

March 12, 2010

Committee of Six  
Converse Hall

Dear Colleagues,

On behalf of the Committee on Priorities and Resources (CPR), I write to describe the Committee's discussions about the potential future makeup of the CPR. The Committee currently consists of six voting members: three faculty members and three students. In addition, a number of College administrators are regularly present *ex-officio* at CPR meetings: the Dean of the Faculty, the Treasurer, the Director of the Budget, and the Director of Human Resources. The President also serves *ex-officio*. Since Fall 2008, two members of the Advisory Council on Personnel Policies (ACPP) have been invited guests at CPR meetings. More recently, the Legal and Administrative Counsel and a representative of the Managers' Council have also been invited guests.

Students on the CPR have argued strenuously for the addition of three staff members with vote. The faculty on the Committee, mindful that staff members with vote would have significant implications for faculty governance, have advocated that two staff members serve *ex-officio*, by virtue of having been elected by a process determined by the staff. It is traditional that *ex-officio* members do not have a vote on faculty committees at Amherst.

Some staff at the College are eager to have an official, voting voice on the CPR. Last summer, the Advisory Budget Committee (ABC) encouraged the addition of two staff members to the CPR as voting members, noting that "Amherst's staff are not as fully present in the College's governance structures as they should be." The ABC recommendation seems to have been based on the assumption that the CPR should be a committee that represents different constituencies on campus. The ABC presumably also thought that since staff is vital to the smooth functioning of College operations, it should have a vote on any committee charged with reviewing and making recommendations about the College's annual budget.

In discussing the ABC recommendation, students on the CPR reiterated these points and raised a number of additional reasons for adding staff members with vote. In their view, since the CPR makes recommendations that affect the entire college community, representation on the committee should be proportional to the constituencies involved. They also believe that if staff members join the CPR as voting members, the CPR will enjoy more legitimacy across the campus. Finally, they argue that by giving staff voting membership on the CPR, the staff will become more confident that the entire Amherst community appreciates its input and recognizes its dedication to the institution.

The faculty members on the Committee support staff voice on the CPR. They believe that it is beneficial to hear staff input on a range of important issues facing the College. They

also favor having staff in the room during CPR meetings. They believe, however, that the benefits of staff voice would be assured by having staff serve on the Committee in an *ex-officio* capacity.

While enhancing staff voice is clearly important, faculty members on the Committee also question whether the CPR is the best place for the staff to express its views on the budget and on workplace matters. The CPR is not a benefits and employment committee, but rather a faculty committee concerned with the allocation of the College's resources to best serve its educational priorities. The faculty members believe that there are other possibly more productive and direct channels of communication that should be developed to facilitate the voicing of staff concerns. The faculty members on the CPR are pleased that the ACPP is meeting regularly with the Managers' Council. They believe that regular meetings between the ACPP and the senior administration should be institutionalized. They also support the ACPP's ongoing efforts to establish a Staff Council or other body that will promote a stronger staff voice on campus.

The faculty members' opposition to adding staff with vote is also one of principle: the addition of staff with vote on the Committee raises important issues of faculty governance. The CPR would be the only faculty committee to have staff members with vote. Faculty governance was developed to ensure academic freedom on college campuses; it helps to guarantee that decisions related to educational mission will be made according to academic and not other criteria. Through years of classroom teaching and research work, the faculty has developed special expertise that allows it to make decisions about the long-term educational mission of our College according to academic values. Faculty governance is not a matter of representing different campus constituencies. It is about affording the faculty the special, unique role that only it can fulfill. Clearly, the principle of having only faculty serve on faculty committees was abrogated long ago when students were given voting membership on faculty committees. This presumably happened because the education of students is the primary mission of the institution, and students have education at the forefront of their concerns. While staff is crucial to the functioning of the College, its diverse roles do not, in the main, include the academic concerns that faculty governance is meant to maintain and preserve. The faculty members on the Committee believe that the fundamental question is whether staff participation with vote on a faculty committee is consonant with these concerns.

For these reasons, the faculty on the CPR believe that having staff serve on the Committee in an *ex-officio* capacity could enhance staff voice without unduly compromising faculty governance. Amherst College is distinctive for its faculty governance structure; the CPR is and will remain a faculty committee. In an attempt at compromise, however, the faculty members of the CPR are willing to explore staff vote on the Committee. But the faculty members would only be willing to make such a compromise if the faculty continues to have at least the same number of votes as all other voting members of the Committee. After all, how can one properly speak of a faculty committee when the faculty on it can be outvoted?

One possible compromise that was discussed is the following: the voting members of the CPR be made up of four faculty members, two students, and two staff members, and that a member of the Executive Branch of the Association of Amherst Students serve *ex-officio* (to

compensate the students for the loss of one vote). This 4:2:2 makeup mirrors the current 3:3 makeup, in which the faculty has the same number of votes as all other voting members of the Committee. This would thereby enable staff voice on the CPR, but do so without creating a situation in which the faculty could be outvoted on one of its own committees. Additionally, by increasing the number of faculty who serve on the CPR, it could enhance the broader faculty's knowledge about the College, its budget, and its decision-making processes. Of course, this compromise does not (and will not) satisfy those who believe (some of the CPR members among them) that staff should not have votes on a committee that makes recommendations on the long-range educational mission of the College.

We hope that this summary of our Committee discussions will be helpful to the faculty as it considers any changes to the makeup of the CPR. Finally, we suggest that the Committee of Six structure the debate in the faculty meeting so that the faculty first discusses whether staff should be on the CPR in a voting or in an *ex-officio* capacity. Should the faculty decide that staff should be on the CPR with vote, we ask that the 4:2:2 makeup be offered to the faculty for discussion.

Sincerely,

Catherine Epstein, Chair of the CPR