

Mickey:

Good evening, Cornellians, from around the world, my name is Mickey Munley and it's my great pleasure to be here hosting tonight's alumni All-Call. My role tonight is simply housekeeping to keep things moving along. We're looking forward to a lively conversation, lots of questions certainly from you, and some really thoughtful, solid answers from our panel of guests who I will introduce shortly. As you recall from past phonecasts, if you have a question, please just press star three on your phone at any time, it's like raising your hand, it won't interrupt us, but it lets us know you have a question and we'll get you in the queue. We're going to try and get to as many questions as we can and as many topics as we can and that helps us sort of curate that in better fashion. So star three at any point if you have a question, but of course, first we have some very important comments, and I know all of you are eager to hear.

Mickey:

So, it's my great pleasure and honor to introduce, finishing his ninth year as president at Cornell College, Jonathan Brand. Jonathan, the floor is yours.

President Jonathan Brand:

Well, thanks Mickey, thanks. Well, good evening everyone. It's a pleasure to have some time with you in this virtual telephonic format, one that we're all too familiar with now. It won't surprise you that my comments are largely focused on COVID-19, and how it has forced us to rethink everything we do. Some of this is probably old news for many of you. You probably know, we moved all of our Block Seven and Block Eight courses online. Going into the summer we made the decision, with safety of our students, faculty and staff as our highest priority, to go ahead and cancel all of our summer programming with the exception of two major exceptions.

President Jonathan Brand:

We will offer 18 different online courses for our students over the course of the summer, and we will continue our very vibrant student summer research program in a virtual format, not on campus. And as I say all of this and mean to suggest that this has been a very turbulent period for higher education, I think we have a lot to be thankful for, and a lot to be optimistic about at Cornell. Now, why do I say that? Well, once again, no surprise to anyone here, Cornell College has shown in my mind its real strength and it's mettle. During the last two months, the faculty and staff have been exceptional. Not even so much in doing their jobs, but in actually in helping others to do their jobs as well.

President Jonathan Brand:

In a matter of a week and a half, we needed to get all of our classes online, it was done. We needed to take all of our incredible support structures around our students, and move those online, and keep everything personalized. It was done. We needed help, and we still need help, continuing help recruiting students. Done. We needed assistance in calling our current students on a regular basis, just to see how they're doing in a virtual format. Done. We needed to develop quickly safety related protocols, and practices for everything. Done. The spirit of partnership and connection across all of Cornell has taken us in my mind, to levels that I don't think I've ever experienced during my time at Cornell, and I think rarely seen, even in higher education. Under our Dean's leadership, and Dean Dieker, will be speaking momentarily, he with several of our colleagues, developed and the faculty approved in under a week, a major change to our block system delivery in response to COVID-19.

President Jonathan Brand:

And then just two days later, we launched it publicly, thanks to a very impressive marketing and communications team. I mean, everyone was involved, and I could go on and on in mentioning the individuals who made this all happen. The teamwork, the sense of shared purpose has been joyful, it's been energizing. Yes, it has been a bit fatiguing, but everyone understands what has to be done, and we've done it. So my biggest remark to you as we go into this All-Call together, is my sense of deep gratitude for the strong leadership that so many have shown during this crisis. It has required a big and motivated team, and that's exactly what we have. And many of you also on this call have stepped up, from the alumni board to our general alumni body, helping us to recruit students, spreading the good word about our plans, continuing that financial support, and I'm very thankful.

President Jonathan Brand:

So with all of that, you may be wondering, well, what exactly have we done? Well, we know from data, we know from the media, that prospective students and their parents, and current students and their parents, they want flexibility, they want minimal disruption, they want certainty that their children can graduate in four years, notwithstanding, this unpredictable and dangerous virus. And it turns out our One Course calendar provides all of that in spades. It's a great model when the world is prospering, it turns out that our One Course At A Time model, is brilliant in a crisis. We can move between on-campus courses, and off-campus courses the way virtually no other school can, if we have to. Students don't have to juggle, for example, four or five courses online, they only have to focus on one. Our faculty don't have to juggle, and focus on three or four courses at one time. They only have to teach one.

President Jonathan Brand:

And I'm going to leave it to Joe Dieker, here in a bit, to speak in greater detail about our bold action plan, but I can tell all of you on this call, I don't see a better model out there right now, for our students. So as a part of COVID-19, you may be wondering, what sort of Federal support we received, you all know about the CARES Act, the federal stimulus law, that was passed. Well, we received, just so you all know, about \$845,000. Half of it is, where we act as an agency of The Federal Government. It's actually for our students, to distribute to them to help underwrite, and support costs that they have associated with their disruption. So, if a student from home needed better internet connection or a better computer, we made sure they have it.

President Jonathan Brand:

If they had travel expenses, we made sure they had it. We focused actually first and foremost on our students, with the greatest financial need, our Pell eligible students. I should also mention... and the other half of that 845,000 is to the College to underwrite our losses associated with the COVID-19 virus. The last thing I'll mention is that some may know about the small business administration forgivable loans, as it turns out, it was for organizations with fewer than 500 employees, we're actually at 470 employees, we're eligible, and received a \$4.5 million forgivable loan, which will help us dramatically and significantly as we make our way into the fall. And of course in relation to that forgivable loan, and this had been our plan, we have not laid-off or furloughed anyone, and that is not in our plans through the summer at the minimum.

President Jonathan Brand:

No doubt, in response to COVID-19, we still have our pressures, and I don't think that what we've done, our response will completely erase them. But I think everything that we are doing will position us more strongly than, we might have originally thought. And I can confidently say that classes will begin on August 24th. We all have a strong preference for that to be on-campus, but if we can't bring students back safely, we'll start virtually, and bring them back the moment we can at, the end of Block One for example, or Block Two. So with that I'm going to stop, and I'm going to turn it over to our fearless VP for Student Affairs, John Harp, who is here and joining us for the phone call. John.

