

Amended February 14, 2012

The sixteenth meeting of the Committee of Six for the academic year 2011-2012 was called to order by President Martin in her office at 3:30 P.M. on Monday, January 30, 2012. Present were Professors Basu, Ferguson, Hewitt, Loinaz, Ratner, and Umphrey, Dean Call, President Martin, and Assistant Dean Tobin, Recorder.

Under “Announcements from the President,” President Martin asked for the members’ advice about several candidates who might deliver the 2012 DeMott Lecture. The President expressed a preference for having the speaker be an author of a book that would be assigned as the “common read” for the first-year class. Continuing with her remarks, President Martin shared with the members highlights of the winter meetings of the Board of Trustees, which had been held January 27 and January 28. Discussions about the tenure process, budget, admission, emergency preparedness, and the process for selecting a new chair of the Board had all gone well, she noted. Much of the discussion about the budget had focused on steps that might be taken to reduce the College’s reliance on the endowment to support its operations. The Board viewed the administration’s proposed ten-year plan for reducing the endowment spend rate, an approach that would combine a reduction in operating expenses with the generation of additional revenue, as a viable one. President Martin pointed out that, since the budget is constructed and approved annually, annual budgets would not be unduly constrained by the rolling ten-year model, as annual adjustments dictated by changing circumstances could easily be made.

Continuing with her summary of the Board’s meetings, the President noted that at a meeting that they had had with some of the Trustees, some students had raised issues surrounding online registration (including complaints about being bumped from classes during the add/drop period, a lack of space in introductory courses, and less contact with faculty members during the registration period) and had expressed concern about a lack of a sense of community (including a lack of shared traditions and the quality of the social life) at Amherst. She noted that some students had also communicated a desire to see the College offer more courses (e.g., accounting) that would prepare them for future careers. In this vein, the Dean noted that the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) has been discussing the possibility of having Amherst participate in a dual-degree program with Dartmouth, through which Amherst students (and students at other liberal arts colleges) may study engineering at Dartmouth. Under this program, Amherst students would spend their junior year at Dartmouth, return to Amherst for their senior year, and then return to Dartmouth for a fifth year of study. Those who complete this program would receive their bachelor of arts degree from Amherst and a bachelor of engineering (B.E.) degree from Dartmouth’s Thayer School’s engineering program.

The President noted that another Board conversation had focused on ways to minimize the effects of noise and other disruptions that will result from the construction for the science center project, which will present some challenges for students living in nearby residential halls. In addition, the Board had discussed the process for selecting the next Board chair. Jide J. Zeitlin ’85, who is in his seventh year as chair, will complete his term at the end of this year. To facilitate the search for Mr. Zeitlin’s successor, the Board will designate a past member of the Board to interview current Trustees. During this process, each Board member is asked about the goals and functioning of the Board, his or her own role on the Board, and whether he or she has an interest in serving as chair and/or has recommendations of others who might serve in this important role. The Board’s Committee on Trusteeship then makes a recommendation to the full Board, which is responsible for appointing the new chair. Continuing the summary of the Board’s meetings, Dean Call commented that the Trustees had responded with interest to his presentation on the tenure process and tenure decisions between 1984 and 2011. The Dean then offered more detail to the Committee about the data that had informed his presentation, about which he had provided some information to the Committee at the last meeting.

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Under “Announcements from the Dean,” Dean Call asked for the Committee’s advice about whether to move forward with a proposal made at the December 6, 2011, Faculty Meeting that the Faculty celebrate retiring faculty members at their final Faculty Meeting by having a citation read. Professor Ferguson suggested that retiring faculty members be asked if they would like to have such a citation read, rather than doing so without an individual’s consent. Other members felt that colleagues’ modesty might make them feel uncomfortable about authorizing a citation, even if they wished to have one read. Dean Call commented that, for a number of years, citations about retiring faculty members had been read at Commencement, noting that some retiring colleagues had objected to the practice, which had then been discontinued as a result. Some members of the Committee pointed out that most colleagues seemed to feel honored by the practice and that only a few had objected to it. Professor Ratner said that, in his view, the discontinuance of honoring faculty in this way at Commencement represents a loss. The Committee, the President, and the Dean agreed that honoring retiring faculty would not only celebrate the individual for his or her service to the College over many years, but would be a way of building a culture of recognition at the College. Professor Basu expressed the view that, while some faculty members might not feel comfortable having a citation read about them at Commencement, they might be more inclined to having a piece written by the colleagues who have been closest to them, read at a Faculty Meeting, which is a more personal venue. The Dean thanked the Committee and said that his office would work with departments to coordinate the citation process for retiring colleagues.

