

Amended March 31, 2011

The twenty-ninth meeting of the Committee of Six for the academic year 2010-2011 was called to order by President Marx in his office at 2:30 P.M. on Monday, March, 21, 2011. Present were Professors Basu, Ciepiela, Loinaz, Rockwell, Umphrey, and Saxton, Dean Call, President Marx, and Assistant Dean Tobin, Recorder.

President Marx began the meeting by asking the members for their views about Professor Staller's request, which she had made at the Faculty Meeting of March 1, that a statement from which she had read aloud at the Faculty Meeting of November 2 be appended, retroactively, to the minutes of that meeting. The November 2 minutes had been approved at the December 7 Faculty Meeting; Professor Staller had been absent from that meeting due to an illness. The President noted that it had also been suggested at the March 1 meeting that the statement might be appended to that meeting's minutes instead. President Marx reminded the members that the Committee had discussed earlier (see the Committee of Six minutes of November 4, 2010) the issue of whether to append the statement. It had been noted then, and was reiterated now, that the practice has been to summarize in the minutes comments made by faculty, including those that they may read. The members also noted once again that it would have been appropriate for the statement in question to have been submitted before the Faculty Meeting to the Committee of Six, as the body that sets the agenda for Faculty Meetings, so that the members could have commented on the document through their minutes and could have decided whether the document should be discussed at the Faculty Meeting as part of the agenda. The members agreed that the statement should not be appended to either set of Faculty Meeting minutes. Professor Rockwell noted that, if she had desired, Professor Staller had the procedural option of proposing a motion at the March 1 meeting on whether or not to append the statement to the Faculty Meeting minutes.

The Committee discussed having a conversation about faculty governance, in anticipation of its meeting with the Board of Trustees on April 1, and decided to have an additional meeting on March 23 to discuss this matter and several other agenda items.

President Marx asked the members for their views about asking the Faculty to consider the question of teaching evaluations for tenured faculty. He reminded the members that the Faculty had voted in 2007 (see [Faculty Handbook IV., B., 2.](#)) to require that each tenured faculty member (other than those on phased retirement) evaluate his or her teaching in one course each year by means of her/his choice. (Those holding half-time FTE appointments evaluate one course every two years.) It had been agreed that, whatever the form(s) of evaluation, the content and results would belong to the faculty member and would be confidential, and that any record could be destroyed by the faculty member at any time. The President wondered if the Committee would consider proposing a motion that the Faculty adopt a policy that requires tenured faculty to use the same system for all of their courses, for the continuing purpose of informing their own pedagogy. President Marx noted that he had asked the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) to consider this question when meeting with the committee this fall, and that the CEP had expressed interest in discussing the question this spring, but had recently declined to bring a motion forward. Professors Basu, Rockwell, and Saxton said that they would not object to such a motion, but wondered whether this was the right time to bring this matter forward. The Committee suggested that it would be valuable and informative to assess the current policy before proposing any enhancements to it. (When the Faculty voted in the new teaching evaluation program in May 2007, it had been agreed that it would be assessed six years after its implementation.) Professor Rockwell said that he would be interested in asking the CEP

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why it had chosen not to bring the issue forward, and he suggested that the two committees might have a discussion about this matter at the meeting that has been planned for March 28. The other members agreed that doing so would be useful.

Continuing with the conversation, Professors Ciepiela and Umphrey stressed the need to have broader faculty discussion about teaching evaluations for tenured faculty, including a consideration of other ways of supporting pedagogy and helping colleagues flourish in the classroom. Laying some groundwork before moving forward with a motion such as the one that the President had described would be important, they argued. President Marx wondered why the Faculty would not want to engage in a discussion and debate about the question of teaching evaluations. Professor Saxton noted that some colleagues feel that student evaluations are deeply flawed and do not value them as a way of providing useful feedback about teaching. Professor Ciepiela agreed that many colleagues see problems with this instrument of evaluation and find greater value in attending workshops on pedagogy and in other methods of supporting teaching. She also expressed the view that, by requiring teaching evaluations for all classes, we might be inviting students to consider their learning experience at Amherst in narrow, evaluative terms.