John Harp, VP Student Affairs:

Thank you Jonathan. I just want to echo Jonathan's comments about the Block Plan, and what a great time it is to be on this. I was on a long Zoom call today with vice presidents of student affairs from ACM and GLCA colleges. And it seems that most or all of them of course, except for Colorado College, are migrating to something that is closer and closer to the Block Plan. So, no doubt that we've got something good, that's attractive, and it will serve students well, this coming year and into the years to come. I want to give you a couple updates on how students are doing with learning and how, Cornell is supporting their learning, and also how staff and faculty are preparing for the fall, to reduce risks on campus. First of all, in terms of learning and switching to online, as Jonathan mentioned, and Joe will talk more about in just a few minutes, how well our students are doing academically, that the old slogan that you can do anything in 18 days, turns out it's true, for an online education, too, on the Block Plan.

John Harp, VP Student Affairs:

So our students are doing very well in distance learning, and although we prefer being together, and they prefer being here, we've all made the best of the past couple of months, and we hope to be back together on August 24th. Let me mention some ways that we've supported them.

John Harp, VP Student Affairs:

Initially we had some 100 plus students who when the time came, and it happened to be during spring break that it was time for us to, encourage students to be in their homes, we had more than a hundred who couldn't return home immediately, and we still have 25 of those students on campus today, and during this whole time we've provided them with food and shelter and counseling and health services, and other typical services they would expect on campus with our essential staff, who continued to be here on campus.

John Harp, VP Student Affairs:

For all of our students, we've continued to have academic advising, tutoring, and personal counseling, and wellbeing support available online, and as Jonathan mentioned, we've had numerous touchpoints with students. Whether it's emails, or text messages, or phone check-ins, we've literally created a roster of all of our students, and determined who could be in touch with each of them. We've developed co-curricular programming online that has included numerous wellbeing and yoga sessions, led by our terrific chaplain, Catherine Quehl-Engel, who's a new media sensation now. Student Senate has had meetings, many student organizations have met, Student Senate has conducted their annual budget process for student organizations for next year.

John Harp, VP Student Affairs:

Campus routines, that students have missed, and traditions, we've been able to turn into virtual programs online, including the Ped Mall Walk, and also tonight at 10 o'clock, there's a Late Night Breakfast, which is a tradition, it is about 10 years old now. And so recently students received a postcard from Cornell that had, a pancake recipe from Bon Appétit, and tonight they'll be making pancakes on a Zoom call for many of them, at 10 o'clock.

John Harp, VP Student Affairs:

For our students who have experienced financial obstacles, Cornell has distributed emergency grant funding to many of them, so far to cover expenses to continue their educations, including internet and data expenses, food and living expenses, transportation costs, of coming back and forth to campus to get their things, and even the purchases of laptop computers. Those funds will continue to be available and distributed by the College for the next, 11 to 12 months. Now, about how faculty and staff are preparing for the fall to reduce exposure risks here on campus, we're planning for the best, and the worst-case scenarios. We have about 13 different task forces, that are working on specific aspects of Cornell's response to COVID-19. We have faculty, staff and students on many of these teams, and a sample of a few of them include, safety, security, lodging, food and cleanliness task force, guiding principles for safe campus reopening task force, Residential options in fall 20 Task Force, Safe individualized campus tour options this summer...

John Harp, VP Student Affairs:

a Retention Task Force, and so on. Our centralized organizing group is the Crisis Management Team, led by President Brand. And each task force has been commissioned by this team. We are referring to an abundance of external guidance, and it's been critical that we're well organized and communicate internally and externally on a regular basis. In addition, we're following the evolving guidelines from the CDC, and Linn County Public Health Department. We also just last week received the American College Health Association's guidelines, which are very helpful. We're gaining and sharing best practices, from ACM and GLCA colleges, and locally, we're in regular communication with the City of Mount Vernon officials, as well as the Mount Vernon Community School district leaders. Let me mention, just a handful of specific ways we're preparing for the fall. We've set aside more than 70 bed spaces, including the entire Smith Residence Hall, for self-isolation and quarantine spaces.

John Harp, VP Student Affairs:

Smith Hall, many of you may have known as New Hall when you were here. We are developing an online symptom checker that faculty and staff can use as we hope to begin to phase them back in later this summer, to be on campus again, and students, and faculty, and staff will be able to use that in the fall. We're retooling our cleaning processes, everything from frequency to types of cleaning materials, and frequency of cleaning residence hall bathrooms. We're planning structural training changes, including installing plexiglass barriers where close interaction occurs at locations like the Thomas Commons information desk, Cole Library checkout desk and places like that. We're looking at one-way stairs, floor markers to help maintain distance, and even looking at replacing interior restroom door pulls with toe pulls.

John Harp, VP Student Affairs:

We also have to determine how many students we can safely seat in each classroom on campus. We'll explore staggering morning class time so that not all students go to at lunch once, and we'll develop ways to stagger dinners as well. And, of course, the dining experience, in general, may look a good bit

different in the fall. There will be no self-serve areas, more sneeze guards in place, and a limited number of seats and tables that are spread out more. And there perhaps could be times when all food is to-go only. So this is just a sample of some of the techniques and plans that we're putting in place to mitigate exposure risks in the fall. Glad to turn it back over to Jonathan, and it's great to talk with you all tonight.

President Jonathan Brand:

Thanks. Great, John, I appreciate it. I'd like to turn it over to our fearless Academic Dean, Joe Dieker. Some of you may know, Joe is on the verge of ending his 10 year tenure, as our Academic Dean, and will be moving back into the faculty full-time, and was recently voted by the Board, conferred Emeritus status for his great work. So Joe, our fearless Dean, I'm turning it over to you for an update.

