

Amended April 25, 2012

The twenty-fourth meeting of the Committee of Six for the academic year 2011-2012 was called to order by President Martin in the her office at 3:30 P.M. on Monday, April 2, 2012. Present were Professors Basu, Ferguson, Hewitt, Loinaz, Ratner, and Umphrey, Dean Call, and Assistant Dean Tobin, Recorder.

The members first discussed the Faculty Committee on Student Fellowships' nomination of three recent graduates of the College for Rufus B. Kellogg University Fellowships. The Dean asked if the Committee felt that it would be permissible for the students to be informed now that they would receive the fellowship, which support graduate study, pending the approval of the Faculty and the Board of Trustees. The members said that they would have no objection. The Committee raised some questions surrounding the apportionment of the funding, and the Dean agreed to ask for further information about how the funds would be distributed among the recipients.

The Committee next reviewed drafts of the Dean's letters to department chairs and candidates concerning reappointment and tenure that are sent to department chairs and candidates each spring. The members discussed possible refinements of the reappointment procedures, agreeing that it would be helpful for the Committee of Six to have additional information that could enhance the feedback that the members could provide about candidates' progress as scholars. The members agreed to stress in the letters to chairs of departments with candidates for reappointment the importance of ensuring a common understanding of plans and prospects that would help tenure-track members build their scholarship. The Committee noted that letters should convey to departments that they should place emphasis on reviewing and vetting candidates' scholarship and on sharing their assessment of the trajectory of the candidate in regard to scholarship, as they do with teaching, with the Committee of Six. The department's expectations about the candidate's scholarly productivity by the time of the tenure review would also be important to include. The Committee felt that it would be helpful if the candidate were invited to share with the Committee of Six the statement about scholarship and teaching that he or she is required to provide to the department as part of the reappointment process, or another statement that the candidate might prepare specifically for the Committee of Six. The members agreed that not only would this information inform the Committee's deliberations, but it would be valuable for the candidate.

Continuing, the members concurred that it would be beneficial if departments, in their departmental letter, provide a summary of any concerns that may have been shared with the candidate about teaching and/or scholarly progress. It was agreed that the department should also comment on how the candidate may have responded to this feedback, describing, for example, new approaches and/or adjustments that he or she may have implemented.

The members discussed the need to improve the substance and format of teaching evaluations, including how students' responses might be better organized, as well as the possibility of incorporating a numeric scale for responses to some questions. Professor Ratner suggested organizing students' responses by grouping them by question. The possibility of offering departments two or three templates for teaching evaluation formats and questions, from which they could choose, could be helpful to the Committee of Six. Carefully developed forms with greater commonality would assist the members with comparisons of teaching records across cases. Professor Ferguson suggested that the Committee might read a random sampling of evaluations, rather than the full set of evaluations. Professor Umphrey saw difficulties with taking such an approach. Dean Call expressed the view that it would be helpful if the tenured faculty who are reading teaching evaluations also saw evaluations of their own teaching regularly. Doing so could be helpful to senior colleagues in calibrating how the teaching evaluations of tenure-track colleagues are interpreted, he noted. Some members of the

Amended April 25, 2012

Committee agreed. Professor Loinaz commented that some tenure-track faculty have told him that they find it helpful when senior colleagues who have served on the Committee of Six offer their perspectives on the substance of teaching evaluations and how the Committee of Six might view them. The Committee agreed to have a broader conversation in the future about the issue of teaching evaluations.

Turning to the topic of annual conversations between department chairs and tenure-track faculty, the members stressed the importance of ensuring that these conversations occur each year and are meaningful. It was agreed that the Dean should send departments an annual reminder of the need to have the conversations. Professor Basu commented that, since the chairmanship rotates frequently among departmental members, it is helpful for chairs to keep notes of the conversations in the department's files so that future chairs may have access to them to inform themselves about past conversations and feedback that has been given to a tenure-track colleague. The members felt that it would be helpful to develop a set of best practices for chairs, perhaps creating an "online toolkit."

