

Amended April 11, 2012

The twenty-third 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, March 26, 2012. Present were Professors Basu, Ferguson, Hewitt, Loinaz, Ratner, and Umphrey, Dean Call, and Assistant Dean Tobin, Recorder.

The meeting began with “Announcements from the President.” President Martin noted that she had recently discussed with the Committee on Priorities and Resources (CPR) plans to add the position of Provost to the administration; the CPR had been receptive to the proposal and expressed its support for moving forward with a search, she reported. The President informed the members that the College has engaged the search firm of Isaacson, Miller, which had assisted with the search for Amherst’s President, to work on the search for the Provost. She plans to share a description for the position with the Committee soon and looks forward to receiving the members’ feedback.

President Martin next informed the members that the College had been approached by a donor who, along with a small number of others, wishes to provide the financial support to renovate Pratt Field and Neuhoff-Lumley Track and to replace DeBevoise Fieldhouse. The President explained that the project had already been a priority of the athletics department before the proposal came forward and that, if not for the generosity of the donor, it would have been necessary for College funds to be dedicated to the project. The fieldhouse, she noted, is no longer a safe or adequate space, and the project, as envisioned, would replace it with a 15,000-square-foot new space that would be designed to be flexible and to accommodate men’s and women’s teams for fall and spring sports. The new fieldhouse would include locker spaces, medical treatment and equipment rooms, and restrooms. There would be a team video, meeting, and alumni gathering room as well, President Martin noted. The project would also provide a second multi-use, all-weather playing surface (replacing the current natural-grass Pratt Field) for seven varsity teams, as well as club and intramural teams, and improvements in visibility, lighting for evening practices and games, landscaping, access, and seating (the track would be inside the stands and the track and field would be lowered slightly to improve spectators’ views). President Martin explained that the project would also enhance the space for tailgating and ease congestion, and she said that the number of home seats in the stands (though not the overall number of seats) would be increased. Traffic flow would be improved, and the number of cars would be reduced when games were not under way, as students would no longer drive to practice using Hitchcock Road, Orchard Street, or Woodside Avenue, since vehicles would access the new fieldhouse from Northampton Road.

After meeting with the donor, President Martin said that she had agreed that, if a number of conditions were met, the project would likely be able to move forward. She outlined these conditions for the Committee. Consultation with the Committee of Six would be required, as would the support of the Board of Trustees. The College would have full control of all aspects of the design process, and any designs would need to retain the essential aesthetic characteristics of the 121-year-old Pratt Field and the surrounding topography. To this end, it had been agreed that the size, scale, and material palette of any new Pratt Field would be very similar to the historic field. In addition, as part of the renovation, the track would need to be redesigned and rebuilt so as to meet International Association of Athletics Federation standards, which would allow Amherst to host track meets once again (the current track cannot be used for competition since the grandstands are on the inside of the track), President Martin said. Finally, the project would have to be fully funded by donors whose gifts would not detract from other College priorities. President Martin explained that, since it now appears that all of these conditions will

Amended April 11, 2012

be met, she intends to discuss the project with the Board at its meetings on March 29 and to share preliminary designs with the Trustees, noting that, in January, she had informed the Board about the possibility of moving forward with the project. Now that the improvements seem to be a realistic possibility, she had decided to inform the Committee of Six about these plans. After providing the outline of the project, the President showed the members the preliminary designs, which they agreed are impressive and in keeping with the present aesthetic.

Continuing the conversation, President Martin said that the goal would be to complete the project by August 2013, so that the new facilities could be in use for the 2013 athletic season. To do so, the final design, permitting, and approval process would have to be completed this spring. She noted that Suzanne Coffey, Director of Athletics, and Jim Brassord, Director of Facilities and Associate Treasurer for Campus Services, would meet with neighbors in the area of the field in small groups to review the project, offering information on lighting and landscaping, in particular. The lights that are being envisioned for the field are of a sophisticated design that would focus light only on the field, effectively limiting the amount of light that would spill over. The schedule for when the lights would be on for practices and games would be shared, as would some options for landscaping which could shield the neighbors' views of the field.