Joe Dieker, VP Academic Affairs and Dean:

Thanks, Jonathan. It's good to be with all of you. It has been a really busy and interesting past nine weeks at Cornell, and not exactly how I'd planned to finish my Deanship. But we are excited about welcoming Ilene Crawford, who's from the Cornell class of 1992, as our new Dean on July 1st. So just about the time our students left on spring break, it became pretty obvious that the pandemic would require major changes on our campus and in our approach to teaching and learning, because it would not be safe to have large groups of students on our campus. So we extended spring break by a week, and working with our faculty, we moved most of our classes to online teaching and learning in just a week and a half. We did have to postpone a few science lab courses to the fall, but because students needed the hands-on lab experiences that you can't really get in a virtual space.

Joe Dieker, VP Academic Affairs and Dean:

But, one of the guiding principles we had through all of this is we're committed to making sure our students still complete their degrees on time, in a timely manner. The transition, which I was a little nervous about, was surprisingly smooth, and I think, that's thanks to efforts of our Center for Teaching and Learning staff, who sat down with every faculty member who was teaching, to help design their classes for online learning. And our IT staff, who made sure we had the infrastructure, and software in place to facilitate learning. I was, on that first day very nervous about whether we were going to have crashes and things, and we didn't have any problems. Most of the issues were related to students' connectivity at their homes, or students needed better functioning computers, or other equipment, and as John mentioned, our IT staff worked quickly and handled these situations, so all of our students were able to continue their classes. Our faculty and students did really well in the virtual learning environment.

Joe Dieker, VP Academic Affairs and Dean:

Most of them had very little experience either learning online, or teaching online. But we got nice comments from many of our students, and their parents, about how our faculty did their best to recreate that Cornell Community in an online format. In fact, just one anecdote, we had one parent contact us, who has two students, one at Cornell and one at a larger university, and they let us know that they thought the Cornell student had a much better learning experience, even though the university that the other student went to was much more experienced in online learning. So, as we look ahead to the fall, Jonathan mentioned that we're going to begin classes on August 24th as scheduled. Of course, we all hope that it's safe and we can hold our classes on campus, but we'll be ready to continue online format if necessary.

Joe Dieker, VP Academic Affairs and Dean:

The beauty of the Block Plan is that we can pivot somewhat easily from online learning to in-place learning, depending on the circumstances with the pandemic. We could literally move from Block to Block, from one method of teaching and learning to another. And then to add flexibility to our calendar, we added two additional Blocks in the summer. I called them Flex-Blocks. Think of them as Blocks Nine and Ten. When you were here, there was a Block Nine as part of our normal year. But think of them as having Blocks Nine and Ten. And in the summer, this gives us more options to get those essential hands-on classes to be scheduled at times that they can be held on campus. So, right now we have eight slots for classes on campus, we'll actually have 10.

Joe Dieker, VP Academic Affairs and Dean:

Because so much of what we do, and even in my field in music, and in the sciences and other areas, there are some hands-on kinds of classes that, it's just virtually impossible to do online. So we're hoping with this new Flex-Blocks calendar, that we can move from online learning to in-place learning as necessary, but also make sure we have enough spaces, in place so that we can have students on campus to get those essential hands-on experiences.

Joe Dieker, VP Academic Affairs and Dean:

Of course, it's very hard to predict the future of the pandemic, but we'll be as ready as possible to meet the learning needs of our students. And we're firmly committed to online teaching, mentoring and interaction with our faculty, whether our students are learning on campus or online. So with that, I think Mickey, there's probably some questions we should get to.

Mickey:

There are indeed. Thanks a lot, Joe. Again, for everyone who may have joined since we got started, like class, raise your hand by pressing star three on your phone, it is like raising your hand, it won't interrupt us or make any noises, but it lets our team know you have a question, get you in the queue, they'll get the question topics so we can get to as many topics, and into as many questions as we can tonight. We appreciate those of you who have already pressed star three, and so why don't we tip things off here. We'll go to Jodi in class of '91. Jody or Jason, who has a question about the shift to online learning, I believe, so Jody or Jason, you're on live, please go ahead with your question.

Jodi Enger Marquith '91:

Hey, good evening. I was just kind of curious, obviously we've had some major changes to everyone's repertoire, with the COVID-19. I'm just curious, now that this has been pushed to this level, how do you see Cornell adapting for the future, just the future of college experience with online learning versus in-person? How do you guys see that happening?

President Jonathan Brand:

Well, so, Joe, why don't I take a crack at this right away, with some initial thoughts? It's a great question. It's something we think about, and I think that there is no going back. I think that higher ed will be changed forever as a result of this. And by that I mean in part, I think online learning, virtual learning, is going to be a part of higher education more mainstream than it has in the past. Everyone knows that for the last couple of months, schools that did not have an online platform, did everything that they could in their power to get their courses online, and to ensure a meaningful experience for their students. But,

long term for many schools, and I put Cornell in this camp, our students will expect an even higher level of expertise with online teaching and learning, than we've delivered in the last two months. Even though, mind you, I think we have done a spectacular job and our students, their survey results are showing that they're very thankful for this instruction.

President Jonathan Brand:

So, I really think that once we come through the COVID-19 pandemic, whether that's a year, two years, three years, I think that online virtual learning is going to be incorporated into our courses in a way that it hasn't been in the past. And one other level, this is something I also think a lot about, which is we're very tied nationwide to an agrarian academic calendar. And one element of our 10-block calendar that we're piloting for the next two years that I love, is that it puts into relief the wisdom of maintaining an agrarian calendar. It might be that students will be studying on their schedule throughout the year. So, Joe, I don't know if there's anything you might wish to add?