Dean Call said that he would like to see programs developed to support teaching, including innovation, experimentation, and a range of the most informative methods of assessment. President Marx stressed that considering the question of student teaching evaluations does not preclude thinking about other ways to inform teaching. He expressed the view that having feedback about learning experiences from both the student and faculty perspective creates a culture of openness. Professor Basu agreed and said that she favors having a system that encourages some form of self-evaluation and reflection for all faculty. She commented that, under the current system, there is significant inequity in the ways that teaching is assessed for tenured and tenure-track faculty. Professor Basu said that she is aware that some Amherst departments solicit teaching evaluations from all students in all classes, and that it might be informative to ask departments that do this about the merits of this system. Professor Umphrey noted that it would also be useful to review some of the research that has been done on student teaching evaluations and the efficacy of this tool as a means of improving teaching. The members agreed to return to this topic during their meeting with the CEP on March 28. Professor Loinaz asked that the Committee be provided with background material about the Faculty's consideration of the issue of teaching evaluations for tenured faculty. The Dean agreed to provide such information, noting that an Ad Hoc Committee on Student Evaluation and the Improvement and Teaching, which had been charged with exploring ways to support the improvement of teaching at all ranks, including proposals for the evaluation of tenured faculty by students, issued a report in 2007. The members also discussed the possibility of offering departments a model teaching evaluation form for students, in the hope of creating an instrument that could elicit student feedback consistently and effectively for all departments. The form could include a series of questions that would be relevant for all departments, and departments could add other items that would be tailored to departmental/discipline-specific assessment needs.

Under "Announcements from the Dean," Dean Call noted that he had extended to March 28 the deadline for the report of the Task Force on Copyright, Reserves, and Coursepacks. He also informed the members that Treasurer Peter Shea had asked to make a presentation about new rules affecting the investment of individual retirement funds at an upcoming Faculty Meeting. In addition, he asked the Committee if Ernie LeBlanc, Benefits Administrator, and Pat

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Long, Associate Director of Human Resources, could attend the next Faculty Meeting as guests to offer their expertise, if needed, about the proposal of the Committee on Priorities and Resources (CPR) regarding parenting and medical leave. The members agreed that it would be helpful to have these colleagues present at the meeting.

Under “Questions from Committee Members,” Professor Loinaz asked whether there is a transition plan for the position of the Director of the Career Center, now that Allyson Moore, the current director, has announced plans to become the Director of Undergraduate Career Services and Associate Dean of the College at Yale. The Dean said that a search for a new director is already under way, and that Allen Hart, Dean of Students, will soon name acting co-directors of the Career Center, who will serve until Dean A. Moore’s replacement is named. In addition, some members of the staff of the Dean of Students office will provide additional support to the Career Center during this time of transition. The Committee expressed gratitude to Dean Moore for her service to the College.

Turning to the topic of the Little Red Schoolhouse, President Marx noted that he will soon meet with the Chairman of the Board and the Director of the school to discuss the need to cease operation of the school at its current site by the time (summer 2012) that construction begins on the new science center. Professor Loinaz asked about the nature of the College’s relationship with the school. President Marx said that the College owns the school building (a gift to the College enabled it to be built) and the land on which it was constructed and provides an endowment (through another gift) that supports the school’s operation. While Amherst provides the space to the school, the College does not participate in running it.

Conversation turned to the recommendation of the Committee on Priorities and Resources (CPR) that the College adopt a new parenting/medical leave policy. The members discussed the [CPR’s letter of March 9, 2011](#), (appended via link), in which the committee provided responses to questions that had been raised at the March 1 Faculty Meeting about the proposal, as a means of clarifying details that had been seen as confusing during the presentation of the motion and in the discussion that followed. The Faculty had referred the proposal back to the CPR for purposes of clarification. The motion, in its original form, is now being proposed again the Dean said. Professor Basu noted that, in her role as an individual faculty member rather than as a member of the Committee of Six, she had written to the CPR to request that the committee draft two motions to be forwarded to the Faculty, one along the lines that had been brought forward by the CPR, and a second that would provide the same benefits to the primary parent, whether or not that person is the biological mother and whether or not that person is faculty or staff. She had also asked that the CPR provide estimates of the costs to the College of each option. Professor Basu said that she had expressed the view that the CPR could endorse the option it preferred, but could allow the Faculty to consider both proposals.

Continuing, Professor Basu said that she had informed the members that she had not suggested this course earlier to the CPR because she had been convinced by the committee’s wish to bring a motion before the Faculty as soon as possible. However since the Faculty had requested that the CPR clarify the proposal, she had felt that it was appropriate for her to make her request of the CPR. She had noted in her communication to the CPR that she was also making this request because the Faculty had seemed enthusiastic about the committee’s proposal, and might support a more generous policy. The CPR had declined this request, Professor Basu noted. She said that she was now in a quandary, since she would like to see a proposal for a more robust policy brought forward, but if that is not going to occur, she would not want to

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derail efforts to improve the current policy in the ways that the CPR has proposed. Professor Basu noted that she would support having the CPR study the questions that she had raised and wondered if there would be time for it to do so without jeopardizing the possibility of having a Faculty vote this spring. Professor Rockwell asked the Dean to characterize the agenda of the CPR for the spring. Dean Call said that gathering the comparative data that would be needed to answer these questions could take some time, adding that it might not be possible to complete such research during the Spring semester. In addition, he commented on the challenge of making equivalent comparisons among categories of individuals who have different units of work.