Continuing with his announcements, the Dean asked the members for their views on whether time should be set aside at the first Faculty Meeting of the semester for Professor Williamson and Mr. Geffert, Librarian of the College, on behalf of the Library Committee, to make a brief presentation about the rising costs of serial subscriptions and the need to make some budget adjustments as a result. Dean Call explained that dramatically rising serials costs, which are due in large part to the increasing commercialization and monopolization of academic publishing, are forcing academic libraries, including Amherst’s, to spend more and more of their budgets on serials. The Dean noted that the College’s library now devotes 71 percent of its materials budget to ongoing subscriptions, including individual serials titles (print and electronic), databases, and packages of serials titles. Dean Call said that it is his understanding that, prior to the first Faculty Meeting, the committee wishes to send a memo to the Faculty about this issue and to ask for participation in considering how best to address it. After a process of consultation, Mr. Geffert, with the support of the Dean, will decide whether to cap the percentage of the library’s materials budget that would be devoted to ongoing serials requests. The Committee agreed that it would be helpful for Professor Williamson and Mr. Geffert to make a presentation at the Faculty Meeting. The Committee turned to a committee nomination.

The members next discussed a nomination for a faculty representative to a new College committee, appointed by the President, which will be charged with leading the College’s efforts to comply with applicable laws and regulations. The following is the charge to the committee:

The Compliance Committee serves as an advisory committee to the senior administration with respect to the College’s efforts to comply with applicable laws and regulations. The Compliance Committee is responsible for reviewing, evaluating, and coordinating the College’s compliance efforts and for fostering a culture of compliance through such avenues as educational programs and the dissemination of information to the college community. Although each department will continue to be responsible for compliance efforts with respect to its particular areas of

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responsibility, the Committee may establish working groups to develop and implement policies and procedures, especially for areas requiring coordinated compliance efforts across the College community. The Committee will invite to its meetings department managers and such other individuals as may be necessary for the Committee to fulfill its responsibilities.

The Compliance Committee includes those in the following roles: Legal and Administrative Counsel (Chair); Director, Compliance and Risk Management (Five Colleges, Inc.); Treasurer; an Associate Dean of the Faculty; Director of Facilities; Director of Human Resources; Chief Information Officer; Dean of Students; Comptroller; and a faculty representative (to be chosen in consultation with the Committee of Six).

The following individuals will serve on the committee: Paul Murphy, Legal and Administrative Counsel (Chair); Beth Carmichael, Director, Compliance and Risk Management (Five Colleges, Inc.); Peter Shea, Treasurer; Jack Cheney, Associate Dean of the Faculty and Samuel A. Hitchcock Professor of Mineralogy and Geology; Jim Brassord, Director of Facilities and Associate Treasurer for Campus Services; Maria-Judith Rodriguez, Director of Human Resources; Chief Information Officer (to be named); Allen Hart, Dean of Students and Professor of Psychology; Stephen Nigro, Comptroller; and a faculty representative (to be named).

The Dean next informed the members that a department has recommended a member of the class of 2012E for a summa cum laude degree. The student has an overall grade point average in the top 40 percent of the graduating class. The Committee agreed that a Committee of Six member would review the thesis, offer a summary of it to the Committee, and that the full Committee would review the student's transcript and the departmental recommendation. It was noted that, while the student does not qualify for a summa degree because his/her GPA is not in the top 25 percent of the class, if the Committee agrees with the recommendation that the thesis is worthy of a summa, the student would be awarded a magna cum laude degree (without distinction), because the GPA is in the top 40 percent of the class.

