We have compiled the following suggestions for writing effective CAAAN alumni contact reports following discussions with the directors of admissions in the seven undergraduate college and schools:

1. CAAAN contact reports should be concise, cogent, and clear. Reports are limited to 1,500 characters, or approximately 250 words, which is the same limitation we place on most applicant essays. This is necessitated by the limited amount of time selection committees are realistically able to spend on each application.

2. Listing students’ extracurricular activities is not necessary. We ask students to provide this, and they usually do a GREAT job of letting us know about all of their involvements!

3. Reports should highlight any information that might be new -- something the student forgot to include, or that has transpired since the student sent in the application.

4. Reports should highlight any unusual circumstances. For example, a student may reveal to you in a contact meeting that he had to limit extracurricular activities this year because he’s providing childcare for his younger siblings due to difficult family circumstances. This is important for us to know.

5. If there is nothing new or unusual, reports should briefly describe the one or two main qualities that stand out about an applicant (examples: genuine interest in and passion for learning/for engineering/for the performing arts; genuinely kind, compassionate individual; keen interest in research, service, or leadership, which helps us identify possible Cornell Commitment nominees). Please share examples that support your observations.

6. While we prefer a bit more content in reports, it is occasionally appropriate to write only a sentence or two if there is nothing new, different, unusual, or exceptional to report.

7. The selection committees are looking for observations, not judgments. The most valuable reports are those that are focused on education-relevant details instead of personal characteristics, which may be a reflection of cultural preferences and tastes.
Samples of Some Good CAAAAN Contact Reports

Example #1:

I found my conversation with Jason to be both stimulating and thoroughly enjoyable. He exudes a sense of positive curiosity and authenticity – you get the sense that he is 100% comfortable in his own skin. He had many good questions about the Cornell experience and seemed genuinely drawn by the diversity of students and experiences it offers. He drew contrasts (in Cornell’s favor) with Williams College in this regard. He spoke fondly of his Eastern European grandmother who immigrated to the U.S. and won a scholarship to Cornell, where she studied math. He occupies a lofty position within his family, as a kind of intellectual/academic role model to which to aspire. Jason has many interests, including music, a wide variety of sports (both to play and to watch), politics, literature and journalism (he writes for the local paper in his home town). He offered up that he loves a good spirited intellectual debate, and I could sense that that was very much in his bones. He was polite, genuine, and a real pleasure to meet. I particularly got a kick out of his admission that, due to the full schedule that he is maintaining during his senior year, and the option (which he took) to take gym before school officially begins in the morning, he made the wise decision to take yoga so that he could lie down – noting amusingly that he was the only male in the class.

Example #2:

I attempted to contact Brittany three times via phone and email, but she never responded.

Example #3:

Meeting Kevin was a unique experience for me. He is the first applicant I’ve met with who has an academic interest in the field of urban planning, the program I completed at Cornell. Kevin was able to articulate his interests and reasons for applying to Cornell and the planning program within AAP. He has always been intrigued with cities and maps, geography, and the social structure which all combine to create the urban landscape. He correctly recognized the myriad components that are part of a planning program.

Kevin visited Cornell last year and spent two days in Ithaca. Originally intending to apply to a “big-city school”, he found Ithaca to have the vitality and diversity of a larger city. He had many questions about life at Cornell, including weather, the “east coast mentality”, the political climate, and the size of the university.
As most likely stated in his application, Kevin has a busy schedule with community service, writing a column for the school newspaper, and a job as a lifeguard at the local pool.

While this was a limited interaction, Kevin struck me as an intelligent, articulate, and focused student.

Example #4:

Briana is a refreshingly eager and confident young applicant. We met at her current school in a classroom she secured for my visit. Our meeting provided a chance to really dialogue about how Cornell fits into her future. I found her conversational style and her interests very fitting of a future Cornell leader. In addition to responding to my questions, she facilitated dialogue using pre-written questions for me to answer. Briana asked about housing, cultural diversity, social climate, and student-professor relationships and took written note of some of my responses. Throughout her college search, she has taken advantage of several opportunities to learn more about Cornell. On a recent campus visit, Briana said she was happy to see so many students busy chalking the ground with notices of club meetings/events representing different perspectives. She also found that the campus was beautiful and big, yet manageable. Briana shared many stories of her involvement in academic programs and community service projects that lead me to believe that she would be active on campus if admitted to Cornell. She feels that the academic rigor and diversity of her current school places her in a unique position to take advantage of higher level challenges at a school like Cornell.

When asked if there was anything that she wanted to share that was not included in her application, Briana said that she had a difficult time "articulating exactly how much I love to learn."