a single reference to the university’s activities. The reference to values in this report should not be read as an invitation for the university to justify engaging in ideological speech as required by a commitment to “values” writ large. Values writ large, disconnected from the university’s core mission and functions, are not a proper basis for the university to exercise its institutional voice.

useful term for the report of a university task force charged with formulating practical recommendations and best practices.

Some readers might believe that there is an implicit hierarchy between the terms, with institutional neutrality representing a more forceful recommendation and restraint representing a watered-down version of neutrality. This is a false inference. In fact, the “Chicago approach” was never categorical and absolute, as the [Kalven Report](#) recognized when it stated that: *“From time to time instances will arise in which the society, or segments of it, threaten the very mission of the university and its values of free inquiry. In such a crisis, it becomes the obligation of the university as an institution to oppose such measures and actively to defend its interests and its values.”* Institutional restraint captures the essential characteristics of neutrality but renders it as an effective guide for action and packages it in an intellectually faithful concept that is consistent with Cornell’s ethos.

On matters beyond the scope of the university’s mission, the individual voices of the university’s constituencies—faculty, staff, students, alumni, and families—rise to the surface as they appropriately exercise their freedom to speak where they deem it necessary and appropriate. A robust exchange of ideas and opinions through free expression and academic freedom is the best way to ensure open dialogue and mutual respect within the university community. At all times, these individuals speak for themselves, not for Cornell.

This mission-centric conception of institutional voice need not entail that the institution must remain silent when its ability to execute its mission is compromised. The university is entitled to protect its interests; neutrality with regard to itself is logically incoherent. What is required by a principle of institutional restraint is a thoughtful and nuanced appreciation of Cornell’s mission, a need to carefully tailor its voice to that mission, and reasonable circumspection and prudence in exercising that voice.

When institutional restraint does not apply because a topic falls squarely within the core mission of the university, speech is permitted but not required. There are many reasons why discretion, rather than speech, may be strategically preferable for the institution and its academic values.

3. Rationale

a. What is institutional voice?

Institutional voice is communication that speaks on behalf of the university. These are messages from university leadership, in any format, that may be addressed internally to members of the university community or externally to audiences outside of the university. These messages may be official statements, but they may also be announcements or communication

regarding activities, policies, or events that impact the university's core mission, values, and functions.

Importantly, institutional voice differs from the individual voices of faculty, students, staff, or alumni, as well as the voices of those who lead units within the institution and who can only speak for those units. There are certain members of Cornell leadership who, due to the nature of their position at the university, cannot meaningfully divorce their individual faculty or staff voice from their institutional voice. In particular, the university's president and provost can seldom communicate publicly on matters related to the university without speaking on behalf of the university. Those in roles of university vice presidents and vice provosts may similarly find their communication or comments received as representing the university as an institution.

Usually, institutional voice finds expression in communicative statements from the institution. In some circumstances, substantive actions may produce communicative content, though this report is principally concerned with communication per se. Institutional communications take a variety of forms, including communications that reach internal and external audiences using multiple channels and with different labels: formal statements, emails, comments to the press, social media postings, website content, videos, speeches, etc.

b. What is the goal, purpose or intent of the use of institutional voice?

The university uses its institutional voice to represent, preserve and amplify its core mission, values, and functions. The purpose and intent of these articulations is: 1) to inform the university community and its constituencies on a matter of import and currency; 2) to place the university's position on important issues into the public record; 3) to influence robust debate and decision-making on important issues, understanding that there may not be a consensus amongst the university community. In determining the use of its institutional voice, the university's decision should satisfy one or more of the following criteria:

- a) The issue directly affects the university's core mission, values, or functions in ways that are easily communicated to the university community;
- b) The issue directly affects the background conditions that make possible the academic enterprise at Cornell or in higher education generally, for example, our nation's democratic system, the rule of law, freedom of speech, or freedom of thought, and thereby impacts the university's

ability to make its contributions to the common good through its research, teaching, clinical care, or engagement.

In determining to use its institutional voice, it is advisable for university leadership to articulate the rationale for its exercise of institutional voice to the community and the constituencies most likely to be impacted by it. It is the responsibility of university leadership to act with prudence and restraint in navigating the link between institutional voice and university mission.

c. Who speaks for the institution?

