

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.

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.

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.

- 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.

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.

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.

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.