President Martin next discussed with the members the possibility of establishing a humanities center at the College. She noted that Dean Call had developed a strategy, which includes making use of space within the Frost Library, that could make it possible to launch such a center relatively soon, perhaps by the fall of 2013. The Dean explained that this year's faculty recruitment process will result in the appointment of four scholars who are in the early stages of their careers to post-doctoral positions at Amherst for next year, as well as the appointment of a pre-doctoral Five College Fellow at the College. These five young scholars will join two colleagues who will be in the second year of their postdoc at Amherst. With this cohort of colleagues, it may be possible to orient the humanities center around a theme, to support both the research and teaching of current Amherst faculty, as well as to foster diversity within the Faculty—by bringing scholars to Amherst early in their careers and supporting their research endeavors in myriad ways, among them offering opportunities for participation in a humanities center and reduced teaching loads. The Dean explained that having six to eight such scholars on campus and involving other visiting colleagues, for example Copeland Fellows who come to the College for a year to explore a common theme, would provide the foundation (and, in the case of the Copeland Fund, additional financial support) for a substantive program.

Continuing the conversation, Dean Call noted that the recent temporary move of members of the English department to Frost Library, which had been necessitated by a flood in Johnson Chapel, has resulted in some interesting observations. It has become clear that the library has been enriched through hosting colleagues from English, becoming more of a hub of the intellectual life on campus, and that many aspects of the arrangement have worked quite well. In addition, seminars are being held in the "Friendly Reading Room," and the new library café is being enjoyed by many and has become a new place for members of the College community to congregate on campus. The Dean said that, as a result of this series of events, it seems clear that the library, at least for an initial period, would be a viable location for a humanities center. Bryn Geffert, Librarian of the College, has expressed enthusiasm for hosting the center. Dean Call said that it is his hope that, when the English department returns to Johnson Chapel, plans for a humanities center could move forward, a process that he envisions would take seven months or so. In response to questions about the level of support that is

Amended April 11, 2012

available for post-doctoral positions, Dean Call responded that there is currently funding available from the Mellon-Keiter endowment to support three post-doctoral positions at a time (each appointment is for two years). He has gathered support for an additional three postdocs, in addition to support that might be used from the Copeland Fund and discretionary funds. The Dean said that he would anticipate that, to support a sufficient cohort of post-docs for the center on an ongoing basis, additional funding would need to be raised. Funding sources could likely be found, he believes. The members discussed how best to move forward with a center. Would the Committee of Six or another faculty group help develop the center, for example? Professor Hewitt suggested that colleagues who are exploring this year's Copeland theme, which is concerned with the future of the humanities, could contribute in helpful ways to the planning for the center. Professor Basu asked if the possibility of creating a center that promotes interdisciplinary research and teaching both in the humanities and in the "soft" social sciences has been considered. She noted that area studies departments, in particular, are in need of support for research, as external support for these interdisciplinary endeavors has been significantly reduced in recent years. Professor Hewitt noted that colleagues from Political Science have been among those participating in the Future of the Humanities Copeland Colloquium, as their research is interdisciplinary and can have a humanities focus. President Martin said that no decisions have yet been made about any parameters for the center, including any intellectual or field-based boundaries. She said that she would welcome proposals for the center, including the idea of incorporating the social sciences. Professor Loinaz asked if there might be a lack of coherence if the social sciences became part of a "humanities" center. Professor Hewitt expressed the view that moving in such a direction would not necessarily result in a lack of focus.

Professor Ferguson commented that he favors establishing a center and believes that doing so will be a way of knitting faculty together through their teaching and scholarship. The Committee agreed that an Amherst humanities center could be developed on an intellectual model that would not be discipline-based, but that would emphasize the intersections of knowledge. Such a center would have the potential to be innovative and to benefit faculty and students, the members agreed. A focus on the ways that teaching and research inform and strengthen one another should also be a hallmark of the center and would encourage elevated conversations about pedagogy that would not necessarily be rooted in fields, Professor Ferguson commented. Professor Basu said that, in addition to providing a space in which to discuss teaching, she would welcome the creation of an enhanced environment for research that a center could provide. Professor Hewitt commented that she has found the discussions that have taken place as part of the Copeland Colloquium this year to be energizing, noting that these conversations have focused on broad intellectual issues that are not field based. President Martin said that it would be her hope, if the Faculty support such an initiative, to approach granting agencies for funding for such a center, including for post-doctoral fellows. Another project for which external support might be pursued, she said, is the development of first-year courses that build on the First-Year Seminars' emphases on writing and discussion, furthering in specific ways the academic foundation that would enable Amherst students to better navigate and take fuller advantage of the open curriculum.

Under "Announcements from the Dean," Dean Call discussed with the members anticipated senior hires that have resulted from this year's faculty searches, and the process and schedule for tenuring them this spring. There may be additional senior hires, he noted. The Committee then nominated colleagues to serve on ad hoc tenure committees. Dean Call said that

Amended April 11, 2012

he was delighted to report that Gayle Barton has accepted the appointment of Chief Information Officer (CIO) at the College and that, pending Board approval, she will start work at Amherst on July 1. The members then voted to approve the minutes of February 27.