University leadership

The Board of Trustees appoints the President, Provost, and Provost of Medical Affairs of Cornell University to lead its academic and operational functions. Only the board, president, and provost speak for the university, though at times the president and provost may delegate this responsibility to additional officers, most notably a vice president for university relations or an individual in a similar communications position. The president and provost oversee tiers of leadership beneath them, including but not limited to vice and associate vice presidents, vice and associate vice provosts, deans, and other leaders and administrators. These individuals do not speak for the university unless specifically delegated to do so by the president or provost. In exercising this institutional voice on behalf of the university, the president, provost, and board should follow the principles of restraint outlined in this document.

The president and provost represent a vast array of university interests that range from mission-centric values and mission-centric functions and operations; and represent the complex intersections between these internal values and functions, with entities, communities and persons outside of the institution. Managing the internal and external dynamics of their roles requires nuanced communication, as well as the capacity to speak publicly on matters related to higher education in general. As university leaders, they may operate as public intellectuals to extol the societal values and benefits of scientific, humanistic, and creative research. Each president or provost may have different levels of interest in conveying this institutional voice depending on their tolerance for risk and contestation.

In articulating their views, the president and provost should be careful to ensure that their articulations meet the criteria, articulated above, for when to use institutional voice. Their speech, in both tone and content, should not convey intolerance to other views and should not crowd out other voices within the university from voicing dissent.

College leadership

The deans of colleges and schools of Cornell University constitute the leading administrators who have authority over their units' academic and operational functions. The deans do not speak for the university, as this responsibility is reserved for the president, provost, and board. Instead, the deans can only speak for themselves in their scholarly or creative capacity, or in exceptional situations, their college or school. In deciding when to exercise this voice, deans should follow the principles of restraint outlined in this document and only speak for their college and school when necessary to advance the academic unit's mission.

It may be the case that deans have an opportunity to speak in their scholarly voice, as independent teachers or scholars, on questions that relate to their zone of academic expertise. This may include statements in the classroom during a regular course, articulations in journal articles or peer-reviewed books, or publications, quotes, and appearances in popular media designed to translate scholarly insights for the public. Although these expressions of scholarly expertise fall within the zone of academic freedom, deans should be mindful of the possibility that even scholarly discussions can intersect with sensitive matters of political concern. Furthermore, some audience members may not easily distinguish between a dean's statements on behalf of their college and a dean's scholarly contributions to a topic of public concern as an expression of individual voice. When in doubt, deans should exercise restraint in their communications to avoid such confusion and should always clarify whether they are speaking on behalf of their school or college or whether they are speaking for themselves as scholars.

Deans oversee tiers of leadership that report to them, including but not limited to vice and associate deans, unit directors and department chairs. When college leaders other than the dean use their voice, they are speaking either for themselves or on behalf of the department or sub-unit in which they exercise authority, rather than speaking for the wider college or university. Given the possibility for confusion regarding this attribution, exercises of voice by administrators below the level of college deans should be rare and exceptional.

As is the case for university leadership at the presidential and provostial level, college and school deans should be careful to ensure that their articulations meet the criteria for when to use their voice, and that their speech does not convey intolerance to other views and does not crowd out other voices within the university from voicing dissent. Deans should exercise prudence and restraint in communication in a similar way to university leadership.

In all cases, deans should coordinate in advance with university leadership, e.g. provost, president, or their delegates, to ensure that college-

level or school-level communications are consistent with university communications.

Academic departments and other units

When making comments, leaders below the level of college leadership, such as department chairs, program heads, and center or institutes directors, should be mindful of the confusion that their public expressions might generate, in the sense that internal and external constituencies might falsely believe that they are speaking for their department or unit, college, school, or university. This confusion is especially relevant regarding outside constituencies who may not be familiar with the internal structure of universities in general or Cornell University specifically. Reports in the public domain, in press articles, online platforms, social media, or other channels, might attribute these comments to the wider university in ways that could trigger consternation for university members.