Joe Dieker, VP Academic Affairs and Dean:

Just a couple of comments. I think I agree with Jonathan, there's going to be some aspects of online teaching for our future. And I think it's appropriate because, more and more adults as they go out into their workplace and have to increase their skills at their jobs and so forth, are going to have to know how to learn online. At the same time, I think our faculty learned so much more about technology, by teaching online, that even at our on-campus courses, they're going to be better adept at using technology in effective ways on campus. I think the other thing I'd say is, we're still firmly committed to person-to-person instruction, and that residential liberal arts experience, but I think in the long term, what we're doing now is going to enhance that, with new capabilities and technology, and new capabilities of online learning both for our students, and for perhaps new groups of students like adults and so forth, that Cornell could also reach out to.

Mickey:

Great. Thank you so much, again, star three if you have a question. Now let's go to class of '58. Carl, who looks like his question has to do with enrollment. Carl, you're on live, please go ahead with your question.

Carl Zulke '58:

Okay. Thanks for calling and congratulations to President Brand and also the ones who did this task force, and are on top of the [inaudible 00:24:47]. My questions are, how's the enrollment doing, and is it going up or down next year, and how many are there? The other part of it is, how's the endowment? Is this going down with the grants and things that we've got from the Federal Government? Those are my questions.

President Jonathan Brand:

Well, great questions, Carl. Thank you very much. Let me take them in order, if I might. Here's what I know about enrollment. First of all, to put a little context around this, most schools, at least nationwide, first of all, don't believe that they can really reliably count on enrollment until their students arrive in August, and actually pay their tuition. So that's one thing, just as a little bit of some context for our numbers. Two, we're members of an association called the Associated Colleges of the Midwest, the

ACM, and as of May 3rd, we shared a lot of data and information across the Association. The ACM schools are in total as of May 3rd, down in their enrollment from last year by about 10.4%.

President Jonathan Brand:

We at the moment, as of last week, and actually I think that this number has improved, we were down about 8.6% from last year. So actually we're doing a little bit better than the ACM. By the same token, when we look at our funnel, we actually feel pretty optimistic about our ability to bring in our class. Part of it again is that, this is our moment for anyone who might have been skeptical about the value of the Block system, we know that right now we have the model, the best model that is out there to meet what our students and their parents want.

President Jonathan Brand:

So, this is our moment to make a national and international, really national probably more anything right now, push to make the claim that we've been doing this for 42 years, that we are experts at it, and this is precisely what students want. So we continue to receive applications, we continue to receive deposits, and we are moving in absolutely the right direction towards meeting our enrollment goals, and I'll say a part of enrollment is also retention. And we're paying close attention to our students, based on their preregistration for the fall. Nothing looks out of line from past years, which would be a good indicator of us hitting our historic averages, in terms of returning students. But I'm going to be very optimistic, again in light of the fact that we have **the** model, and if ever anyone wondered whether being in Mount Vernon, Iowa was a positive or a negative, this is one of the safest places to be, in Mount Vernon, Iowa, And, we think that's another huge selling point for Cornell College right now. We're sitting in an encouraging place at the moment.

President Jonathan Brand:

In terms of the endowment, it probably won't surprise you, the market at its low from its high was down about 30%. Our endowment last year peaked somewhere North of \$76 million. And like the market, it was down at its low, probably about 30%, it's recovered largely what the market has recovered. One thing that I'm really pleased about, for every corporation, organization, it's not about assets and liabilities anymore, it's really about cashflow. And so we have a nice amount of cash that we are able to rely on, over the next six months that permits us, we hope, not to even have to draw on the endowment, while it hopefully recovers, because this obviously wouldn't be the optimal moment to draw on it. We're hoping obviously that the market rebounds, and continues to go up, and with it of course our endowment will also. Thanks, Carl.

Mickey:

All right, Jonathan, thank you so much for those two very good questions, Carl, we really appreciate that. Okay next let's go to Rachel, class of 2013, who looks like her question is about some lab-based coursework. So Rachel, you're on live, please go ahead with your question.

Rachel Fendrich '13:

Hey, I was wondering what you were doing about classes like, genetics or biology, or the arts that, really they're so lab-based, organic chemistry, that they really cannot be done online without having that lab experience.

Joe Dieker, VP Academic Affairs and Dean:

This is Joe Dieker, the Dean here, and an excellent question, and a tough one for us to deal with. This spring, we actually had to put off some of our lab courses to next fall, some of our lab science courses. In an area like music, we're continuing to give music lessons over video conference, Zoom. We did have to end our ensembles, which require a band, large groups of students in a room singing, just don't work in the pandemic. So, right now we're challenging our faculty to think in interesting and creative ways how we're going to handle this in the future. Of course, we hope that many of our Blocks will be on-campus next year, and with our new Flex plan that I mentioned a few minutes ago, we actually have 10 slots now that we can schedule some of those hands-on classes, if some of the other Blocks have to be online.

Joe Dieker, VP Academic Affairs and Dean:

Since I'm going back to the Music Department, I'm exploring different ways that we can teach performance through software means that are pretty interesting. I teach a conducting class, how to keep students, say in band, continue to practice their parts until we were able to get together with the group. So that's the challenge, how to engage our students. It'll never be as perfect or as good as it would be on campus, but we're going to do our best to engage our students virtually, and then, hopefully, we can have our students back on campus for those really inter-active classes that, as you mentioned, we really need to have. So, a great question and it's not really an easy answer, but we're doing our best to provide good solutions to that.

Mickey:

Okay, great. Thank you. So now let's go to Fred, class of 1970. Fred it looks like his question is about tracking, so, Fred, you're on live, please go ahead with your question.

