

Amended February 16, 2012

The seventeenth 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, February 6, 2012. Present were Professors Basu, Ferguson, Hewitt, Loinaz, Ratner, and Umphrey, Dean Call, President Martin, and Assistant Dean Tobin, Recorder.

The meeting began with President Martin sharing her impressions of meetings with alumni that she has had during her recent travels on the College's behalf. She then turned to the topic of the search for the College's Chief Information Officer, informing the members that she had met with two finalists for the position and that she intends to meet with another candidate soon. Plans call for the finalists to return to campus to offer public talks for the community. The Committee then discussed a personnel matter.

Under "Announcements from the Dean," Dean Call informed the members that the Lecture Committee has nominated Assistant Professor of Mathematics Tanya Leise to deliver the Max and Etta Lazerowitz Lectureship. The Lazerowitz Lecturer, a member of the Amherst faculty below the rank of full professor, is appointed annually, he noted. Professor Leise's lecture is set for Thursday, April 12, at 4:30 P.M., in the Alumni House. Continuing with his announcements, the Dean asked for clarification from the members about whether they wish to invite all or a subset of the proposers of the Five College Architectural Studies major to meet with the Committee to discuss the proposal. The members agreed that, since it would likely be challenging to coordinate a meeting with all of the proposers because of schedule conflicts, a time should be found that would be convenient for the colleagues who would anchor the program at Amherst, Professors Gilpin and Long. Professors Clark, Courtright, Rosbottom, and Kevin Sweeney, as members of the Amherst College Architectural Studies Advisory Committee, should also be asked to attend the meeting at that time, their schedules permitting. Professor Hewitt suggested that it would be informative for the Committee to have a broader conversation about the relationship between the liberal arts and professionalism. Dean Call agreed, noting that some of Amherst's peer institutions have been expanding their conceptions of the liberal arts and broadening their curricula as a result.

Continuing with his remarks, Dean Call explained that, as noted in [its letter to the Committee of Six](#), the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) had recently approved the use of online and hybrid courses for transfer and make-up credit, on a limited basis. The Dean said that the CEP had agreed that the Registrar and Class Deans should have the authority, which they should employ "sparingly," to approve the use of online and hybrid make-up courses when "absolutely necessary." The Registrar will also be asked to review courses taken by transfer students "with care, but without special focus on whether they took place in physical classrooms." Permission of both the Registrar and Class Deans will be required for granting credit for online and hybrid courses as credit for make-up courses. Professor Ratner wondered how many requests for credit for courses of this type are pending; he suggested that the number of online and hybrid courses that have been used for credit be tracked, and the policy evaluated, after a year. In addition, Professor Ratner wondered if the Registrar should be asked to try to determine, prior to authorizing that particular courses can be taken for make-up credit, whether the courses are online or hybrid courses. The Dean said that he would ask the Registrar to do so, while noting that assessing the nature of courses might be a challenge for some courses. Professor Loinaz asked if online and/or hybrid courses will be designated as such on students' transcript. Medical schools do not accept credit for such courses, and, at present, he said, the practice is to inform medical schools that none of the courses that are noted on Amherst students' transcripts is an online or hybrid course. The Dean said that he would ask the Registrar if there are any plans to note on students' transcripts whether transfer and/or make-up courses are hybrid and/or online courses. Professor Basu asked about the department's role in assessing whether

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credit should be awarded for these courses toward a major. The Dean responded that, as is the case with courses that are taken as part of study abroad, online and/or hybrid courses will not be credited toward a major without a department's approval. The Registrar, as she sometimes does in the case of courses that are taken abroad, may also seek the advice of departments when determining whether these courses should be accepted for College credit.

The Dean next informed the members that a student, who is working with the Office of Advancement on a program to increase student awareness and appreciation of the role that alumni play in creating their Amherst experience, has contacted him about informing the Faculty of this program and seeking faculty members' participation. The Dean said that it is his understanding that one of the initiatives involves a week-long educational campaign this spring. The members agreed that an announcement could be made at the next Faculty Meeting that information about the program would be available in the Converse lobby, and that Advancement staff would be available to answer questions. The members next reviewed a thesis and transcript of a student who had received a summa cum laude recommendation from a department and whose overall grade point average was below the top 25 percent but within the top 40 percent of the class. Under the honors guidelines, the student qualified for a magna cum laude degree. The members voted unanimously to forward a recommendation for a degree magna cum laude to the Faculty.

Under "Questions from Committee Members," Professor Umphrey asked the Dean for his impressions of the all-day workshop for faculty in their first three years at the College, which had been held just before the start of the Spring semester. The Dean's office and the Office of Foundation and Corporate Relations had co-sponsored the event. Dean Call expressed his gratitude to senior colleagues, including Professor Umphrey and Professor Loinaz, who came forward to organize and participate in the various sessions, which were attended by sixteen tenure-track faculty who are in the early stages of their careers, and eight senior colleagues. Issues addressed included work-life balance, research plans, internal and external funding, the evaluation of teaching, and review for reappointment and tenure. The Dean expressed the view that the workshop had been very well received and had helped to bring to the forefront some of the unmet needs of newer faculty and to connect them with the colleagues and other resources that can be of the most help to them. As an outgrowth of discussions at the workshop, it is his intention to provide senior colleagues, some of whom may be in departments that have not had new colleagues and/or reappointment or tenure cases for some time, with more information about procedures for mentoring and evaluating tenure-track faculty. A chairs meeting is a possible venue for providing this refresher about procedures. In addition, a number of follow-up workshops are being planned in February and March for tenure-track faculty, Dean Call said.

