To the Editor:

Is the broader Cornell community seriously surprised by the decision of the trustees, including elected representative trustees and President Elizabeth Garrett, to approve the new Cornell College of Business and completely ignore Cornell's representative assemblies? This decision has ample precedent at Cornell in the failed attempt of the provost in summer 2002 to dismantle an entire college without consulting faculty. More importantly, though, our campus needs to actually engage in dissent outside of shared governance bodies lacking actual impact on university decision-making: It is time to feeling ashamed of dissenting in ways that circumvent "the usual channels."

After approving the new college at a meeting in New York City -- over 200 miles away from the campus which these decisions would actually impact -- President Garrett emailed to say that the vote "marks the beginning of an inclusive and crucial process" to "more fully define" the new college's structure. Given the usual administrative lag for anything at Cornell, it seems likely that the true "beginning" of this process was months ago. President Garrett and Provost Michael Kotlikoff still aren't concerned with our collective disapproval of this undemocratic process; rather, they simply wanted to rush their questionable agenda through to approval. Cornell's corporate autocrats can point to shared governance when convenient, but their record demonstrates their actual disdain for it. Similar to the imposition of the student health fee last year without the advice and consent of students, this latest and greatest administrative blunder lays bare "shared governance" at Cornell as a disappointing lie.

Even if one rejects the health fee analogy, the direct precedent for the Board's decision was an administrative initiative to dissolve the College of Architecture, Art and Planning during the 2002 summer recess. Two years earlier, the administration had also not consulted faculty governance in recommending the creation of eCornell as a for-profit "online learning subsidiary." In 2007 the Faculty Senate's Committee to Review Faculty Governance published a final report that expressed the general sense of faculty, based on two years of investigations: "The Administration and Board of Trustees have not consistently consulted in a timely and adequate manner with the University Faculty and Faculty Senate on important issues." You don't say!

Any Cornell affiliate should fume at this publicly available report detailing the administration's flippant attitude toward "shared governance" -- back in 2007! The administration's record demonstrates that going through the "proper channels" of shared governance will not save "a strong and independent" School of Hotel Administration, as Chuck Feeney and other donors wish to preserve. Given that departments must now spend restricted donor funds for basic operating expenses, the administration does not actually care about Mr. Feeney's money, either. However, the worst Cornellian misconception is still that if they just ask really nicely -- pass a resolution in one of the assemblies or form yet another committee -- then some day, the administration will deem them worthy enough to join the true ranks of decision-making.

The cruel reality of the University's need to profit from our labor and tuition must crush our wildest dreams that Cornell executives are anything other than enforcers of that profit motive. "Non-profit" in name only, Cornell enriches the lives of construction firms, Wall Street bankers and university execs. Students pick up the tab with the family savings account, earnings from summer jobs, and a lifetime of debt bondage. Union workers have the "privilege" of providing excellent customer service, while their new, part-time colleagues are brought on at precariously low wages. And even under the protection of
tenure, most faculty on this campus remain immersed in "the proper channels," passively transforming Cornell into its own "rubble heap of progress."

Alex Brown