

Amended May 16, 2011

The thirty-seventh meeting of the Committee of Six for the academic year 2010-2011 was called to order by Dean Call in the President's office at 9:00 A.M. on Tuesday, May 10, 2011. Present were Professors Basu, Ciepiela, Loinaz, Rockwell, and Umphrey, Dean Call, and Assistant Dean Tobin, Recorder. Professor Saxton was absent. President Marx joined the meeting for the final forty minutes. The members turned briefly to personnel matters.

Dean Call informed the members that the College had used target-of-opportunity hiring procedures to make one tenure-track hire this spring. The appointment arose from a regular search that resulted in two hires.

Under "Questions from Committee Members," Professor Basu suggested that the Committee return this fall to the topic of restructuring faculty committees and the related subject of release time for College service. To facilitate such a discussion, Professor Umphrey suggested that the Committee of Six meet with the current members of major faculty committees, and colleagues who had served on the committees during the past five years, to discuss the issue of committee work. Professor Basu asked those who would be leaving the Committee of Six at the end of the academic year for their views on the issue of committee restructuring. Professor Ciepiela said that she has reservations about the proposal, which had been discussed previously by the Committee, to create a structure of a small number of faculty committees that would have a tremendous workload. She expressed concern about how the selection process for serving on such committees would be handled and about the possibility that colleagues could be required, through election, for example, to take on a heavy burden of committee service during a time in their careers when it would be particularly detrimental. She offered the example of a colleague who might be in the final stages of completing a book project, when that project could be interrupted by intensive committee service.

Continuing the conversation, Professor Rockwell commented that, if committee service were to be consolidated within a small number of committees, he would worry that faculty would lose the valuable opportunity that now exists to become acclimated to the College and to gain important experience, through service on smaller, less burdensome committees. He would be concerned that, under such a system, service on the envisioned major committees would become the burden of the small group of faculty who are recognized as taking committee service seriously. Professor Ciepiela commented that, to some extent, the situation just described exists now in regard to the Committee of Six. Membership on the Committee has, in the past, rotated among a relatively small group of colleagues, it was noted. Professor Rockwell said that he would be open to exploring a structure in which there would be a separate tenure and promotion committee, but that, at the same time, he does not see a compelling reason to adopt such a structure.

Professor Ciepiela wondered whether the possibility of having more administrative support for faculty committees could be explored. She said that it is her impression that faculty, especially on ad hoc committees, spend a good deal of time gathering and analyzing data, and that some of this work might be done by administrators, who would provide the information to the committees. The Dean noted that administrators provide this type of support for the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) and the Committee on Priorities and Resources (CPR) and that this model has been effective. Professor Umphrey expressed concern that committees tend to be more reactive than proactive, partially because their workloads do not allow for enough time to think deliberatively about the long term or, in fact, to think about issues beyond those that are considered during the year in which the committee service occurs. She asked that

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the Committee consider structures that could enable committees to drive larger conversations in a proactive way. Professor Loinaz expressed the view that the lack of communication among committees that currently exists contributes to inefficiencies and to some lack of awareness of issues that may need to be taken up, and how those issues might best be addressed. He noted that meeting minutes can be used to follow the activity of those committees that generate minutes, but that most committees do not generate minutes. He suggested that it would be helpful to have improved vehicles of communication for discussing with committees work that is being considered or under way. Professor Umphrey agreed and wondered whether it might be helpful for the Committee of Six and the Faculty to hear more regularly from chairs of faculty committees, who might also offer short reports of their work, so as to develop a better sense of how the business of the College is being carried out.

Continuing the conversation, Professor Basu asked the Dean if he could provide a sense of the extent to which faculty members' willingness to serve on committees varied at different stages of their professional lives. The Dean responded that, for the most part, faculty view committee service as a shared obligation that they have to the College, and they typically accept invitations to serve. Professor Ciepiela noted that some faculty members appear not to serve on committees. Professor Loinaz asked how widespread a problem this might be. Professor Basu conjectured that some faculty do not view committee service as one of their strengths, while noting that serving on committees is a way of gaining experience and expertise that can inform future committee service. Dean Call said that the College operates under the assumption that committee work should be shared equally by the Faculty, though this is not always the case. Professor Ciepiela expressed the view that, as part of any consideration of new structures, it would be important to have an open conversation with the Faculty about committee work, in order to gain a broader sense of colleagues' attitudes about this subject. Professor Umphrey suggested that committee assignments could be based, at least partially, on the interests of the Faculty. She proposed that the Dean's office conduct a survey each year to try to determine whether faculty have an interest in serving on particular committees, making assignments accordingly.