Discussion turned to the upcoming long-range planning process. President Martin noted, and the Committee and the Dean agreed, that, at the outset, it will be important to try to define what Amherst is, what it should be, and how it might respond and change to meet internal and external needs and pressures. This process will enable priorities to be set and goals to be established, which will help determine the foci and structure of the planning process. The intention is for the plan that emerges to help guide the College in integrated ways for the next five to ten years, President Martin commented, noting that the College will celebrate its bicentennial in nine years. At the President's request and to inform the development of the plan, the members discussed the ways in which Amherst College is unique and what distinguishes it from its peers, as well as the challenges the College may face in coming years. Professor Ferguson expressed the view that Amherst is part of a dying breed; it must take an active role in forging the character of the liberal arts in today's world, and in the world of tomorrow, as other small liberal arts colleges with fewer resources move away from a traditional liberal arts model

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and/or do not survive, he argued. Professor Ferguson expressed the view that, in the coming years, an Amherst education may become more difficult to justify to students and their families. President Martin commented that the liberal arts model is becoming more and more attractive abroad, for example, in China; she feels that it will become important for Amherst to explore linkages with institutions in other countries. The Committee agreed that the College should find ways to convey that the liberal arts tradition, with its emphasis on thinking critically and creatively, analyzing problems from multiple perspectives, and digesting and integrating vast amounts of information across domains, will provide the best preparation, in ways that pre-professional training can't, for students who will live in an information age. Recognition of the value placed on the liberal arts abroad may stimulate more interest in the liberal arts in this country, which at this time is moving in the direction of favoring the utilitarian, President Martin noted.

Continuing the discussion, the members agreed that it will be important for Amherst to become more explicit about what it does. Among the attributes that set Amherst apart are the following offerings and characteristics, the Committee noted: a Faculty that is made up of teacher-scholars; opportunities that are available to students to engage directly and in multiple ways with active scholars; an intimate learning environment with small classes and personal attention; an emphasis on and attentiveness to teaching, and a culture of innovative pedagogy; and a rigorous and demanding educational experience. It was agreed that meeting students' interests, which shift over time, will require building flexibility into the curriculum to accommodate new fields; the College will need to find ways to do so that are true to the values and approaches of the liberal arts, the Committee noted. Professor Umphrey suggested that it will be important, for example, to clarify the role of experiential education at Amherst. She further noted that campus activities (e.g., the student newspaper or student government) and engagement in organizations within the community could be structured and presented as models of civic culture for students and could serve an important role in preparing them for lives as engaged citizens. Dean Call agreed, commenting more generally on the importance of strengthening the ways in which education beyond the classroom, including experiential education and opportunities for students to engage in research, is integrated with the curriculum. Professor Basu agreed, commenting that Amherst has tended to focus inward, and that it will be important in the years to come to balance that approach with one that cultivates worldliness in students by supporting public, externally-oriented engagement. She argued that students would also benefit if more emphasis were placed on designing programming (e.g., in the areas of residential and social life) that enhances in intentional ways the broader fabric of intellectual life by forging links between formal and informal settings for learning at Amherst. President Martin agreed and commented that a number of students have spoken with her about their feeling that there is a lack of community and intellectual vibrancy on campus. Professor Basu suggested that, perhaps, students need more explicit guidance and structure from the College in order to take advantage fully of all that is available to them at Amherst and within the Five Colleges. President Martin concurred.

In the context of a brief discussion about sustaining a climate and experience of academic rigor at the College, the members discussed the challenges posed by grade inflation. President Martin noted that grade inflation can have the effect of diminishing the rigor of the academic experience Amherst offers and students' motivation to achieve. Professor Basu agreed, while informing the President that a number of initiatives have been implemented in recent years to increase the Faculty's awareness about grade inflation. For example, on an annual basis, each faculty member is now provided with his or her individual grade distributions, and for purposes of comparison, the aggregated averages of his or her department(s), the traditional divisions, and

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the College as a whole. President Martin thanked the members for the helpful discussion and suggested that the Dean and she develop a preliminary outline of the planning process, which they would then share with the members at a future meeting. The members agreed that this would be a good approach.

The meeting adjourned at 6:05 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Gregory S. Call
Dean of the Faculty



AMHERST COLLEGE

Department of Computer Science

February 2, 2012

The Committee of Six
Amherst College

Dear Colleagues:

The Committee on Educational Policy recently reviewed the College's policy on transfer and make-up courses. I write to alert you and the College community that we have approved the use of on-line and hybrid courses under limited circumstances.

Transfer credit for courses taken prior to matriculation at Amherst is granted at the discretion of the Registrar. Make-up courses---those taken to remedy a course deficiency---require prior approval from both the Registrar and the Class Dean. Until now, on-line or hybrid (partially on-line) courses could not be used for either purpose.

We have agreed that the Registrar and Class Deans should have the authority to approve the use of on-line and hybrid make-up courses when absolutely necessary. While we believe that there is enormous advantage in having students be in a physical classroom, circumstances will sometimes justify exceptions. For example, appropriate classroom-based courses may not be available within a reasonable distance of a student's home. We ask the Registrar and Deans to use this authority sparingly.

We ask the Registrar to examine the courses taken by transfer students with care, but without special focus on whether they took place in physical classrooms. This information is often not available to her and is, if available, only one of the characteristics she should examine in assessing the acceptability of a course.

Best regards,

Lyle A. McGeoch

On behalf of the Committee on Educational Policy

CEP Members:

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Gregory Call, *ex officio*
Carol Clark
Javier Corrales
Matthew DeButts '14

Pranay Kirpalani '12
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