



**Cornell University**

**Cornell Health**

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**Mathew Kleiner Create Change: Health Leadership Award  
2025 Awardee: Zoey Preza '25**

Cornell Health is pleased to announce Zoey Preza '25 as the 2025 recipient of the Create Change: Health Leadership Award. This award honors the legacy of Mathew A. Kleiner '93 by recognizing and rewarding the personal investment of time, energy, dedication, and vision that effective leadership requires. Each year, outstanding Cornell University students are nominated for demonstrating the courage and commitment necessary to create changes that enhance the health and well-being of the Cornell community, as Matt Kleiner did as a student leader during his years at Cornell.

Zoey was nominated for this award by Antonia Pellegrini, Health Initiatives Coordinator in the Skorton Center for Health Initiatives at Cornell Health, for her noteworthy contributions in promoting social connectedness and cultivating a caring community among her peers in which individuals are encouraged to ask for help and able to receive help when they need it.

As Co-President of the Cornell Minds Matter (CMM) student organization, Zoey helped revitalize CMM following the COVID-19 pandemic and spent considerable time outside of the classroom leading strategic mental health promotion initiatives on campus. For example, along with her CMM peers, Zoey helped distribute self-care kits to hundreds of students throughout the semester by hosting tabling events at various locations across campus when students typically experience elevated levels of stress. Another notable accomplishment that the group has achieved under Zoey's leadership was bringing back the Perkins Prize award-winning Dining With Diverse Minds event, which was halted during the COVID-19 pandemic. This beloved campus tradition brings together students, staff, and faculty for an open and honest conversation about various mental health topics over a shared meal to promote understanding, respect, and cooperation among different members of the Cornell community.

During her final year at Cornell, Zoey, a California native, drew upon her early experiences of difficulty adjusting to Ithaca's long dark winters and considered how the built campus environment could be shaped to foster mental well-being and soften the "winter blues" for others. In collaboration with staff members throughout Cornell's Division of Student & Campus Life, Zoey led the initiative to string up thousands of festive lights around the trees and lamp posts on Ho Plaza and brighten this well-traveled path through campus during the darkest months on campus. The illumination of the plaza was the focal point of CMM's 'Light Up the Season' celebration, which brought hundreds of students and employees together to unwind and connect at the end of fall semester. Zoey's drive and determination was instrumental to this initiative's success and reflects the years of personal growth and relationship building that have shaped Zoey into a strong leader and champion for positive culture change.



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In addition to her work with CMM, Zoey served as a student representative on Cornell's Health Promoting Campus Student Wellbeing Council. In this role, she was actively engaged by staff to share her knowledge about the student experience and provide ideas about how to address specific concerns and barriers identified by students. Similarly, Zoey served on student panels for candidate interviews within Cornell Health and shared insights and perspectives with prospective candidates about the on-campus undergraduate student experience. She also participated in student focus groups as part of Cornell's Health Promoting Campus efforts to help current staff and administrators understand the factors that help and hinder a sense of belonging among Cornell students. Zoey's impressive efforts to advocate for students' voices to be heard and represented in different spaces across campus align with Matt Kleiner's efforts to promote social justice and challenge systemic inequalities within institutions of higher education.

Throughout Zoey's time at Cornell, she has made meaningful contributions to student and campus mental health and well-being. These efforts will enhance the student experience at Cornell in years to come. It is in this spirit of service to foster a healthy educational environment that we award Zoey Preza '25 with the Create Change: Health Leadership Award.

Antonia Pellegrini

Health Initiatives Coordinator, Skorton Center for Health Initiatives, Cornell Health

May 2025