Questions Frequently Asked by Prospective Students
And the Rationale Behind the Answers

1. Which college is easiest to get into?
There is no sure formula for gaining admission to Cornell, but one of the fundamental steps is making sure the program you’re applying to is the one which best suits your educational and career goals. The application is the tool you have to present yourself for consideration to the admissions committee as an ambitious, unique candidate. Beyond excellent academic performance in a tough academic program in high school, one of the most important factors in the decision is determining whether a candidate will be a positive addition to the Cornell student community. Extracurricular activities and personal accomplishments will show the committee what you have to offer and the better job you do revealing your talents to them, the clearer their image will be of what you can offer Cornell.

2. Are the contract colleges really part of Cornell University?
Yes! In fact, if it weren’t for the College of Agriculture and the State of New York, there might not be a Cornell University. All undergraduate students of the University receive the same Cornell diploma. They live and study together in the same Cornell residence halls. In fact, they all have the ability to take classes in all seven of Cornell’s schools and colleges. And another thing, you don’t have to be from New York to apply to/be admitted to the contract colleges.

3. Can I apply to more than one college?
Yes. Students may choose to apply to both a primary and an alternate undergraduate college/school. We recognize that with about 80 majors available across our seven colleges, a student may have a sincere interest/match with more than one college/program. More information about this option is available on the Primary/Alternate College Admission Handout on the CAAAN website.

4. Can I change my mind and switch colleges once I get here?
Yes. The internal transfer process is handled on an individual basis. The student will be interviewed by the college he/she wishes to enter, and after examination of his/her academic performance, they will base their decision for admission on several factors. The primary factor is whether the program you wish to enter is appropriate for you and whether you will succeed in that program. If your interview and academic record prove that the new program is right for you, chances are very good you will be admitted right away. If there is some doubt in either area, you may be admitted to the Division of Internal Transfer for a semester to try out your new college and see how it fits your needs. After the trial semester, if you’ve convinced the faculty that you will succeed in their college, they’ll let you in. If not, you may be asked to leave Cornell for a semester, or perhaps for good.

5. Does Cornell have a drug and alcohol abuse problem?
Among 14,000 undergraduate students, there are certainly those with personal problems including the misuse of alcohol and use of illegal drugs. At the same time, there are large groups of students who spend time organizing alcohol and drug awareness programs to educate the Cornell community about the dangers substance abuse poses. There are also hundreds of meetings and activities every week that don’t involve the use of alcohol or other drugs…plays, concerts, speakers, sports, dance classes, great restaurants, hiking…so students have plenty of substance-free options of things to do.

The decision to drink or use any other drug belongs to the individual and how well that individual is prepared to make the decision is in part a reflection of experience in high school and appropriate parental guidance.

6. If I’m not in the Greek System, will I have a good social life?
Even if you are in the Greek System, you may not have a good social life. It is up to you and your priorities. There is certainly opportunity at Cornell to find the most diverse personality types anywhere and once you begin making friends, you may find your friends heading off in lots of different directions socially. Only 1/3 of the students are in fraternities and sororities.

There are plenty of things to do outside the Greek System. Most students are involved in at least one or two clubs or teams. Within these organizations there is plenty of “social life” -- everything from forming intramural teams to holding dances and parties. On top of that idea, add the dozens of concerts and plays and hundreds of films you can attend throughout the year in Ithaca and on campus. You may find the nucleus of your “social life” is the lounge in your dorm, the dance floor at The Haunt, or it may be the Straight.

One great thing about Cornell’s Greek System is its openness. Since 2/3 of the undergraduates are not in houses, you will find circles of best friends who are mixed between fraternity members and non-members. A good share of the guests at most fraternity functions are not members of houses, so don’t feel you’ll be “cut off” from Greek life by not joining a fraternity or sorority.

7. Is Cornell’s campus safe?
Yes. And we are proactive to keep it safe, too. The goal of Cornell’s Department of Public Safety is to protect the life and property of Cornell’s citizens. This is effectively accomplished through crime prevention education and thorough security on the campus. The Blue Light Security System is the most visible of Cornell’s safety measures. It has three components (1) the Blue Light Phone System, (2) the Blue Light Bus Service, and (3) the Blue Light Escort Service.

Security telephones with bright blue lights are located all over the Central, North, and West Campus areas. These phones can be used for instant communication with the Cornell Police 24 hours a day. For students who do not feel comfortable walking alone at night, trained student volunteers are available to accompany them from any campus location to any other campus (or nearby) location through Public Safety’s Blue Light Escort Service. No community the size of Cornell is totally crime-free, but the University takes every precaution possible to keep crime at a minimum on campus and in the surrounding areas. Since we are located in a non-urban environment, the job is somewhat easier than it would be elsewhere.

8. How tough is the academic pressure?
Each new student needs to determine his/her own limitations. That may mean postponing auditioning for a play until next semester or giving up the marching band in order to keep up with schoolwork. No one will tell you that four years at Cornell is easy. It is hard work from freshman year to graduation. But the pressure you can feel at the beginning should lessen as you learn to manage time more effectively.

There are plenty of opportunities to get extra help for classes. Each college has an academic advising center, and there are tutors available for almost every subject offered. The Carol Tatkon Center in Balch Hall is also a great place for first-year students to drop in and ask for extra help, or meet with a peer or staff advisor (or grab a cup of coffee and check out a wireless laptop). Of course, every class has scheduled office hours where students can get individual help from professors and teaching assistants.

