

Karen E. Stewart

Cornell degree: AB '85 (A&S)

Endorsed by the Committee on Alumni Trustee Nominations



The single most important issue the Board of Trustees must navigate is Cornell's financial health. Trustees oversee endowments, approve budgets, and lead fundraising initiatives. A financially strong institution is better able to fulfill its mission, such as providing access and affordability to students, attracting and retaining top academic talent, supporting professional and administrative staff.

Describe the reasons you are interested in serving on the board. What strengths and attributes would you bring to this role?

As a first-generation student, my Cornell education enriched my life and enabled a fulfilling career. In my alumni volunteer roles, I actively support Cornell's founding principle of "... any person ... any study," and would continue to champion this value as a trustee. My professional and volunteer experiences have honed my listening skills, allowing me to engage with stakeholders to achieve shared goals. As a trustee, I would work collaboratively with the board to establish policies, set the strategic vision for the university, to create roadmaps for growth and development. A Cornell education should be affordable, and students should feel they belong.

In your opinion, what does Carl Becker's concept of "freedom and responsibility" mean for today's Cornell community?

The concept of "freedom and responsibility" remains relevant to the Cornell community as a guide for navigating unsettled times. This idea was developed during the turbulent years between World War I and World War II. Carl Becker believed that freedom was a balance of personal liberty and a duty to the wider public. Becker highlighted the role of universities in upholding democratic values by promoting humane and rational principles. He argued that universities should foster an environment of diverse perspectives and free expression. Through research and education, Cornell empowers students to think critically, evaluate information, and assess its reliability.

President Michael I. Kotlikoff recently said that this is an important time to "educate citizens to think for themselves, and live together; and to value truth, openness and equality as cornerstones of democracy." In your opinion, what does this mean at Cornell?

Cornell's time-honored tradition of addressing societal divisions through education and respectful debate has proven effective during times of relative peace or turmoil. By fostering fact-based, reasoned discussions free from personal attacks, this approach has consistently benefited students, faculty, and other stakeholders. It highlights respect for knowledge and truth, fosters examination of evidence while challenging personal assumptions and biases, and supports constructive handling of challenges and differences. A commitment to thoughtful engagement would continue to uphold the Cornell's values and strengthen our community.

Professional experience:

- Community Service Society of New York, personal finance coach, 2022–present
- Nuveen, head of mutual fund disclosure, 2012–2020
- TIAA, senior director, 1989–2012 (Various roles in marketing, investor communications and compliance)

Alumni service:

- Reunion Campaign Committee, member, 2024–present
- Cornell University Council, life member, 2024–present; member, 2022–2024, 2016–2020, Administrative Board, ex officio, 2019–2021; Ambassador Committee, chair, 2019–2020; Ambassador Committee, vice chair, 2018–2019; Administrative Board, member at large, 2017–2019
- President's Council of Cornell Women, emerita member, 2021–present; immediate past chair, 2021–2023; Nominating Committee, chair, 2021–2023; chair, 2019–2021; Steering Committee, member at large, 2017–2019; Membership Committee, chair, 2015–2017; member, 2012–2021
- Cornell Black Alumni Association, member, 1998–present
- Frank H.T. Rhodes Exemplary Alumni Service Award recipient, 2023
- Cornell Mosaic, member at large, 2018–2023; Executive Committee, member, 2014–2018
- Cornell Alumni Admissions Ambassador Network, committee chair, 2008–2013; member, 2009–2023

Community/public service/philanthropic priorities:

- Coach underserved communities about basic financial education through group classes and 1-on-1 sessions

Other education:

- JD, New York Law School, 2002

Student involvements/activities:

- Cornell Catholic Community
- West Indian Students Association

Additional information:

Karen has had a long career in the financial services sector working at Nuveen and TIAA. She held leadership and professional roles in corporate communications, marketing, procurement, asset management operations and compliance. She has an AB from the College of Arts and Sciences and a JD from New York Law School. She is an active Cornell volunteer—President's Council of Cornell Women, Cornell Black Alumni Association, Cornell University Council, Cornell Mosaic and Class of '85 development committee. Karen was born in Jamaica, migrated to South Florida with her family when she was eight years old, and she currently lives in Brooklyn, NY.