Under "Questions from Committee Members," Professor Ferguson asked whether the President and the Dean had considered whether it would be possible to provide course reductions for members of the Committee of Six, and for other faculty who assume substantial administrative and service burdens. Dean Call said that course reductions have been granted to members of the Committee of Six on two occasions because of the large number of tenure cases that were to be reviewed. Professor Ferguson expressed the view that reducing by one course per semester the teaching load of members of the Committee of Six would facilitate the work of the Committee more generally. He said that he has found that teaching and/or scholarship must be sacrificed to meet the demands that the Committee imposes. Professor Hewitt said that an alternative would be to divide the work of the Committee between two committees. Professor Umphrey asked what the avenue would be for making a proposal for a course reduction for members of the Committee of Six. Professor Basu noted that she has raised this issue before and is also unsure of how a solution should be pursued. She commented that the work of the College is distributed inequitably, with some colleagues assuming more of the burdens of chairing departments, overseeing searches, and serving on major committees than others, with a cost to the individuals' ability to pursue their research. Dean Call asked if the members were proposing that only members of the Committee of Six be eligible for course reductions or whether course reductions should be offered for other responsibilities with substantial workloads, such as chairing the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP), for example. President Martin said that course relief is an administrative issue with a number of implications, among them funding. She expressed the view that the Committee of Six has a vast workload and said that she would support course reductions for its members. Professor Umphrey said that she would like to make a formal request that the administration consider the question of course relief. The President said that the issue of course relief, as a general matter beyond providing it for members of the Committee of Six, should be a part of the long-range planning process. She said that she would ensure that this question would be part of that process. The members next reviewed a draft agenda for a possible Faculty Meeting for April 3 and agreed that there was insufficient business to have a meeting.

At 5:00 P.M., Associate Dean Griffiths joined the meeting to continue the discussion about the need to develop college-wide learning goals for inclusion in the five-year reaccreditation report that the College will submit in January 2013 to the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEAS&C). Associate Dean Griffiths began the conversation by noting that, at this point, two-thirds of departments have submitted learning goals for their majors. He has been impressed with the thoughtfulness with which these goals have been developed and articulated, and gratified by departments' responsiveness to this project, he said. Associate Dean Griffiths noted that college-wide goals are on two levels (combined in some institutions): institutional goals address the lifelong and social impact of the whole college experience. These goals are aspirational and should be derived from the mission statement. By contrast, the general education goals are more narrowly academic and should be more operationally oriented, he said. The Faculty voted such goals in 1977 and revised them slightly in 1993 as a recommendation about six areas of study that students and advisors should consider. This advisory has fallen out of use, and since 1998 the College has been on notice from NEAS&C about the need to adopt and use meaningful goals, Associated Dean Griffiths noted.

Amended April 11, 2012

These goals need to be communicated to students explicitly and publicly, and they need to be constructed in a way that will enable students' progress toward achieving them to be measured and assessed, Associate Dean Griffiths noted.

The Committee wondered if two proposals for Amherst's institutional and general education learning goals should be brought to the Faculty. One could be the approach that has been suggested by Associate Dean Griffiths and endorsed by the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP), which would represent a modest change to the College Catalogue that would replace the current list of six advising areas with language that references the mission statement and that should meet the reaccreditation association's expectations concerning goals for general education and institutional learning goals. The other proposal might make use of richer, more aspirational, and more descriptive language to articulate fuller institutional and general education goals that are more reflective of the institution. Professor Ferguson noted that a good deal of less generic and more aspirational language is embedded in the department's learning goals, which is positive. Dean Call wondered if commonalities could be extracted from departmental learning goals to form a basis of general education and institutional learning goals. Some members of the Committee expressed support for this approach. Associate Dean Griffiths discussed with the members the challenges of adopting more intricate and numerous learning goals and, more significantly, he said, of making use of such goals and capabilities—and of assessing whether progress is being made on meeting them. He offered examples of peer institutions that have developed elaborate institutional learning goals, but have found, on a pragmatic level, that they cannot make use of the goals as part of their advising process. These institutions have faced challenges in assessing whether students are making progress toward such goals and/or whether students are developing identified capabilities as a result of their experiences at their institutions. Associate Dean Griffiths stressed that the revision to the Catalogue language that he has proposed, while minimalistic, would be viable, could be used in advising, and would enable the College to meet the requirements for the five-year report. Fuller consideration of general education and institutional goals will be needed before the decennial review in 2018, he said, but such a process will take time and would probably require that a curriculum committee be formed. In terms of adopting more aspirational and lyrical language for the goals, Professor Griffiths noted that sometimes sparer more concrete language is preferable, particularly for general education goals that must address capabilities (e.g., breadth of study and writing and quantitative skills) that NEAS&C requires. He offered as an example the Faculty's revision/reduction of the description of the First-Year Seminar (The new language is in bold face below and appears in the College Catalogue 2011-2012, pp. 71-72). The new compressed language has proven to be more helpful in guiding faculty who teach the seminars and in assessing students' learning, he noted.

