

Summary of the Cornell Freshman-Year History Project Zoom Session

1. Opening, Setup, and Purpose of the Meeting

1. Naomi Katz Mintz opens the meeting, coordinating co-hosts and admitting participants. She explains that **about 33 people registered**, and they wait for more to join before beginning the main “spiel.”
2. Naomi explains the purpose of the project:
 - o To create a gift to themselves and to Cornell.
 - o To preserve memories of **daily life 50 years ago**, which differs drastically from student life today.
 - o To archive these stories at Cornell.
 - o She references a history program focused on lives of “regular people,” likening it to this project’s approach.

2. Structure of the Session

Naomi outlines the evening's format:

1. **Breakout rooms** to share memories of freshman year. Starter topics include:
 - o Freshman quarter
 - o Moving in
 - o Dining freshman year
 - o Social life

These are optional prompts.
2. Each breakout room needs a **scribe** to take notes.
3. Participants should also generate suggestions for future themed sessions.
4. They are encouraged to contact friends with different experiences who might contribute stories.

3. Participant Introductions and One-Word Descriptions of Freshman Year

Participants introduce themselves by name, location, freshman dorm, and **one word summarizing their freshman year**. Examples:

Common Themes

- “Eye-opening” (used by multiple participants).
- “Overwhelming.”
- “Fantastic.”
- “Different.”
- “Mind-boggling.”
- “Fabulous chaos.”

Examples from Individuals

- lived in Donlon; word: *eye opening*.
- lived in Dixon; *eye opening* and *overwhelming*.
- lived in University Halls; describes freshman year as “impossible” to summarize.
- lived in Donlon; found everything “so new” and *overwhelming* after coming from Catholic school.
- lived in Dixon 5; found the year “fantastic,” and shared anecdotes about choosing a single to avoid a “crazy roommate.”
- lived in Donlon; called the year “fantastic.”
- lived in Dixon 5; word: *different*.
- described her year as “fabulous chaos.”
- lived in Donlon; word: *mind-boggling*.
- lived in Donlon; shared an amusing memory about learning the word “*inclement*” due to Cornell’s extreme weather.
- lived in Sperry Hall; arrived from Beirut, unfamiliar with American colleges; found it the “beginning of a journey.”

4. Breakout Room Discussions

1. Participants are assigned automatically to breakout rooms.
2. Some latecomers are individually placed into rooms after brief conversation.
3. One participant unfamiliar with Zoom receives assistance and opts to join a room after clarification.
4. A phone-in participant, Scott, is placed into a room to listen.

Breakout topics (from introductory instructions):

- Dorm life
- Moving in
- Social life
- Dining
- Weather
- Freshman quarter transitions
- Other student experiences

5. Post–Breakout Room Sharing and Closing Discussion

1. Upon returning, people discuss items such as freshman “teeth,” dorm memories, and nostalgic artifacts (e.g., a “Cornell Coed” booklet, Heights menu).
2. Naomi shows items from her freshman year, prompting reminiscing.
3. Participants mention reconnecting with classmates they had not spoken to in years and discuss recruiting more alumni to join future sessions.
4. They talk about obtaining contact lists, sharing email addresses, and sending the submission email address for stories.
5. Naomi and others mention previous reunions, including visiting their old sorority house where their class’s year was missing from the wall display—feeling “like we never existed.”

Final Summary

This meeting serves as an energetic kickoff to a collaborative oral-history project collecting freshman-year memories from Cornell alumni. Participants reconnect, share personal introductions and vivid one-word summaries of their freshman experiences, and engage in breakout-room storytelling. The themes center on discovery, challenge, weather, independence, social life, and nostalgia. The project aims to preserve these lived experiences—“the everyday life of regular people”—for the Cornell archives so the unique world of their freshman year will not be lost.