Kimberly Nicole Dowdell
Cornell degree: BArch ’06 (AAP)

Cornell University’s Board of Trustees is currently called upon to successfully navigate an evolving pandemic, while further positioning Cornell for a strong future as an institution distinguished by academic excellence, public impact, environmental stewardship, alumni engagement, and a sense of belonging where any person can study while truly feeling welcome.

How does Cornell’s unique status as both an elite Ivy and a land-grant institution position it to do good in the world? How can the trustees and alumni support Cornell’s mission to do the greatest good?

Cornell is a “best of both worlds” kind of institution, which offers unparalleled opportunities to learn boldly and give back to our communities. I was afforded the incredible experience of studying architecture abroad in Rome during my fourth year. The following semester back in Ithaca, my sorority sisters and I volunteered at the Lansing Residential Center for Girls, a juvenile detention facility in a neighboring community. I am grateful for both of those very different opportunities, which shaped my Cornell experience in important ways.

As a kid coming from humble beginnings in Detroit, I saw Cornell as a place where my dreams of leading urban revitalization could begin to take shape. Those dreams are coming to fruition today, and I am grateful for the multi-dimensional education that I received at Cornell. As an alumni trustee, doing the greatest good means facilitating the diverse experiences that ignite the dreams of students.

How do you envision the Board of Trustees supporting Cornell’s founding principle of “... any person ... any study?” How does this relate to Cornell’s priority to strengthen and broaden diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives across the university?

The Board of Trustees can further support Cornell’s founding principle by boldly confronting the expressed challenges that are preventing any person from believing that they fully belong on campus, in Ithaca, or beyond. Being a member of the Cornell community is a distinct privilege, but there are students who struggle more than others to tap into the full benefits of this privilege.

Thus, Cornell trustees must remain responsive to the needs of the entire student body, requiring the university to develop strategies that bolster positive and sustainable outcomes in the realm of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Diverse faculty and staff members are part of the solution, particularly in senior-level leadership positions throughout the institution. Establishing measurable goals and reporting on progress at regular intervals will also be crucial to the success of this long-standing priority to create a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive environment at Cornell.

Why do you hope to serve on the board and how are you uniquely suited to contribute to Cornell’s success?

I sincerely hope to serve on the Cornell University Board of Trustees to give back just a fraction of what this amazing institution has offered me. My Cornell journey began two decades ago, including significant volunteer service, culminating in an even deeper belief that there is so much more for me to contribute in support of future Cornellians. As a trustee, I wish to be an example of what is possible for young people who grew up with challenging early life circumstances to arrive at Cornell with a fresh start. I will not only bring my perspective to the board as a woman of color, but also as a Midwesterner, a millennial, and a licensed architect with a background in public administration. These are just a handful of unique points of view that I can represent, but what I will have in common with everyone is a sincere love for Cornell.

Professional experience:
- HOK, Principal, 2008–2011; 2019–present
- University of Michigan, lecturer, 2016–2019
- Detroit Real Estate Development Venture, 2016–2019
- City of Detroit, Executive Manager of Public/Private Partnerships, 2015–2016
- Levien & Company, Real Estate Project Manager, 2011–2014
- U.S. General Services Administration, intern, 2005–2006
- McKissack & McKissack, intern, 2004

Alumni service:
- President’s Council of Cornell Women (PCCW), member, 2019–present; panelist, What does it mean to be a powerful Black working woman in America today?, 2021; speaker, PCCW Symposium, 2021
- Cornell Alumni Admissions Ambassador Network, member, 2012–present
- College of Architecture, Art, and Planning (AAP) Committee on Diversity, member, 2015–2021
- Committee on Alumni Trustee Nominations, member, 2015–2019
- Moderator, Lifelong Engagement with Cornell, Cornell Alumni Leadership Conference, 2018
- AAP Advisory Council, member, 2010–2017
- Cornell Black Alumni Association (CBAA), lifetime member
- Cornell Future Architect Award (CFAA), Co-founder

Community/public service/philanthropic priorities:
- Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. (AKA)
- American Institute of Architects (AIA)
- Architect’s Foundation
- Association of Real Estate Women, former board member
- Chief Chicago, founding member
- Chicago Architecture Biennial
- Chicago Central Area Committee
- Children’s Hospital of Michigan
- Cranbrook Kingswood Alumni Association, lifetime member
- Harvard Kennedy School Center for Public Leadership Alumni Council
- HOK Impact, Co-founder
- Ingenuity Chicago
- Madame Architect National Council
- National Organization of Minority Architects (NOMA)
- Social Economic Environmental Design (SEED), Co-founder
- Trinity United Church of Christ Chicago

Additional information:
Kimberly Dowdell is an architect and frequent speaker on sustainability, diversity, and the future of cities. As the 2019–2020 national president of NOMA, she increased opportunities for women and people of color in architecture, and more than doubled the organization’s membership. Kimberly’s career aspirations are rooted in her Detroit upbringing, where she was inspired to utilize architecture as a tool for revitalization. Her professional experience spans from architecture to government and teaching to real estate development. Kimberly is a principal in the Chicago studio of HOK, a leading global design firm. Kimberly’s overarching mission is to improve people’s lives, by design.

For the candidates’ full bios, go to cornel.ly/ballots22