#### THE LIBERAL STUDIES CURRICULUM

Under a curriculum adopted in 1996, the first-year students are required to take a First-Year Seminar. These courses are planned and taught by one or more members of the Faculty as a way to introduce students to liberal studies through a range of innovative and often interdisciplinary approaches. The subject matter of the courses varies, as do the capabilities they seek to encourage. ~~These range from writing, quantitative skills, scientific reasoning, oral presentation, and argumentation, to performing, creating and contemplative learning. All seminar instructors share the goal of helping students develop an analytic approach to the course material. Through these classes, first-year students are~~

Amended April 11, 2012

~~exposed to the diversity of learning that takes place at the College. Small groups of students work closely with professors in a collaborative atmosphere and immerse themselves deeply in the course's particular subject matter. Typically, informed discussion is a major component of a first-year seminar.~~ **All courses have an enrollment limit of 15 students and provide discussion-based classes, writing-attentive instruction with frequent and varied assignments, close reading and critical interpretation of written texts, and careful attention to the analysis of argument in speech and writing.** The courses offered for 2011-12 are described on pages 78-88.

Continuing the conversation, Associate Dean Griffiths noted that at the decennial review in 2008, NEAS&C stipulated that the College should have adopted learning goals and should report on the results of assessing them already in the interim report, due in January of 2013. In 2011, NEAS&C introduced a new "educational effectiveness" format for the five-year report, which does not allow for much in the way of narrative and requires an evidence-based and assessment-oriented approach, he informed the members. Benchmarks must be offered, and improvement over time should be demonstrated. It is important to show that there is a commitment to analysis and evidence under this model, he noted. More than half of institutions are now asked to provide additional information on a shorter clock following their decennial reviews, he said. In light of NEAS&C'S recent raising of the standards for learning assessment and for reporting, a major institutional effort will be needed to make a full assessment plan operational by the time of the next decennial review in 2018.

Professor Umphrey asked how the goals that Associate Dean Griffiths had described would be assessed. Transcript analysis, and portfolio review (plans are in place to develop a pilot portfolio review project), surveys, and systematic reports of the strengths and weaknesses in capstone courses are among the tools that can be used, he responded. President Martin expressed the view that, since it is difficult to measure much of what might be articulated in institutional goals, it would be best to make them full and aspirational. She commented that, in her visits to departments, she has learned first-hand that there is evidence of curricular and pedagogical change across departments, noting that this and other information of this sort will be articulated and reported. The President suggested that learning goals for general education should be derived from what the College works hard to do (in regard to the curriculum, teaching, involving students in research, etc.), thereby making the goals reflective of the institution. Professor Umphrey expressed some concern about the possible implications of adopting the goals that Associate Dean Griffiths had described, noting that she would worry that the goals might come to serve as the basis of how advising would be done at the College in ways that don't speak to the way Faculty teach.

President Martin commented that the institutions with which NEAS&C is concerned differ greatly from one another, but that the accrediting agency has only one set of standards that apply to all. In her view, the goals that Amherst develops must be specific to the College, meaningful, and must represent Amherst's unique strengths. The Committee discussed whether the goals might be seen as providing a guidepost to students for navigating the open curriculum and for their advisors. Professor Ratner commented on a proposal that had been made at one time that, at the conclusion of their first and second years at the College, students could be asked to reflect on their education during the year that had just concluded and to write a summary of what they felt that they had learned. Such a summary could then be discussed with the student's

Amended April 11, 2012

advisor. Professor Basu suggested that energy be devoted to developing goals, incorporating them into the advising system, and assessing student progress toward them. The Committee thanked Dean Griffiths, and he left the meeting at 6:25 P.M.

In the time remaining, the Committee discussed whether the Ad Hoc Committee on Advising may be considering how to integrate learning goals into the advising process at the College. Professor Ratner said that he understands that the advising committee is focused on the more structural aspects of advising. The Committee asked the Dean to request information from the committee about whether they have focused on the implications that their discussions might have on learning goals. He agreed to do so.

The meeting adjourned at 6:40 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Gregory S. Call  
Dean of the Faculty