At times, faculty within departments, programs, centers, faculty bodies, or other configurations, may decide to act collectively in exercising their collective voice. Such communications, while collective in nature, do not constitute “institutional” voice, nor may they speak for the university.

These guidelines should not be interpreted to impinge on such freedom of expression (nor on the expressive freedoms of individual faculty members speaking for themselves). Guided by the same principle of prudence and circumspection, it is advisable that any such collective statements pertain to, and be informed by, the faculty group’s domain of scholarly expertise. Furthermore, departments and other academic sub-units should be guided by the same principles of restraint outlined in this document. Statements by academic departments on matters unconnected to the department’s educational mission may crowd out the voices of individual members of the community.

In situations where a department believes that its voice is both necessary and appropriate to fulfill its academic mission, and satisfies the criteria of restraint, several conditions should be satisfied before it issues any communication. Faculty acting collectively within their academic units should determine an appropriate and transparent procedure for exercising their collective voice. At a minimum, this procedure should dictate adequate deliberation and voting to determine whether the collective communication will be issued. The process should be grounded in principles of fairness and inclusivity, ensuring that relevant members—faculty, students, or staff—are respected and considered. It is essential that academic units cultivate an environment where diverse viewpoints are welcomed and where individuals, especially those holding minority perspectives, feel safe and supported in expressing their views.

Particular care should be taken to protect untenured faculty, as well as staff, who may experience additional vulnerability in contexts where disagreement with majority opinion could carry professional risk. Processes for deliberation and decision-making should be designed to encourage open dialogue, reduce power imbalances, and ensure that no member is silenced or marginalized. In this spirit, academic units should avoid imposing a majoritarian perspective that may inadvertently suppress dissenting views. Furthermore, the department should seriously consider whether its communicative objectives could be accomplished by releasing a letter with individual signatories, rather than a collective statement from the department as such.

Accordingly, votes should be conducted anonymously, and in the interest of transparency, procedures should include careful consideration of who is enfranchised to vote and publicized statements should include the vote tally and categories of the enfranchised voters (e.g., tenure- and non-tenure line faculty, postdoctoral fellows, lecturers, staff, graduate students, etc.), so that the audience for the communication understands which categories of individuals participated in the process that ultimately led to the communication.²

When publishing the actual communication, the academic group should inform university leadership (dean and provost) in advance of the publication, so that university leadership may be prepared to publicly respond to the inevitable queries from the press or the public about whether the statement represents the university's position. The academic group should avoid placing the statement on the main department landing page hosted by the university website, which might generate confusion by falsely implying larger institutional imprimatur for the communication, and should instead consider alternate locations such as a subsidiary page of the department's web presence). The statement should include an explicit and prominent notation that it does not represent the views of the university.

4. Task Force Committee process

On March 11, 2025, then-Interim President Michael I. Kotlikoff, Provost Kavita Bala and Provost for Medical Affairs Robert A. Harrington [announced](#) the formation of the Presidential Task Force on Institutional Voice. Deputy

² Although this report does not touch upon the speech of student groups, the recommendations outlined here for faculty groups may be relevant for student groups to consider in the future. Student groups may wish to adopt formal procedures to determine when such communications will be issued, how that deliberation is undertaken, and criteria for voting on such decisions (including which students get to vote and how the vote should be conducted). Student groups that issue communications should be mindful of the fact that their collective communications may place members of their groups under extraordinary pressure when individuals do not agree with the collective statement.

Provost Avery August, Howard Hughes Medical Institute Professor and professor of immunology in the College of Veterinary Medicine; and Jens David Ohlin, the Allan R. Tessler Dean of the Cornell Law School served as co-chairs along with seven faculty members from various disciplines who served as committee members on the task force. The full list of task force committee members is in Appendix 1.

The charge to the task force was to develop guidance for how and when the university should exercise its “institutional voice” to speak officially on issues of social and political significance. Questions about the individual voices of the university community were not considered as part of the charge of the task force. The full charge to the task force is included in Appendix 2.

To promote the formation of the task force and invite community engagement, a Cornell Chronicle [article](#) was published on March 11, 2025 with a link to a [webpage](#) dedicated to the mission of the Presidential Task Force on Institutional Voice, residing on the Provost’s Initiatives’ website.

