



Cynthia Cuffie

“The single most important issue being faced by the Cornell University Board of Trustees is the increased need for mental health support and associated services of the Cornell community as the community becomes more globally connected, diverse, and complex in a rapidly changing greater society.”

Cornell Degree: BS HumEc 1974

Other education: MD 1978, University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey; Endocrinology Clinical Fellowship 1982–1984, Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, New York; Career Planning and Development Certificate, 2014, New York University, New York; Executive Coach Certificate, 2015, International Coaching Federation, Kentucky

How does Cornell’s unique status as both an elite Ivy and a land grant institution position it to be an advocate for, and a symbol of, the importance of higher education? How can the trustees and alumni support this mission?

As the world becomes more connected, diverse and complex, preparing students and scholars to meet future challenges will be critical to the progress of society. As a world-class institution founded on the principles of “any study ... any person,” Cornell has the opportunity to lead in translating cutting-edge research into practical applications that can be used to address societal issues. Trustees can support this mission by holding University leaders, faculty and administration accountable for strategic deployment of resources in the service of this type of work and encouraging collaboration across the University between those engaged in research and those dedicated to applying it. Alumni can serve as role models for how this commitment continues after leaving the University by sharing their own contributions with fellow Cornellians.

Each year Cornell welcomes thousands of graduates into a new phase of their lives as alumni. What challenges do you believe make it difficult for recent graduates to stay connected to Cornell? What can Cornell do to better support alumni and their lifelong relationship with the university?

There are a number of traditions that bind Cornellians together on campus—from ice hockey to Slope Day to gospel choir and everything in between. Once we leave campus, paths diverge, and we begin to direct our energy into the next chapter of life. Challenges that make it difficult for recent graduates to stay connected to Cornell include: 1. reluctance to join new communities during a time of major life changes; 2. difficulty identifying personally meaningful alumni activities; and 3. unfavorable geography. Cornell can support alumni and their lifelong relationship with the university by 1. creating a pre-graduation tradition focused on the next chapter where soon-to-be alumni begin identifying meaningful alumni connections; 2. leveraging technology to connect them to alumni communities; and 3. soliciting information about potential interests for staying engaged. Once students graduate, Cornell can use this information to create a tailored welcome into the Big Red alumni community.

Describe the reasons you hope to serve on the board. What strengths would you bring to this position? How are you uniquely suited to contribute to Cornell’s success?

I enjoy connecting with Cornellians and working with leaders to enhance the university community. Having the privilege to be a steward of the Cornell experience for the next generation would be an honor. I bring to the board lessons learned as a trustee of a prestigious K-12 independent school and my drive for results, collaboration and inclusion. I am uniquely suited to contribute to Cornell’s success because 1. I have broad Cornell experience as an undergraduate student in two colleges and as a professional clinical instructor of medicine at Weill Cornell during my endocrinology fellowship at MSKCC; 2. I am a first-generation college graduate who has invested time and resources to help similar Cornell students navigate the daunting combination of academic, financial and social situations; and 3. as a physician, corporate executive and executive coach, I can diagnose issues and drive toward solutions in a compassionate and data-driven way.

Professional experience:

- President, Aspire Educational Associates Corporation, 2004–present
- Executive Coach, Aspire Educational Associates Corporation, 2012–present
- Vice President, Global Clinical Development, Cardiovascular Diseases, Merck and Company, 2009–2011
- Vice President, Clinical Research, Cardiovascular and Metabolic Disease, 2005–2009; Endocrinology and Urology, 2002–2005; Various roles of increasing responsibility, 1984–2005, Schering–Plough Corporation

Alumni service:

- 45th and 40th Reunion campaign 2018–2019, 2013–2014; Tower Club Committee
- Class of 1974, vice president of outreach 2014–2019
- Cornell Alumni Admissions Ambassador Network 2004–2016
- Cornell Black Alumni Association (CBAA) lifetime member; vice president of student relations 2012–2015
- College of Human Ecology Alumni Association 2009–2014; secretary 2012–2013; Board Leadership Development Committee 2012–2014; chair, Student Research Grants Committee 2010–2012
- College of Human Ecology Dean’s Advisory Council 2008–2011; Chair Diversity Initiatives 2009–2011
- Cornell University Council 2012–2016, 2018–present; Administrative Board Mentoring Committee, Mentoring Committee co-chair 2014–2016
- Cornell Mosaic Executive Committee 2012–2016, 2018–present; Development and Alumni Engagement Committee 2012–2016
- Minority Student Mentoring Program, mentor 2004–2007
- President’s Council of Cornell Women (PCCW) 2012–2018; grants vice chair 2014–2016; Grants Chair 2016–2018; sustaining member 2018–present

Community/public service:

- Morris County (NJ) Master Gardener 2015–present; Helpline Team
- The Links Incorporated, Essex County (NJ) Chapter 1986–present; founding member
- American Heart Association, Central and Southern New Jersey Board 2008–2016
- Coalition of 100 Black Women Board 1983–1984; Role Model Committee chair 1983
- The Juilliard School Pre-college Parents’ Association 1997–2004
- Leadership New Jersey Program fellow 2003
- The Pingry School Trustee 2000–2009; Finance Committee

Student involvements/activities:

- Student mentoring/tutoring, College of Human Ecology
- Organist, Informal Black Gospel Group

Additional information, optional:

Honors/Awards

- Outstanding Multicultural Leader—Promoting Diversity 2010, Diversity Council of Pennsylvania
- Outstanding Women in the Pharmaceutical Industry 2001, Women’s Fund of New Jersey
- Thurgood Marshall Award of Excellence 2001, Thurgood Marshall Scholarship Fund. Inc.

As a first-generation college student who became an endocrinologist and pharmaceutical executive—leading global teams that developed life-changing drugs while maintaining clinical instructor of medicine responsibilities—Cynthia appreciates the transformative power of a Cornell education. In appreciation to her Cornell experience, Cynthia established an endowment fund to support student research. She’s served a variety of alumni organizations. Cynthia uses her second act career as an executive coach to advise professionals and students. Cynthia, mother of three, resides in Far Hills, New Jersey.