

Dear Faculty Senators,

I have received Resolution 211: Request an Annual University Report on Academic Freedom (passed March 23, 2026).

Academic freedom is a key precondition to academic excellence, and I both appreciate and respect the Faculty Senate's interest in ensuring that academic freedom is fully protected at Cornell, and that incidents in which academic freedom appear at risk are made known to the university community.

In practice, external requests and internal disciplinary proceedings where issues of academic freedom come into play nearly all stem from bias reporting processes. The Cornell Office of Civil Rights (COCR) is responsible for investigating all incidents in which Cornell faculty, students, or staff members are accused of violating the rights of other members of our community under Policy 6.4. COCR publishes an annual report of the bias incidents reported to them, a limited number of which may include concern around threats to academic freedom. I believe that the most effective way to respond to the Senate's concern would be to separately delineate those COCR cases in which an abridgment of academic freedom is claimed in a way that maintains appropriate confidentiality.

Additionally, consistent with the university's stated commitment to academic freedom, and as stated in my response to Resolution 212, the provost will convene a committee that will consider and issue a report regarding certain policies and related procedures utilized by both COCR and the Committee on Academic Freedom and Professional Status of the Faculty.

However, an annual report that includes external requests for data, as requested in Resolution 211, is not feasible. The University receives numerous external requests for data related to claims asserted by individuals or government agencies outside of the university community. Many of these requests are subject to appropriate claims of confidentiality. In addition, outlining all of these requests would be both excessively onerous and immaterial to the issue of concern, as most such requests are not relevant to academic freedom. The University responds to such requests as legally required, preserving information for which there is no legal basis for disclosure. The university does not track, nor is it feasible to track, data in the manner described in the resolution.

These facts notwithstanding, I would like to assure the Senate that I will inform the university community of external requests for data that constitute a clear abridgment of Cornell's academic freedom, and that can reasonably be made public without violating the law or required conditions of confidentiality.

Sincerely,
Michael Kotlikoff

Michael Kotlikoff, V.M.D., Ph.D., Sc.D. (h.c.)
President and Professor of Molecular Physiology
Cornell University