As the committee undertook its work, Cornell’s [core values](#) served as guiding principles for the direction of the resulting recommendations. In addition, the committee acknowledged the [Cornell University’s Policy Statement on Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech and Expression](#) as a foundational policy to which the task force recommendations align.

The committee held its initial meeting on April 1, 2025, and met weekly through the end of the Spring 2025 semester. The committee invited engagement from the community in three ways:

1. A dedicated email address: tfiv@cornell.edu.
 - A total of 45 emails were received, all reviewed and responded to by the co-chairs as required.
2. An anonymous online feedback form featuring five specific questions and an open-ended commentary option.
 - Survey questions and a breakdown of the 207 responses received can be found in Appendix 3.
3. Virtual listening sessions, supported by the Office of the Assemblies and promoted by the Dean of Faculty Office, provided faculty, staff, and students an opportunity to share their ideas on the questions as reflected in the charge.
 - Six sessions were held: two each for faculty, students, and staff, respectively. See summary report on listening sessions in Appendix 4.

The task force committee met with selected groups of faculty and two outside experts to gather their perspectives on the charge.

Selected groups of faculty included:

- Provost's leadership team
- College and School Deans
- Chairs and Center Directors
- Select Law School faculty
- Advisors from the Cornell Council for the Arts (CCA) and Durba Ghosh representing the Humanities Council

External experts included:

- Laurie Patton, President, American Academy of Arts and Sciences
Former President, Middlebury College
<https://www.amacad.org/person/laurie-l-patton>
- Jason Stanley, Yale University Jacob Urowsky Professor of Philosophy
Forthcoming: University of Toronto Munk School of Global Affairs and Department of Philosophy
<https://munkschool.utoronto.ca/person/jason-stanley>

The task force committee consulted the work on this topic from other sources including the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) and a number of peer institutions. The complete list of reference documents is in Appendix 5.

Appendix 1: Full list of task force committee members

- **Avery August (co-chair)**, deputy provost and professor of immunology in the Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine
- **Jens David Ohlin (co-chair)**, the Allan R. Tessler Dean of Cornell Law School
- **Milton Curry**, professor of architecture and senior associate dean for strategic initiatives and engagement, Cornell University College of Architecture, Art, and Planning
- **Kate Griffith**, the Jean McKelvey-Alice Grant Professor of Labor-Management Relations and senior associate dean for academic affairs, diversity, and faculty development, Cornell University School of Industrial and Labor Relations
- **Lee Humphreys**, professor and chair, Department of Communication, Cornell University College of Agriculture and Life Sciences
- **Lori Khatchadourian**, associate professor, Department of Near Eastern Studies, Cornell University College of Arts and Sciences
- **Sarah Kreps**, the John L. Wetherill Professor in the Department of Government, adjunct professor of law, and Director of the Cornell Brooks School Tech Policy Institute
- **Taha Merghoub**, the Margaret and Herman Sokol Professor of Oncology Research and Deputy Director of the Meyer Cancer Center, Weill Cornell Medicine
- **Mert Sabuncu**, professor, School of Electrical and Computer Engineering, Cornell Engineering, and professor, Cornell Tech
- **Victoria White**, project manager, Office of the President and Provost

Appendix 2: Full charge to the task force committee

Ezra Cornell's statement on the founding of Cornell, "I would found an institution where any person can find instruction in any study," has been this institution's guiding principle from the beginning. The diversity of voices and viewpoints from this "any person ... any study" ethos results in robust educational experiences and opportunity for critical engagement around a wide range of topics and issues.

As a university that seeks to support this robust engagement, the existence of some guiding principles would provide the campus community with the tools for supporting and promoting the expression of diverse viewpoints. As an institution that includes among its five core values "free and open inquiry and expression," it would also be helpful to develop guidance for how, when and under what situations the institution itself expresses its voice.