Discussion turned to the Faculty Meeting Agenda for the meeting of May 19. The members discussed whether to include Motion Two (the recommendation that a new timeslot be added for classes on Mondays from 7 P.M. to 9:30 P.M.), which they had forwarded to the Faculty for consideration at the May 3 meeting, on the agenda of the Commencement meeting. Since the agenda for the May 3 meeting had been re-ordered by a vote of the Faculty, there was insufficient time to consider Motion Two. The members decided that the best course would be to ask the CEP to consider this proposal as part of its review of the Committee's [larger set of ideas](#) (included with the Committee of Six minutes of April 25) for easing pressures on classroom spaces, and to request that the CEP report back to the Committee of Six in the fall about its views on these proposals. The members also agreed that the First-Year Seminar Committee should be asked to consider the Committee's proposal that First-Year Seminars be offered in more than one timeslot and to report back on its views to the Committee of Six. The members then voted five in favor and zero opposed to withdraw Motion Two from the agenda for the Faculty Meeting of May 19. The members next reviewed some proposals for new courses and voted five in favor and zero opposed to forward them to the Faculty. The Committee voted five in favor and zero opposed to forward the agenda to the Faculty.

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The members next reviewed the theses and transcripts of students recommended by their departments for a summa cum laude degree and having an overall grade point average in the top 25 percent of the graduating class. The Dean reviewed the theses of students who had received summa cum laude recommendations from their departments and whose overall grade point average was likely to land below the top 25 percent but within the top 40 percent of the class, since these students would qualify for a magna cum laude degree under the new honors guidelines voted by the Faculty last fall. The members voted unanimously to forward these recommendations to the Faculty and offered high praise for the quality of the work done by this accomplished group of students. Professor Basu noted that, among the theses that she had read, quite a number were informed by impressive field work that had been conducted by students during study-abroad experiences. She said that she was impressed with the ways that the student-authors had integrated interviews and observations with secondary sources and wondered if there might be ways to encourage and support more broadly the model of incorporating study-abroad experiences and field work into students' honors work in foundational ways. The members agreed that the Committee on International Education could be asked to consider this issue, and that Janna Behrens, Assistant Dean of Students/Director of International Experience (who is also an ex officio member of the committee), who advises many students about studying abroad, could also be consulted. The members discussed the possibility of launching an interdisciplinary course, possibly a seminar for sophomores, that would focus on ethnographic research methods, since having formal training in these techniques would be helpful to students who wish to incorporate field work into their honors research. The Committee wondered how best to generate interest in proposing and teaching such a course and considered whether the new Ad Hoc Committee on Advising and/or the Committee on International Education should be asked to consider this topic. The Committee turned to personnel matters and then discussed committee nominations.

The members next reviewed drafts of the Dean's letters to department chairs and candidates concerning reappointment and promotion that are sent to department chairs and candidates each spring. The Committee had previously reviewed the letters concerning tenure.

Returning to the topic of mentoring tenure-track Faculty, the Committee discussed possibilities for enhancing and formalizing practices in this area. Professor Basu noted that there are no College-wide mentoring practices beyond annual conversations with chairs and tenure-track colleagues and observations' of junior colleagues' teaching by senior colleagues, both of which are procedures that are included in the *Faculty Handbook* (III., D., 2.), by vote of the Faculty. To gain a better overall sense of departments' mentoring practices, the members suggested that the Dean write to department chairs and ask that they provide information about departmental mentoring practices. In addition, Professor Basu proposed that the Dean's office gather information from peer institutions about mentoring practices and programs. The Dean said that he would be happy to ensure that such research is done.

Continuing the conversation about mentoring, Professor Basu said that it would be useful to consider the effectiveness of having mentors within departments, outside the departments, and/or outside the College (in a tenure-track colleague's area of scholarly expertise). The members agreed that it would be helpful for tenure-track colleagues to receive guidance early in their careers at Amherst about prioritizing research projects, the timing and venues for publications, and balancing research, teaching, and service. Professor Basu commented that it would be helpful if the Dean could remind departments of existing mentoring policies and

