

# Major Points and Thematic Summary

## 1. Introductions and Living Situations (Icebreaker)

Participants begin by stating names and where they lived junior year. Many lived in Balch, Risley, and off-campus apartments such as Stewart Avenue or Dryden Road.

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## 2. Academic Turning Points and Departmental Experiences

### 2.1 Organic Chemistry as a Major Obstacle

Organic chemistry is repeatedly cited as extremely difficult, shaping academic trajectories:

- Several students failed or struggled with the course.
- Many attributed difficulty to poor teaching, huge lecture halls, or inconsistent instructors.
- Some changed majors to avoid taking it.
- Pass/fail and leniency during the Cambodia crisis helped many survive the course.

### 2.2 Shifts in Academic Paths

- One student moved from pre-med to psychology after failing organic chemistry, encouraged by a supportive advisor.
  - Another student in mathematics recounts surviving a poorly taught applied math course only because the university allowed pass/fail for major requirements during the political unrest.
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## 3. Political Climate, Protests, and the Cambodia/Vietnam Context

### 3.1 Impact of the Draft Lottery

Students vividly recall the emotional strain of the Vietnam draft lottery:

- Groups gathered around radios and TVs to hear birthdates drawn.
  - Many remember watching male students “practically passing out and crying” when receiving low numbers.
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- Some shared stories—possibly urban legends—of extreme reactions, highlighting widespread anxiety.
- Several students or their partners narrowly avoided the draft, sometimes through appeals or last-minute changes in policy.

### **3.2 Anti-War Activism and Travel to Washington, D.C.**

- Students attended major protests in Washington, D.C., sometimes encountering tear gas.
- Some slept on gym floors, car-pooled with strangers, or attended music events disrupted by tear gas drifting indoors.

### **3.3 Campus Disruption and Policy Changes**

- Examinations were canceled and pass/fail grading expanded after Nixon's Cambodia invasion.
  - Many recall "the world burning" and cities on fire on TV, intensifying the sense of crisis.
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## **4. Personal Development and Later Careers**

Several recalled how junior year shaped future paths:

- A student's draft appeal introduced him to administrative law, the field he later taught.
  - Working in state mental health settings led another from psychology toward consumer-protection law.
  - Others reflected on how Cornell's name helped them in later graduate-school admissions despite academic struggles.
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## **5. Social Life, Campus Culture, and Lighter Memories**

### **5.1 Hockey Fandom**

- Multiple participants were devoted Cornell hockey fans.
- Some slept in Barton Hall for days to secure season tickets, describing it as a rite of passage and camaraderie-filled adventure.
- One participant hitchhiked to Lake Placid to see Cornell win the national championship; he later became the public-address announcer for Cornell hockey.

### **5.2 Dorm Life and Friendships**

Balch Hall appears frequently—its sections kept residents from encountering each other even while living in the same building.

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## **6. Reflections on Change from Freshman to Junior Year**

- Students noted increased leadership roles, more independence, and greater awareness of national politics.
- Academic pressure and social upheaval intensified, but so did confidence and community.
- Many felt junior year was a turning point in both academic direction and political consciousness.