Fred Burke '70:

Well, I'm a townie so I have a lot of connections with Cornell, and I agree with you about how online learning will happen somewhat in the future, but I also know that what sets us apart, not only is the Block Plan, but also for all private colleges, is the on-campus experience, and it's so crucial that the students get back on campus this fall. And with that in mind, do we have plans, I know they change all the time with different health news, about what the students would have to show us to allow them to live in the dorms? Do we have to do tracking of where they have been before they come to Cornell? What's our take on that at least at this stage?

John Harp, VP Student Affairs:

Fred, this is John. That's a that's a great question, and glad to have another townie on this call tonight. And I look forward to seeing you in town again soon. You're right that this guidance is changing by the week, and sometimes we're able to ascertain guidance that even conflicts each other, so we are continuing to monitor. We're focusing on what we're learning from the CDC and The American College Health Association, and we will be putting into place our detailed plans as we get closer to the end of the summer. So, really, I think, we'll hit our stride in July, regarding what specific techniques we will use, to make sure A: students are maintaining their own health, maintaining awareness of their own health, including taking their temperatures on a daily basis, and completing the online symptom checker, that I described earlier. And then, next, how quickly we can respond when a person does have symptoms, and the fact that we have areas to isolate them.

John Harp, VP Student Affairs:

We'll hopefully have systems where we can have them continue with their course in person, and take an online course the next Block if it straddles two Blocks. And that we then, this summer before we get into the fall, are developing that practice of tracking, and tracing. And again, we don't have that worked out yet, but we will as we continue to receive guidance from Federal and state health officials. Thanks for your question, Fred.

Mickey:

All right, great. Thank you so much. Now we're going to go to a class of '69, Sydney, who has a question about residence halls and fees, I think. Sydney, class of '69 you're on live, please go ahead with your question.

Sydney Smith Hicks '69:

Hey, all. I just want to ask if any parents had asked for refunds on the residents fees, or food fees, since they were now eating at home, and was the government loan going to help offset some of that?

President Jonathan Brand:

Sydney, great to hear your voice, great question. Thank you. I'll actually take those in reverse order. We didn't believe that the Federal monies could be used for refunds. So, we took that Federal guidance, and did not apply any of the emergency grant aid for students, for refunds that they were rightfully due. We did end up refunding and crediting, all of our students who were not on campus. And it was basically for most students, some students were here through Block Seven, but for the majority of students who left, it was Block Seven and Eight. What we did do, and we had studied what schools across the country were doing, there were a whole range of different methodologies that schools were using... so what we ultimately decided was the fairest way to refund, or credit students, was to look at their entire financial aid package, and to take the position that their financial aid is supporting tuition, fees room and board.

President Jonathan Brand:

So, they received a refund or a credit that was, comparable to the amount that they paid for tuition fees, room and board. So if for example, they had a 50% discount rate, which is to say a Cornell scholarship, that covered 50% of the cost of tuition fees room and board, then we credited or refunded them, 50% of their room and board for Blocks Seven and Eight. And that seemed to be equitable, the right, the fairest, the best way to approach it, and that's what we did. And we've already distributed, or credited that money to every single student a couple of weeks ago.

President Jonathan Brand:

And interestingly, we also, this won't surprise you, this is something other schools were doing, we offered students and families, if they wished to take that refund or credit the refund in particular, and donate it to help us underwrite student needs across the College, they could do so. And several families chose to make a gift, in the amount of that refund back to the College. Thanks again for that question, Sydney, and great to hear your voice.

Mickey:

Great. Thank you. Now let's move to Julia, who has a question about budget and yoga. My kind of question actually, so Julia, you're on live, please go ahead with your question.

Julia Gutz Moller '88:

Hey, there. I am Julia Gutz Moller and I am from the class of 1988. I have two questions. Just here in Minnesota and I'm sure nationally we're seeing a lot of articles and information about colleges that are actually not going to make it through this. Financially, they're at risk, they were running too tightly on their budgets, and really may not even make it into the next academic year. Everything that we're hearing from you and that you're sharing about the endowment and the fact that you were able to secure the loans, etc.... indicate that you are in a really good position, just when you look at the finances, but how is it all looking and are you pretty confident? I know there are other schools in Iowa that are much more challenged. Then my second question, and I'll lay that out is, how do we as alumni take advantage of Kathy Quehl-Engel, fabulous yoga classes, and where do we access them?

President Jonathan Brand:

Well, Julia, these are two great questions and I love the fact that they come together, from one person. Thank you. So let me start with the fun one, which is I think that all of our fearless Chaplain's yoga sessions are online, can be accessed through our Facebook webpage, and yes, they are incredible. If you could pick the perfect chaplain out of Central Casting, it would be our very own alumna, Catherine Quehl-Engel. So please enjoy them, enjoy them regularly. In terms of the finances for the College, your point and your question is a really good one, and I think you are right, that we are going to see a rash of schools that will not make it this year, and in the next three, four months, I would say in fact, The Chronicle of Higher Education, I know from one reporter who's a good friend of mine, that they are increasingly getting questions from college presidents asking the Chronicle to give more guidance on the steps that a school should go through in closing.

President Jonathan Brand:

And I think it puts a lot of pressure on schools, right now, it's all about enrollment and retention in the fall, and that's going to be the make or break for schools. And Cornell is in a relatively strong position and I'll sort of delineate why I believe that. At the same time, enrollment in the fall for us, and by enrollment I mean new students and retention, will be for us the critical defining moment, for what our budget looks like over the next three, four, five years and into the future. Now, why do I think, and I appreciate your sense from my comments, and from John's and Joe Dieker's that we're in a relatively strong position?