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provide guidance to the chair in this regard (e.g., what information should be covered during annual conversations and how often senior colleagues should observe the classes of tenure-track colleagues), in addition to considering how to regularize offering options such as providing a mentor (who would play a non-evaluative role in a candidate's reappointment and tenure cases) outside a department or outside the College. Professor Umphrey suggested that there be more frequent meetings between the Dean and department chairs to discuss mentoring, as well as other issues, and to share ideas. The Dean noted that past practice has been to have less frequent chairs meetings and to wait until agenda items arise, before scheduling meetings. He wondered whether a change to more frequent lunch meetings, for example, would be desirable. Professor Umphrey said that she would be in favor of such an approach, noting that chairs could and should play a more important role in governance at the College. At present, she continued, chairs are underutilized and serve a purely bureaucratic function. Professor Loinaz asked if there is a handbook for new department chairs. The Dean said that, while there is not a handbook, there is information for department chairs posted on the Dean's web site at [https://www.amherst.edu/academiclife/dean\\_faculty/fph/procedures](https://www.amherst.edu/academiclife/dean_faculty/fph/procedures). On a more general but related note, Professor Umphrey commented that some institutions have established faculty life committees, which generate programming on issues of interest to faculty at different career stages, for example balancing family and career. Amherst colleagues might welcome such offerings, she believes. At the conclusion of the discussion about mentoring, the Committee suggested that it would be desirable to have the oversight of a faculty mentoring program added to the portfolio of responsibilities of one of the Associate Deans of the Faculty. An Associate Dean could be particularly helpful in matching tenure-track colleagues with senior faculty mentors, the members noted.

President Marx joined the meeting at 11:30 A.M. Members of the Committee offered appreciation for the President's service to the College over the past eight years and thanks for his leadership and guidance. President Marx thanked the members for their kind expressions and commented on how much he has valued working with current as well as past Committees of Six. As the meeting drew to a close, President Marx and the members spent some time reflecting on the significant issues, challenges, approaches, and accomplishments during the President's tenure at the College and discussing future possibilities. The meeting concluded with the Committee and the President anticipating the remaining two weeks of the academic year as a time for celebrations and final farewells.

The meeting adjourned at 12:10 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Gregory S. Call  
Dean of the Faculty

**The Committee of Six's Ideas that  
Could Enhance Students' Access to the Curriculum  
and Ease Pressures on Classroom Spaces**

- Create an additional evening timeslot(s) on Monday evening that would help free up time during the day for classes and would offer students additional options  
*(Motion Two, Faculty Meeting Agenda of May 3, 2011)*
- Recast the schedule using ninety minute timeslots—increasing flexibility, with the result that classes could more easily be offered for fifty, eighty, or ninety minutes within a series of longer blocks.  
*(Research options with the CEP. If desired, the CEP would bring a proposal forward for a faculty vote)*
- Distribute large, popular classes throughout the day, including in the morning  
*(Using new software on class scheduling, encourage departments and ask the Registrar to monitor results)*
- Require all students to take some classes in the morning  
*(Implementation would require a vote of the Faculty)*
- Require all students to take classes on Fridays  
*(Implementation would require a vote of the Faculty)*
- Require first-year students to take early-morning classes  
*(Implementation would require a vote of the Faculty)*
- Encourage departments to schedule required courses across timeslots; electives, on the other hand, could be scheduled in overlapping slots or within one or two slots, thereby limiting the courses that students could take that are at the same level within a department.  
*(Encourage departments to do so, and ask the Registrar to monitor the results.)*
- Increase the number of timeslots for once-a-week seminars by allowing seminars to be taught on Fridays, as well as Wednesdays, and/or in the evenings, with an anticipated result being that the pressure for small classrooms for these courses would be eased.  
*(Motion One addresses this issue in part. If the motion is passed, the Registrar would be asked to monitor results)*
- Offer First-Year Seminars in more than one timeslot, perhaps in morning slots (e.g., divide FYS among MW 8:30, WF 8:30, and MF 8:30 slots, thereby requiring only 2/3 the number of classrooms on each day for First-Year Seminars and ensuring that each first-year student has at least one class out of the way before 10 am every day).  
*(Ask the First-Year Seminar Committee to consider this idea)*

- Spread classes with a history of having large enrollments across timeslots  
*(Using new software on class scheduling, encourage departments and ask the Registrar to monitor results)*
- Require departments not to reuse a timeslot until all have been used, while recognizing that exceptions would have to be made when there were pedagogical reasons for departments offering multiple courses in the same timeslot.  
*(Research options with the CEP. If desired, the CEP would bring a proposal forward for a faculty vote)*