The charge of this task force is to examine the issues and questions below:

1. Examine how the mission of the university as an academic enterprise does or not influence whether and when the institution exercises its voice.
2. Discuss the implications of the university speaking institutionally regarding a range of matters — and how that institutional voice impacts the individual voices of Cornell's community members.
3. Make recommendations regarding the principles and best practices that should guide university decisions about when to speak publicly, and regarding what matters.
4. Make recommendations regarding procedures or best practices for who and how such statements should be made at the leadership level.
5. Discuss the process for exercising institutional voice at levels below university leadership, e.g. at the level of colleges, departments, centers, academic sub-units, and other faculty, staff, or student groups. Make recommendations regarding how members of our community should guide these collective decisions.

Questions about the individual voices of the university community will not be considered as part of the charge of the task force.

Appendix 3: Summary of anonymous online survey

Survey Questions

1. What principles should guide the University in deciding when to use its institutional voice?
2. Cornell's mission is to discover, preserve and disseminate knowledge, to educate the next generation of global citizens, and to promote a culture of broad inquiry throughout and beyond the Cornell community. Cornell also aims, through public service, to enhance the lives and livelihoods of students, the people of New York and others around the world.
How does the University's mission shape your thinking on how it should use its institutional voice?
3. What processes should the University employ in deciding when to exercise its voice?
4. In your view, whose voice represents the institution when issuing official statements? (choose as many as you want).

Choices: President, Provost, College Deans, Department Chairs/Center Directors/Program Directors, Other

5. Recognizing the diversity of opinions within our university, what processes should guide units (such as departments, programs, etc.) in deciding when and how to exercise a voice?
6. Please provide any other thoughts you might have relative to the charge to the Task Force.

A total of 207 responses were received:

Constituents:

- 37 Faculty responses
- 78 Staff responses
- 48 Student responses
- 44 Alumni, Other, No response

Campuses:

- 3 Cornell Tech
- 156 Ithaca
- 16 Weill
- 33 No response

Appendix 4: Summary of Listening Sessions

Faculty Session, April 14, 2025 – 31 participants

Participants expressed strong concern over recent threats to university research funding and broader governmental actions that challenge the core mission of higher education. Several highlighted Harvard's proactive public stance as a model for Cornell to emulate, calling for a stronger institutional voice in defending research, academic freedom, and university values.

Key concerns included:

- The need for Cornell to be more vocal in defending its research and societal contributions.
- The importance of clearly communicating institutional values, especially during crises.
- Concerns from conservative voices on campus feeling silenced or marginalized, calling for greater inclusivity of diverse viewpoints.
- The fear and uncertainty faced by international students, and the impact on recruitment and campus safety.
- The tension between remaining neutral and standing by the university's values; many argued that true neutrality is neither possible nor appropriate in the current climate.
- The need for thoughtful processes to determine when and how different university units should speak on behalf of the institution.
- Consideration of legal and economic ramifications of public statements, especially given potential litigation.

Faculty Session, April 29, 2025 – 16 participants

The discussion centered around creating long-term guidelines for when and how Cornell University should speak collectively on public issues. This is not about reacting to the current political climate, but establishing principles-based, mission-aligned decision-making.

Key themes included:

- Clarifying institutional voice: When and how Cornell should make public statements, and who is authorized to do so.
- The importance of consistency, especially regarding topics like free speech vs. hate speech, and aligning statements with the university's core mission.

- Acknowledging that not speaking is itself a choice, and Cornell should sometimes be proactive even if not under immediate threat.
- Concerns about mixed messages when high-level individuals (e.g., deans, college presidents) speak publicly in ways perceived as representing the university.
- Current process ambiguities: It's unclear who Day Hall consults when making decisions; while central communications reviews statements, it lacks authority over college-level messaging.
- Questions around department-level voice: Whether and how departments should issue public statements, and what internal procedures (e.g., faculty consultation, voting) should guide that.
- Need for guidance on how to handle disagreements between leadership and the Board of Trustees, and how to address missteps or retractions if a message misses the mark.

Overall, the goal is to establish clear, values-based guidelines to govern Cornell's institutional speech while respecting internal debate and decentralized structures.

Student Session, April 15, 2025 – No participants

Student Session, April 21, 2025 – 27 participants

The conversation focused on the need for clear, transparent guidelines around when and how Cornell University makes public statements, particularly in response to political, social, and student-related issues. Participants emphasized that the university is already speaking in implicit ways and needs to acknowledge that communication decisions reflect institutional values.