Under "Questions from Committee Members," Professor Basu, expanding on the earlier conversation about recognizing retiring faculty members, suggested that more ways be found to recognize Amherst faculty members for their achievements as scholars and teachers, thereby celebrating individual colleagues, as well as enhancing the sense of intellectual community at the College. For example, colleagues could be invited to give a talk about their scholarship at the time of promotion to full professor, when they publish a book, and/or upon receiving a named professorship or prestigious grant or fellowship. It was noted that, for a short period, Amherst faculty members who received named professorships had been invited to give a talk about their research and a reception had followed as part of the event. The Committee agreed that these talks had been a successful recognition vehicle and that the program for honoring faculty achievement should be reinvented and broadened.

Continuing the conversation, Professor Ferguson commented that Amherst's "leveling culture" is both good and demoralizing, and he wondered whether efforts to honor and reward faculty members who make stellar contributions in teaching and/or research should be recognized in a variety of ways. He suggested, for example, that an award be created at the College to celebrate Amherst faculty who exemplify what it means to be an Amherst professor, both in terms of teaching and scholarship. The President noted that, when faculty members who distinguish themselves receive honors from their own institutions, these internal awards can be

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helpful when the individuals are being considered for honors by outside bodies. The Committee noted that most endowed professorships at Amherst are honorific but do not carry a financial award. The College should, perhaps, consider ways of rewarding faculty achievement with honoraria or additional research funding, some members suggested. The Dean was asked about the criteria for awarding endowed professorships at the College. Dean Call responded that, when making nominations for professorships, he and his Associate Deans review individuals' overall contributions to the College, with an emphasis on scholarship and with departmental considerations in mind. However, many professorships are discipline-specific or have other criteria that must be taken into account. At times, there might be too many or no qualified individuals who meet the criteria for a particular professorship. In addition, Advancement may suggest that particular professorships be filled if they are vacant and a living donor is involved. Dean Call said that he brings forward a list of suggestions for professorships to the President, and that, after consultation with the Committee of Six, a final list of colleagues who will be nominated for professorships is completed for the Board's approval.

Expanding on the discussion about recognizing faculty members' service to the College, the members discussed the possibility of compensating department chairs, either through course release or additional salary. While recognizing that Amherst's current "democratic" system of appointing and rotating department chairs emerged out of a desire not to perpetuate an earlier model at the College, which saw some department chairs wielding considerable power for years, Professor Ferguson noted that a weakness of the current system is that there is no avenue or incentive for colleagues who are particularly skilled at being a department chair to continue as chair for a significant period. Professor Ratner said that, after experiencing both systems, he sees many advantages to the democratic model of rotating the chairmanship regularly and prefers it. Professor Hewitt noted that, under the present system, the chair has no authority to make decisions. Rather, the chair serves as a liaison officer of sorts between the department and the rest of the College and is charged with transmitting information and coordinating consultation with colleagues, she has found. The Dean said that it is often helpful for departments to adopt a model in which the duties of the chair are divided between the chair and a director of studies, thereby dividing the additional work of chairing a department, particularly a large one.

Continuing with "Questions from Committee Members," Professor Ratner said that, after reflecting on the Committee's conversation at its last meeting about the proposal to convert a College-owned house into the offices of the Mind and Life Institute, he continues to have concerns. The Dean noted that any house that is made available to the organization would revert to the College after the period (which would most likely be five years, as this is the expected term of Professor Zajonc's presidency of the institute) designated in the lease. The house could then be used once again for faculty housing and/or to meet the College's ongoing need for space for short-term visitors, such as Copeland Fellows, and/or other institutes that Amherst may wish to host. Professor Ratner suggested that, before offering the house to the Institute, the Dean consult with the Housing Committee. The Dean said that he would be happy to do so.

The meeting adjourned at 5:00 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Gregory S. Call
Dean of the Faculty