President Jonathan Brand:

I think that is right. Whereas I think like every school, unless you have a billion plus dollar endowment, you're still vulnerable. But we are in a relatively strong position. And let me tell you why I say that. First of all, it is true that our endowment at its high point was only, and I put quotes around only, was only \$76 million. But by the same token, our endowment only supports 15% of our operating budget. Princeton, as an example, has an enormous endowment, but it also supports 60% of their budget. So when there's a huge market swing down, it really impacts them. That's one thing. Two, there are schools that have a long-term debt, or debt supported by the operations of the college, that might be larger than their endowment, might be double their endowment. We have about \$18 million total in debt that's supported by the operations of the College, which is very low, and also puts us in a relatively strong position.

President Jonathan Brand:

In addition, I think in these days, your position in the marketplace, is really crucial. Your reputational strength matters. And in the last five years, there's not a single school, in the top 100 national liberal arts colleges, that has moved up in the U.S. news rankings more than we have. And, of course, we're recognized for our One Course At A Time calendar, so it gives us something that we're virtually alone in that space. I'll also add just a couple of the points about why I think we are in a financially relatively good position. You had heard from me and also from our Dean, that in a matter of a week and a half, our Dean and the faculty developed and approved... actually under a week, our faculty developed and approved, an action plan around our academic calendar.

President Jonathan Brand:

Well, higher education is not known for moving at that pace. The general thing in higher education is if you give us a decade, we can do great things. Well, the fact that we have a culture where we can turn on a dime, where I like to say we're not like an aircraft carrier, we're like a powerful speedboat, and we can turn quickly and make changes, I think that's unheard of in higher education, and I think it really augers well for our future. And then, of course, you're talking to alumni, here's another piece of this, which is we have a deeply devoted board, and an alumni base that continues to support the school financially, helping us recruit students, helping us retain students, sharing your expertise with our students, that conjoined with our dedicated faculty and staff, I think puts us in a great place. And we've been doing this since 1853. We've made it through world wars, we've made it through a civil war, we'll make it through this pandemic. I have no doubt.

Mickey:

All right. Thank you. There's actually several questions here, Jonathan that relate to what you said at the end of your question. We're going to go to Samantha class of 2013, who has a question that will let you expand a little bit, on this idea of support. So Samantha, class of 13, you're on live, please go ahead with your question.

Samantha Mathews '13:

Hi. In 2009, I caught the last... H1N1 when we had it, and so I know that in a crisis, Cornell, I had the best experience that you can. And so, I'm really grateful for that I know that Cornell is, from firsthand experience, really great, when you catch the pandemic, or are in a crisis, and I'd love to help, but due to the this pandemic, I lost my job, and I don't have any money, I can't give you. So what are nonfinancial ways, that someone like me can help out the University at this time?

President Jonathan Brand:

Thank you for the question. First of all, I'm sorry to hear the news, and obviously, first, I'll just touch on the sort notion about philanthropy, which is a very personal decision, and obviously, I would not want you to be supporting your school at a time, when you're working so hard to make sure that you can make ends meet. And let me also say you should know we have a terrific, career engagement center, the Berry Career Institute, and I would not at all discourage you, in fact, I would encourage you to reach out. We are here for our alumni in the same way that we are here for our currently matriculating students, so please avail yourself of those services. When you're a Cornellian, you are a Cornellian for life. And one other point I'll just make about this, which is supporting your school is not just financial.

President Jonathan Brand:

If you have talents that you would like to share with current students, you should not hesitate to reach out to our Alumni Relations and Advancement Office, and let us help you make those connections. And I always believe in difficult times, I always tell myself, tomorrow is going to be better. So let's just keep believing that.

Mickey:

Great. Thank you. Now, how about we go to Richard class of 1950, who has a question about athletics. So Richard, you're on live. Please go ahead with your question.

Richard Wardell '50:

Yes. Dick Wardell. I'm calling from, Scottsdale, Arizona class of 1950. I'm just curious what the athletic program is going to look like in the fall, particularly for football and basketball. Are they going to play number one and number two, are they going to play in front of an empty stadium, or a gym or what are the plans? Thank you.

President Jonathan Brand:

Dick, thank you. Great to hear your voice. Just great. Yes, big question, great question, important question, and one that we're thinking about. So, at the moment, what we're really doing is paying attention to two bodies that will give us a lot of the guidance that we need. First of all, the NCAA, originally and by originally, I mean two weeks ago, pretty much told every division one, two, and three school that they weren't going to render any opinions about the fall seasons, but that they were only going to render an opinion about whether to actually host NCAA championships. That is to say they weren't going to tell schools that they could or couldn't play, or compete in the fall. Then in the last couple of days, the guidance that we've gotten from the NCAA is, they're assessing whether competitive intercollegiate sports can occur, if students are online, versus in seat on campuses.

President Jonathan Brand:

So, one, we're going to have to hear what the NCAA ultimately determines, about that issue of whether our students can compete, if they're taking their courses in a virtual format. I think that it won't surprise you at the NCAA has a strong interest in ensuring that fall sports continue. Two, we're obviously members of the Midwest Conference and are listening very carefully to the other schools in the Conference. And I believe that in some point this summer, probably in July, we as a Conference will make a decision about fall sports.

President Jonathan Brand:

Again, I had mentioned earlier, because schools are so enrollment and retention driven for the fall, I think there's going to be a real strong push for fall sports, and to do it in a manner, of course, that pays really close attention to all the practices and protocols, that are important to ensuring that the virus doesn't continue to spread, from cleaning to masks, to the extent possible, to social distancing. We may end up having to clean locker rooms every hour, every two hours. And you ask a great question, Dick, about whether it's possible that we'll have our, competitive sports with no fans in the bleachers? That is possible. Fortunately, I guess with the exception of volleyball, most of the fall sports are outside, and that helps, in being outside rather than in a confined space.