9. Are the students at Cornell "cutthroats"?
Most of the pressure at Cornell is self-induced. Since most students enter Cornell having done quite well in high school, they take it for granted that this will continue through college. It won’t for everyone. After realizing this, there are different agendas Cornell students set for themselves. Some are eager to maintain their status as “A students” and they will (for the most part) work their tails off to do it, sacrificing extracurricular and social life. Others may become more interested in campaigning for student government or trying out for the polo team. Finding the right balance is an important step, and is different for every student. Remember, though, that the
average grade point average for a first-year student at Cornell is roughly the same as that of students at the other Ivies (around a 3.1).

10. Can one socialize and keep up with schoolwork?
That depends on a person’s social agenda. You can’t usually go for even one day without doing some serious studying, but there are times when the workload seems light and times when it seems heavy. There may be days when you can get away with only an hour or two of work and then spend the rest of the night with your friends, but there will also be days (or even several days in a row around final exam time) when you’ll have little time to socialize.

11. Why is Cornell called a “suicide school”?
(If this question comes up, be truthful, but don’t emphasize)
This is primarily because of misinformation and the dramatic nature of any suicides involving the gorges. This reputation was perpetuated by a segment on college suicide done by “60 Minutes” on CBS in the early 1970s. Due to the unusual geological setting (with all our bridges and gorges), the entire segment was filmed here at Cornell and the University’s name was mentioned in the piece more than any other school.

The Cornell Community suffered tremendous loss in the 2009-2010 academic year. Six students took their lives during the year, and among these deaths were three gorge-related suicides. To lose so many students in a year is tragic and extremely unusual. Cornell is a caring community and we are redoubling our efforts to identify and assist students in distress. One visible and significant piece of the university’s multi-faceted effort to prevent suicide is the installation of safety nets under campus bridges.

If you receive questions from families, please share this basic information and encourage them to call the Undergraduate Admissions Office at 607.255.5241.

12. What’s there to do in Ithaca?
Ithaca is a college town in every sense of the word. Its ratio of residents to students is nearly 1:1 and this has advantages. Aside from merchants and services that cater primarily to students, Ithaca has a rich cultural life. The Cayuga Chamber Orchestra, a professional ensemble of strings and winds offers a year-round performance calendar featuring works that range from Bach to Britten. There are also the Hangar Theater, the Ithaca Ballet, multiple cinemas, and a busy concert schedule at Ithaca College and Cornell.

If you enjoy nature and the outdoors, Ithaca has several parks and gorge trails open year-round for swimming, hiking, cross-country skiing, and camping. Ithaca is located at the southern tip of Cayuga Lake, the longest of New York’s Finger Lakes, which provides a great place for water skiing, board sailing, fishing, kayaking, sailing, and other water sports. There are more than 100 waterfalls in the region, and the Cornell Outdoor Education program is one of the largest college programs in the country. Intramural, club, and varsity sports are quite popular, too. Check out the indoor rock climbing wall, the largest on the eastern seaboard!

If you’re a film lover, Ithaca will keep you busy with its diverse cinema offerings. There are over 25 screens in town, several of which specialize in foreign, independent, and classic films popular in the college community. And last, but not least, there are more than 75 different places to eat in Ithaca. Most of these are a short walk or bus ride from Cornell. Within a ten-minute walk from campus, you’ll find Greek, Chinese, Middle Eastern, Vietnamese, Indian, Thai, Italian and Vegetarian restaurants.

13. How large are classes?
There’s no calculated figure for average class size—much depends on which college you’re in and what you’re studying. For instance, the College of Arts and Sciences has a faculty to student ratio of approximately 7:1 so many of the classes are quite small.
In fact, about 73% of the classes at Cornell have fewer than 30 students. Overall, classes are much smaller at the junior and senior level than at the introductory level.

In order to provide individual attention to underclassmen, there are a number of undergraduate seminars for all class years. Freshmen are required to take at least one seminar and most are required to take two. Freshman seminars are limited to 17 students each and focus on improving writing through examination of an interesting subject matter. Topics for seminars range from witchcraft to film-making.

14. Do professors teach all the classes?

With the exception of the Freshman Writing Seminar Program and science laboratory sections, almost all of Cornell’s classes are taught by faculty members.

15. What kind of help is available for students?

Cornell has help available for almost any kind of problem students encounter. To summarize, Cornell offers free professional psychological counseling to all students through University Health Services in the Gannett Health Center. There are also free, confidential peer counselors available through EARS (Empathy and Referral Service). There are support groups for specific types of emotional problems that meet regularly, and there are personal growth workshops offered frequently for students who want to learn more about themselves through interaction with others. For people seeking religious guidance, Cornell has chaplains representing 17 different faiths through Cornell United Religious Work (CURW).

On the academic side, there are workshops on note-taking, study habits and time management. There are free tutors available in each college and through the InterFraternity Council for almost every course taught here. And the Carol Tatkon Center serves as a resource center for first-year students, with advising, tutoring, classes, meetings, and more conveniently located on the first floor of Balch Hall.

Overall, there is plenty of help available for most any situation, but the responsibility lies with the student to take the first step in finding it.

Additional Questions

These are questions to think about and be prepared for. For some questions there are no right answers - simply answer from your experience.

ACADEMIC

• Did you get to know the professors that taught your classes? Did you feel comfortable going to them with questions or asking for help?
• Am I allowed to take classes in other majors? In other schools? Will I be in classes with only students in my major or college?

CAMPUS LIFE

• Do all students live on campus? Are the freshmen all put together?
• Did you feel overwhelmed by the size of the school? Did you feel lost? How did you get around campus?

ALSO TAKE A LOOK AT THE FAQ ON THE ADMISSIONS WEBSITE (http://www.admissions.cornell.edu/resources/faq.cfm) FOR MORE GENERAL QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS.