

Amended January 14, 2008

The sixteenth meeting of the Committee of Six for the academic year 2007-2008 was called to order by President Marx in his office at 3:30 P.M. on Monday, December 10, 2007. Present were Professors Frank, S. George, Jagannathan, O'Hara, Servos, and Sinos, Dean Call, President Marx, and Assistant Dean Tobin, Recorder. The Committee turned briefly to personnel matters.

President Marx informed the members that he has been meeting with individuals who have raised concerns in response to the incidents of intolerance that have occurred on campus. He said that plans are under way to have a public forum in February to raise awareness on campus about these issues. In addition, the President said that he had met recently with a group of students who hold conservative political views. These students told President Marx that they often feel that they are disrespected at Amherst because of their views, and they described incidents in this regard in which their interactions with faculty left them feeling that they had not been treated fairly or courteously because of their beliefs. The students reported that there have also been incidents of harassment, and in some cases, violence against students because of their conservative views. The President said that these students told him that it might make a difference to the general atmosphere of debate if there were more Amherst faculty members who shared their views. President Marx informed the students that the College does not have an ideological litmus test when hiring faculty—nor does he think it should—but he said that he feels that Amherst does and must have a range of views represented among the Faculty and students at the College. He noted that Amherst's responses to incidents of discrimination, harassment, threatening behavior, or violence related to gender, sexual orientation, race, religion, and political views—or any other reasons, for that matter—should be comparable, in accordance with the severity of the infraction, as all such behavior is in violation of the College's policies regarding respect for persons. The Dean and the Committee agreed.

The Dean next distributed to the members a letter (appended) from the members of the Department of Music regarding the report titled "The Arms Music Center: A Comparative Facility Report." The letter requests that the Committee of Six discuss the report. After a brief conversation, the members agreed that the report should be forwarded to the Committee on Priorities and Resources (CPR) for consideration.

The Committee next discussed a letter (appended) from Professor Rosbottom in which he requests that the members address the issue, which was discussed at the Faculty Meeting of November 6, 2007, of warning students when sensitive material will be presented in classes. Professor Frank said that Professor Rosbottom seems to be under the impression that the Dean was suggesting that rules be imposed on the Faculty that might limit academic freedom, when it appears to her, that information about this topic was being provided in order to inform the Faculty and not to require them to respond in a particular way. Dean Call said that, indeed, he had not intended to advocate a particular position, but to raise awareness about issues surrounding the presentation of sensitive material that were brought to his attention by Gretchen Krull, Assistant Director of Health Education/Sexual Assault Counselor. Professor Servos noted that the *Faculty Handbook* (https://cms.amherst.edu/academiclife/dean_faculty/fachandbook/

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preintroduction, pre-introduction, B., Academic Freedom) states that the College subscribes fully to the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) statements of principles on academic freedom (published in 1940). He read the following: “Teachers are entitled to freedom in the classroom in discussing their subject, but they should be careful not to introduce into their teaching controversial matter which has no relation to their subject.” Professor Servos also cited the following 1970 gloss: “The intent of this statement is not to discourage what is ‘controversial.’ Controversy is at the heart of the free academic inquiry which the entire statement is designed to foster. The passage serves to underscore the need for teachers to avoid persistently intruding material which has no relation to their subject.”

The members agreed that the issue is not whether Faculty should be discouraged from presenting a particular type of material, which all agreed they should not, but whether, in the interest of sensitivity to the needs of some students who have experienced violence in their lives, the Faculty might consider warning students when sensitive material is going to be presented in class. Professor Frank commented that some material that includes incidents of sexual violence could trigger serious and disturbing responses in students who may be suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder and that warning students when this sort of material will be presented can be viewed as a courtesy. Professor Servos noted that a call for sensitivity, respect, and thoughtfulness seems fine, but that it would be unreasonable to *require* that such a warning be given, particularly because it is impossible to anticipate all of the sensitivities that might exist among students. President Marx, while noting that academic freedom is clearly one of the most important values at the College, agreed that it is up to individual faculty members to decide whether they want to warn students about the content that will be presented in their classes. Professor O’Hara commented that raising awareness about this issue through discussion is valuable in itself. The committee then returned to personnel matters.

The members returned briefly to their discussion of the future of the Writing Center. Dean Call described progress that has been made on the recommendations outlined in the 2007 Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Writing. The committee’s first recommendation was to “create a named, rotating professorship devoted to writing.” The Dean reiterated his hope that Professors Gentzler and Barale will soon have an official role within his office to support writing instruction. The second recommendation was to “create a standing faculty committee whose charge would be to oversee all parts of the pilot program.” Dean Call noted that the newly created Faculty Seminar on the Teaching of Writing has facilitated an ongoing conversation among eighteen faculty members. The third recommendation was to “reward instructors and departments who take on the task of writing instruction.” In particular, the Ad Hoc Committee on Writing recommended that visiting appointments or, in some cases, new FTEs, be allocated to departments who commit to offering W (writing-attentive) courses. Dean Call noted that the committee might have stretched the intention of the Committee on Academic Priorities (CAP), which was to recommend that new FTEs be allocated to departments who teach writing-intensive courses, which would be designed for students who are less well-prepared in writing, rather than writing-attentive courses, which would be appropriate for all Amherst students. The hope is that some courses in all departments will be identified as writing attentive. Professor Frank noted

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that progress is being made, since writing-intensive courses are under way and are serving twenty-five to thirty students a year. The fourth recommendation was to “make a percentage of all First-Year Seminar offerings writing attentive.” The Dean said that this recommendation is currently being discussed by the First-Year Seminar Committee. The fifth recommendation was to “enlarge the Writing Center” and to increase the number of peer tutors. With the move of the Writing Center to new facilities in Charles Pratt this fall and increased funding, these steps have been taken. The committee also recommended that the professional staff be increased by one full-time position. A second Writing Fellow was added this year. President Marx said that he has had some questions about whether Ph.D.s who have more experience and who have been trained in the teaching of writing might be engaged in the Writing Center.

In regard to the new Director of the Writing Center, the Dean said that he was willing to discuss adding a new colleague to the English department who would hold a part-time tenure-track appointment dedicated to writing instruction that would be coupled with an administrative appointment as the Director of the Writing Center. An interim structure would be needed if this idea is adopted, he said. The Dean envisions a double reporting line to the Dean of the Faculty and the Dean of Students for the position. Some members and the President wondered whether teaching courses for the Faculty on how to teach writing, which has been proposed, should be part of the portfolio of teaching that would be part of the tenure-track portion, rather than the administrative side, of the position. President Marx asked about using a piece of the two FTEs that have been approved to serve writing needs for this position, when colleagues have yet to articulate a conception of how writing will be taught. He feels that such a vision should be in place before these FTEs are allocated. Professor Frank expressed the view that a writing requirement cannot be put in place until more faculty members feel comfortable with teaching writing. A Writing Center Director who is trained to teach writing could offer workshops for the Faculty so that they would feel better able to teach writing, she said. The President said that he is delighted that the Faculty is exploring the possibility of re-organizing the Writing Center, but reiterated that additional resources, in the form of FTEs, should depend upon specific plans about the teaching of writing.

Professor O’Hara wondered if the Directorship of the Writing Center might be a two-year position that could rotate among interested faculty who are skilled in teaching writing. In addition, she expressed the view that it would be desirable for the Writing Center Director to work closely with a faculty colleague interested in writing more broadly who holds a named, rotating professorship devoted to writing. Professor George expressed skepticism about the idea of taking an Amherst faculty member out of the classroom to head the Writing Center, which would mean replacing that colleague with a visitor. He views the teaching of the basic mechanics of expository writing as a specialized field and said that it might be best to bring in someone from the outside who is trained in the field of expository writing instruction to head the Writing Center. Professor Servos agreed, while emphasizing the importance of having writing taught in connection with course content. Professor George said that he feels that, in the case of instruction in writing mechanics, which is what a portion of Amherst students would benefit from greatly, writing professionals could teach this material outside the framework of an

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academic discipline. On a final note, Professor O'Hara said that it will be important to consider the Moss Quantitative Center in tandem with the Writing Center, as some issues are the same for both.

The meeting adjourned at 5:45 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Gregory S. Call
Dean of the Faculty

AMHERST COLLEGE
Department of Music

October 31, 2007

Dean Gregory Call
Secretary
Committee of Six

Dear Colleagues:

We forward to you the report entitled "The Arms Music Center. A Comparative Facility Report" written and researched by two Amherst students-Marshall Nannes '09 and Jonathan Salik '09.

We request that the Committee of Six discuss this report with the President and Dean and that a record of this discussion be included in the minutes. The increasing sense of concern among students and faculty that existing facilities are insufficient and, in some cases, inaccessible in service of a campus broadly engaged with music underscores the importance of beginning a thoughtful consideration of this problem.

Sincerely,

Jeffers Engelhardt
Jenny Kallick
Eric Sawyer
David Schneider

December 7, 2007

Dean Gregory Call, Secretary

Committee of Six

Dear Greg,

I would appreciate it if the Committee would discuss the issue I brought up at the November 6, 2007, Faculty meeting.

Is there a policy that faculty members should warn students of curricular materials that some of them might find disturbing or offensive? If so, what would the range of such materials include? If there is no formal policy, only a decanal suggestion, could individual faculty members be liable in any way should they fail to so notify students, who might determine, *post facto*, that the material indeed did offend or disturb?

It was the suggestion, in the Dean's synopsis of the health professionals' comments as minuted, namely, that some professors weren't doing what they were supposed to do that caught my attention. I, for one, didn't know I wasn't doing what I was supposed to do.

I know that the College's concern is for the well being of our students, but mine is that upsetting or offensive subjects are part of the human experience. In my classes, I would have to give warnings on a regular basis.

Thanks for mulling this over.

Sincerely yours,

Ronald C. Rosbottom
Professor of French and European Studies