President Jonathan Brand:

But I can tell you we have a strong interest, and we are operating under the assumption that fall sports will continue, will occur. But we also know from epidemiologists and infectious disease specialists, that it would be unwise to make any decision about late August or mid-August, so early in May. Really by mid July, we'll have a good sense of how we think the virus is likely to behave in the fall. But again, over 30% of our students are student athletes, and it's an important part of their experience, it's an important part of the collegiate experience, and the spirit of the school. So we're very much hoping that we're able to have our fall sports exactly as we planned, though there might be some variation in the length of the season as another option.

Mickey:

Okay. Thank you so much. Moving on, we'll go to class of '58, John, who has a question about student field experiences when they're away from campus, I believe. So, John, class of '58 year you're on live, please go ahead with your question.

John Dean '58:

Thank you very much. John Dean, South Carolina, class of '58. We've been a strong supporter of the Fellows Program, and I've had wonderful experiences from the Fellows, that have spent time at our Marine Laboratory. And one of the things that the data shows is that, such an experience is one of the most transformative experiences that the students have. And this requires for many to be offsite, and I wondered what the consideration is, for students accomplishing this offsite experience in the coming semester. Not a semester...

Voice in the background on John's phone:

Coming blocks.

John Dean '58:

... In the coming blocks.

Joe Dieker, VP Academic Affairs and Dean:

Okay. John, nice to hear from you. And of course you are a great supporter of our Fellows Program, and have done so many good things for our students, who work at your lab there. That's a tough one during a pandemic because it's tough to travel, and even this summer, many of our students had internships that were canceled by various organizations or companies. Some were able to complete internships that could still be done virtually, but it did put a dent in students', this summer, ability to travel and ability to get those hands-on experiences like internships.

Joe Dieker, VP Academic Affairs and Dean:

As we go into the fall, we have some classes that were intended to be off-campus, places like The Bahamas, as you know, we send science classes to The Bahamas, and actually other classes, sociology, anthropology in The Bahamas and so forth. For those, if it's safe to travel, we will hold those classes, but it's probably not likely in the fall, and we've put students in alternative classes, and hopefully we could have classes off-campus then in the spring, but we'll have to see. Largely, it depends on if it's safe to travel, and if we think it's safe to put students in places, across the country and across the world. And that's more of a wait-and-see.

Joe Dieker, VP Academic Affairs and Dean:

As you mentioned, getting hands-on experiences in the craft that you're studying, is really important. In fact, our new curriculum has it as a requirement, that students get this kind of experience. But the pandemic, it makes it a little tougher for that to happen. Another example is we normally have about, between 30 and 40 students on campus in the summer doing research, both in the sciences and other fields. This year, we've gone virtual and we're doing virtual projects, dealing with say, data analysis and so forth of science projects that we're doing online, and we have about 30 students and about 19 faculty members involved. We're trying our best to make meaningful experiences for our students, but we're going to be very ready to get our students out in the field when it's safe to do so.

Mickey:

All right. Thank you. Now we have Dan from class of '14, who has a question about some cost differences, between blocks and other flex plans, I believe so. Dan, class of '14, you've got your question. Why don't you go ahead, you're live.

Daniel Carney '14:

Awesome. Good evening everyone. I would, in that transition time when we had nine Blocks and one to eight, and one of the big factors was due to costs, as people joke that the ninth Block was a free Block. So I just wanted to see how, if we moved to a 10 Block system, which I think is really great. Will tuition be raising, or how we are able to afford that as we move forward?

President Jonathan Brand:

Well, thank you. It's a great question, great to hear your voice. Last October the board had reviewed, and approved, a recommendation for tuition for next year. And at the moment, the way we are thinking about... just so you know, at that time of course we didn't have COVID-19 in our sites, nor did we have 10 Blocks in our sites. The way we're thinking about it right now, is of course we've got the eight blocks, and I believe again, this could change over the next month, that we're at least preliminarily contemplating that students will have their eight Blocks. And if they wish to take nine or ten, if they go through the eight, and they wish to take a ninth or tenth Block, or both of them, that there would be some reduced summer fee for each of those blocks that we would charge them.

President Jonathan Brand:

Part of the model though, I will say for the ten Blocks, is that if a student over the course... again I'd said earlier at the beginning, that students and their families want flexibility. One of the reasons why we wanted to add the ninth and the tenth Blocks, was that if a student has some legitimate COVID related reason why, they can't take a block during the year, then at no additional cost, we want them to be able to take that ninth or that tenth Block in the summer. Because again, we want students to come to Cornell knowing that no matter what happens, they will graduate in no more than four years, the traditional four-year period. Now it is possible under this model, that somebody will say, "Well, I'm going to graduate in three years." And the 10 Block model permits them to do that, to accelerate progress towards degree completion, that would be under the four years, even as quickly as three years.

President Jonathan Brand:

The other part of this that I'll just build into this question, which is we think, again here's where the Block system, the one course calendar is so strong, we may have students who may wish to come and

take one or two Blocks, or three Blocks. We may have students who, at the moment are not employed and would like to come back and complete their degrees, or get another major. And so the Block system will allow them to choose, individual blocks. And so right now what we're working on, because the board has not been asked to approve anything along these lines, we are looking at appropriate pricing on a per Block basis, for students who might wish to come to Cornell for one, or two, or three Blocks, not the traditional eight to ten Blocks. Well, thanks for that great question. It's an important one.

Mickey:

Okay. Now sort of related to that, we're going to go to Judith, class of '72, who has a question about the mix of fees and charges, within the entire comprehensive fee, I believe. So Judith, class of 72 you're on live, go ahead with your question please.