Key points include:

- Call for a formal decision-making rubric for issuing university statements.
- Desire for greater faculty and departmental input and recognition of their expertise in shaping communication.
- Concerns about transparency in university decisions, particularly around financial and political relationships.
- Student safety and protection, especially for international students and those involved in protests, was a major theme.
- Inclusion gaps were noted, especially the absence of graduate students in the task force.

- Many stressed the importance of protecting free speech, and urged the university to defend students publicly, even amid controversial discourse.
- Specific events (e.g., Oct 7 protests, doxxing incidents) were cited as examples of poor university response or harmful tone.
- A need for proactive and consistent messaging, especially during attacks on academic freedom and democracy.
- Suggestions included creating community-inclusive processes, collaborating with peer institutions, and leveraging lobbyists for broader advocacy.
- The impact of university statements on student trust, perception, and safety was repeatedly emphasized.

Overall, there is a strong call for clearer communication policies, better student protections, and inclusive decision-making that upholds Cornell's mission and moral responsibility.

Staff Session, April 23, 2025 – 85 participants

This discussion reflected a range of concerns and questions about how, when, and by whom Cornell should express institutional voice, particularly in response to community events and external threats.

Key points included:

- Uncertainty around the meaning of “institutional voice”: Is it just official communication or also university actions?
- Questions about whether statements from university leadership (e.g., the president) reflect the institution or the individual.
- Calls for community representation on the task force, not just faculty, to better reflect broader perspectives.
- Concerns about tone in internal messages—many feel communication is too legalistic, impersonal, and lacks care for community well-being.
- Participants emphasized that silence is a form of stance, and lack of response can feel like abandonment.
- Some feel more connected to mid-level leaders (e.g., VPs or deans) than central administration, raising questions about who should speak on behalf of the institution.
- Content neutrality was questioned—participants expressed skepticism about the university’s claimed neutrality and pointed out a lack of follow-through on values-based messaging.

- Appreciation was expressed for updated efforts such as those of Harvard's public research impact site, and a desire for Cornell to do more to show value through action.
- A key tension emerged between public statements vs. internal support, with a call for more visible care and concrete resources, especially for vulnerable groups like international students.
- Participants warned against oversimplifying complex issues like human rights and encouraged deeper thinking about when and why the university should speak out.

Overall, the conversation underscores a desire for more transparent, caring, and inclusive communication, backed by action and reflective of the university's stated values.

Staff Session, April 28, 2025 – 46 participants

The discussion began with an emphasis on the committee's focus on developing long-term, principled guidelines for when and how the university should speak on external events. Other points included:

- There's a need to distinguish institutional voice from personal opinions, especially those of leadership (e.g., president or provost).
- Consistency and clarity are key: community expectations should be managed, and statements should align with the university's core mission.
- University statements should be made when there's a direct connection to the mission; otherwise, silence may be more appropriate.
- Recognized risk: backtracking on statements due to donor or public pressure damages credibility.
- Leadership statements (e.g., presidential) carry more weight and should be carefully considered and coordinated.
- Internal communications may be leaked, so broader guidance is needed beyond just formal statements.
- Silence is also a form of voice, and community may perceive it as neglect or silencing.
- Concerns exist about faculty or deans being seen as institutional voices, especially in absence of official university statements.
- Institutional neutrality is questioned—there's skepticism about whether neutrality is genuine or possible.
- Free speech concerns were raised, particularly about university actions that may appear to suppress dissenting views.

- Suggestions include naming the president and vice president of university relations as official spokespeople, and ensuring action aligns with communication.
- Final emphasis: voice is not only about what is said, but also about how the university acts.

Appendix 5: Reference Documents

The following reports and statements provided examples of approaches and positions on institutional voice developed by other institutions and organizations.

- [American Association of University Professors \(AAUP\) Statement on Institutional Neutrality](#)
- [Brown University Draft Statement of University Values and Voice \(PDF\)](#)
- [University of Chicago \(Kalven Report\)](#)
- [Dartmouth College Statement on Institutional Restraint](#)
- [Harvard University Report on Institutional Voice](#)
- [Stanford University Policy on Institutional Statements](#)