The Committee discussed whether consideration of the motion might be postponed until next year, allowing the CPR to conduct research and to consider the development of a second proposal, such as the one Professor Basu described. Alternatively, the members wondered whether it might be possible to bring the current motion forward to the Faculty now, and if it is approved, to bring this recommendation to the Board. Later, perhaps, another motion for a more expansive policy could be brought before the Faculty and the Board, if the Faculty wished to do so. The Committee agreed that requesting that the Board consider multiple requests for enhanced benefits could be a problematic approach. Professor Ciepiela expressed the view that this issue should be brought forward now, as it has been pushed aside repeatedly over the past decade. Professor Basu expressed some disappointment that research on this question had not been undertaken to inform faculty deliberations about alternative parenting leave policy options. She wondered if it might also be informative for the CPR to consider the issue of parenting leave in the context of broader issues surrounding childcare. President Marx said that Marian Matheson, Director of Institutional Research and Planning, had earlier begun to assess the College community's childcare needs, but that the economic downturn had led to a postponement of this project. He has now asked Ms. Matheson, in consultation with Peter Shea, Treasurer, and Jim Brassord, Director of Facilities and Associate Treasurer for Campus Services, to return to this issue. Once data have been gathered, there may be facilities questions and issues that could come before the CPR, he said.

At the conclusion of its discussion of the CPR's proposal, the Committee decided to bring the current motion before the Faculty now so that a vote could be taken on whether the proposal should be brought forward to the Trustees as the Faculty's recommendation. The members voted six to zero to forward the motion. On the substance of the motion, Professors Ciepiela, Saxton, and Umphrey voted in favor; Professors Basu and Rockwell abstained; and Professor Loinaz was opposed. The Committee then reviewed proposals for new courses and voted six to zero in favor of forwarding them to the Faculty. The members turned to personnel matters.

The members next discussed some tenure procedures and revisions to the Dean's letter to the department chairs of tenure candidates.

The meeting adjourned at 6:35 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

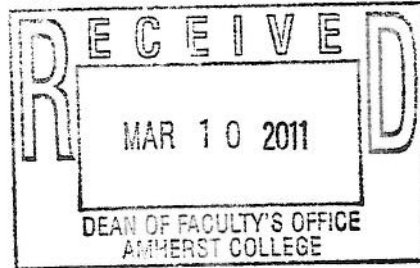
Gregory S. Call  
Dean of the Faculty



# AMHERST COLLEGE

Department of History

CATHERINE EPSTEIN, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR



March 9, 2011

Committee of Six  
Converse Hall

Dear Committee,

At the faculty meeting on Tuesday, 1 March 2011, faculty members posed three questions about the proposed language on medical and parenting leave for the Faculty Handbook. After consultation with Human Resources, here are the answers to those questions:

1) Does the proposed handbook language on medical leave include anything new?

The proposed language for medical leave is essentially an articulation of current practice. Currently, if a faculty member has to take a two-month medical leave, the faculty member is relieved from his or her teaching responsibilities for the semester (at 100% of pay).

The proposed handbook language involves two modifications. The first is that current handbook language speaks of a two-month leave. In the proposed faculty handbook language, this was changed because the standard leave period for a routine delivery is eight weeks. Two months is roughly equal to eight weeks. If, however, the two month's time is taken literally, then the new policy would grant a slightly greater benefit than is now the case. Individuals taking a medical leave would be eligible for 100% of their pay without teaching responsibilities for the semester after eight weeks, rather than two months, of medical leave.

The second modification is that the College would now explicitly recognize childbirth as cause for a medical leave.

The rationale for relieving an individual of teaching responsibilities during the semester in which she gives birth is that an instructor cannot leave the classroom for eight weeks in the midst of a semester. Should an individual giving birth choose the medical-leave option, she would not be working at all for the eight-week period of medical leave. During the rest of that semester, she would be working full time, but the Dean of Faculty would reallocate her duties to research and service.

2) Is medical leave for individuals giving birth in any way connected to parenting leave?

The two policies are completely separate. Should an individual giving birth elect the medical-leave option, she would be relieved from her teaching responsibilities as a result of her eight-week medical leave.

The proposed faculty handbook language explicitly states that for either a medical leave or a parenting leave a junior colleague may elect to postpone the tenure decision for one year.

3) Is there any way that a faculty member who adopts an infant can take a medical leave?

Individuals who adopt a child are not eligible for medical leave. They are eligible for parenting leave.

The CPR sees no reason to modify the proposed faculty handbook language that accompanied its letter to the Committee of Six on May 26, 2010.

The CPR hopes that the motion to endorse a new parenting leave policy and a modified medical leave policy will be placed on the agenda of the next faculty meeting. In addition, we ask that the Committee of Six invite Pat Long and Ernie LeBlanc to the faculty meeting so that benefits experts will be on hand to answer any additional questions that the faculty might have.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Catherine Epstein". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Catherine Epstein (Chair of the CPR, on behalf of the Committee)