Judith Gintzler Kocher '72:

Thank you. It's been a really interesting discussion, and a lot of the questions that people have raised, have been things that I've been thinking about, as well. I just want to mention that my husband and I did set up an endowment, and so we're curious about how the endowment's been doing. Hopefully, it will bounce back, as all of our portfolios have taken a hit. But we have made an investment in Cornell. My daughter is also a class of 2014. We're real supportive, and we really want to see Cornell survive and thrive, I guess in this, trying situation. And what I've been hearing on the news and from other people, is that there's been a lot of requests or discussion, particularly for the big Ivy League schools, I suppose, that people don't want to pay the full tuition rates, if they're going to be doing virtual learning and online courses. I would say online courses will work great to a point, but people aren't paying kinds of tuition fees that most colleges are charging, to do online classes.

Judith Gintzler Kocher '72:

So is this something that you've been thinking about, or are people asking about it, or are you going to, stick with the fee structure as it is? And I guess, you said we don't know how it will impact enrollment until people actually show up on campus and pay their tuition. But is it something that you've been thinking about?

President Jonathan Brand:

Oh Judith, it's a great question. And first of all, I would be remiss if I didn't say thank you for your impressive support of your school, it makes all the difference in the world. Thank you. It is again, another great question and one that we are actively researching and thinking about. And so, let me just throw out the sort of two, it's sort of a binary, there are two really good possibilities here. There is no doubt again in the media, and I think it's reflective of where parents are, in terms of finding their financial sensitivity, which is there is some concern, you've seen this year, students, not at Cornell, have complained about paying the full freight or paying whatever the stated tuition is, when they're not getting the on-campus experience. And you've seen that in the Ivy League, you've seen this in a number of places.

President Jonathan Brand:

Thankfully I think in part because of how well our faculty and staff have moved the experiences online, we haven't had that level of complaining. But it does raise exactly your question about, what does this mean for the fall. So one option of course, as you know, would be to say to students, "If we're online,

this is what you will pay by way of tuition. And if you're on-campus, the tuition that the board approved for example, is what your tuition will be, with financial aid."

President Jonathan Brand:

That's one option. I will say there's another option which I think is a little bit more provocative and exciting, which is, I think, the greater challenge for us, and one that we're working on, is, I know that we won't be able to replicate the on-campus experience online, it's not possible, but we are actively trying, first of all, to figure out how we can, not replicate, but how about plicate, the on-campus experience in virtual formats to create as much as possible a sense, of being on campus. And two, I think the challenge to us is to raise the bar on the online learning experience, so that students say, "You know, that was worth it."

President Jonathan Brand:

And that actually is the path that I would love to see us pursue more than anything. There are many schools out there that have been offering online courses for years. And so now our challenge over the summer is, even if we're not online in the fall, we know that we have to be prepared for that as a possible scenario, and I would say even a likely scenario. We've done a great job, but we're going to have to raise our game further, and make this an experience.

President Jonathan Brand:

And it's worth noting that our online experiences that students have had this spring, they have been largely synchronous experiences, which is to say over 75% of our courses, it may even be a little larger than that, but the students are all in class together. And again, our classes are on average only 16 students. So in many ways our students are still having an immersive personalized experience. So one option again is to reduce tuition. Another option that I think is more exciting, and frankly, of course, financially even more advantageous, is really to invest in whatever it takes, to make the online experience really spectacular for our students. So that then back and forth between non-campus and virtual is even more seamless. But the board will be entertaining at the end of June, a set of recommendations around tuition for the fall, because there are different variations as I said, like a per Block tuition that they haven't had to think about in the past, and we haven't either. This will be a part of the conversation also. Thank you.

Mickey:

And thank you, and my apologies Jonathan, John and Joe. I know we wanted to try and keep in respect everybody's time under an hour, and we've gone beyond. I know there are questions still in the queue, some really good questions. Please know that if you stay on the line as we finish, you can follow the prompts, and you'll be able to leave a voicemail, which we'll get and listen to, and do our very best to respond as appropriate. If you have a comment to leave, that would be great, too, but we'll do our best to get back to as many of those as we can. It's been fabulous, it's been informative, and it really speaks to the quality of the relationship all of you have with Cornell, that you would spend time with us tonight. With that though, to close, I think President Brand, the floor should be yours. The last word is yours.

President Jonathan Brand:

Thank you Mickey and thank you to everyone, for being on the call this evening, and for your questions and for those that we didn't get to, we will be able to get answers to your questions back to you,

promptly. Let me say one thing, and it ties into this last question about, trying to create a sense of the campus experience virtually. On this Sunday, May 17th, 1:00 PM, Central Daylight Time, if you go to Cornell's Facebook site page, we are hosting a virtual commencement for our 212 graduating seniors. 1:00 PM Central Daylight Time. I encourage you to go to Facebook, and to participate because not just one, is it a moment to celebrate our graduating seniors, but it is our first effort at... we want this to be an interactive experience. This is our first effort at creating... trying to the extent possible, to create the campus experience, in a virtual format.

President Jonathan Brand:

It won't be just watching students graduate, or me just droning on and on. There'll be interactive components to it, and one of the ways that you as alumni can support the College, is by coming to our virtual commencement on Sunday at 1:00 PM, and getting engaged with it. It's going to be a lot of fun, and of course we do celebrations very well. So with that, I want to thank everyone.

Mickey:

[inaudible 01:04:34]

President Jonathan Brand:

Yes. And I will add one other piece of this, so that I don't mislead in any way or you wonder. We will be holding an in-person commencement for our graduating seniors in the future, at some point during the next academic year when it's safe to have everyone back on campus. But we just couldn't imagine waiting until the fall to celebrate our seniors. So, virtual commencement this Sunday, 1:00 PM, and then an in-person one in the fall, and of course you're invited to both. Thank you again, everyone, really great to be together, and we look forward to being together again in the near future, in-person, on the beautiful hilltop, in glorious Mount Vernon, Iowa.