At the conclusion of the discussion about the reappointment process, the members agreed to draft a motion to bring to the Faculty to revise the relevant section of the *Faculty Handbook* (III., D., 4.) so as to offer candidates for reappointment the option of submitting a single letter to their department(s) and the Committee of Six, which would become part of the reappointment dossier, or a letter to his or her department(s), which would not be shared with the Committee of Six, and a separately composed letter for the Committee of Six. This letter to the Committee of Six would also be shared with the department and would become part of the reappointment dossier. In either case, candidates would be asked to address their teaching experience at the College, the present state of their scholarship or creative work and their aims and plans for the future, and their engagement in College life. The letter or letters would serve as the basis for a conversation between the candidate and tenured members of the department/s before the department meets to finalize the reappointment recommendation. It was noted that, when the Faculty voted in 2005 to require candidates for reappointment to write a letter as part of the process, it had been agreed that the letter would be for the department only and would not become part of the reappointment dossier.

President Martin next offered a summary of what had transpired at the meetings and retreat of the Board of Trustees, which had been held in New York March 29-March 31. As she had noted earlier, the focus of the retreat was admissions, the make-up of the student body, and students' experiences at Amherst. Cornell University sociologist David Harris, Senior Associate Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Cornell, provided the Board with national data on diversity, including a brief history of Supreme Court decisions on affirmative action, and led a discussion with the Board, which had been informative and very well received. Amherst data were presented on the following four aspects of diversity that Dean Harris had introduced: the changing composition of Amherst's student body over time; academic achievement; the campus "climate" beyond the classroom; and how much Amherst students interact and what they learn in the process. How the classroom and student life outside the classroom work together was explored, as were questions about whether the evidence that had been gathered to inform the retreat points to "achievement gaps" of any sort. The President said that there are indications that subtle gaps in achievement among students from different groups exist at the College, and that exploring ways of further supporting students could increase their success, particularly if students want to pursue certain fields of study or particular paths through the curriculum, for example the courses needed to fulfill premedical requirements. A good deal of conversation at the retreat had focused on the co-curriculum and the question of how Amherst can take greater advantage of students' diverse backgrounds. Initiatives at Amherst and at peer institutions that

Amended April 25, 2012

offer evidence of enriching students' experience were offered, President Martin explained. Much of the discussion also focused on the composition of the student body, and some Trustees wondered whether there should be more representation from the third and fourth quintiles of income, which they saw as representing the middle class, generally. President Martin noted that income does not take wealth into account and thus may not be the best measure when trying to gain a sense of the socioeconomic profile of families with college-age children. Dean Call said that he has done a quick analysis of the student body's income distribution. About eight hundred students, who do not receive financial aid, represent families in the top income quintile. The remaining one thousand or so Amherst students, who receive financial aid, (so information on their families' financial profile is available), are fairly evenly distributed across income quintiles.

Continuing with the summary of the retreat and meetings of the Board, President Martin noted that Tom Parker, Dean of Admission and Financial Aid, shed light on the admission process at the College. As part of his presentation, Board members had been asked to fill out a portion of the Admitted Student Questionnaire that is given to all admitted students. The Trustees were asked to make comparisons between Amherst and a small group of peer institutions as part of their responses. The Board's answers were then analyzed by the College Board, which provided a report of the results as an aggregate the next day. The exercise suggested that Board members, as revealed by their responses, are very proud of Amherst College. Admitted students, while rating Amherst highly, had a greater range of responses when comparing Amherst to peer institutions, President Martin commented. Conversations with the Trustees at the retreat also demonstrated that they are supportive of initiatives that promote curricular innovation and are receptive to proposals that the College develop strategic plans for student life and communications. The President said that the information gleaned from the retreat, including the sense of support for particular strategies and initiatives, will be among the many and varied factors that inform the process of setting priorities for the anticipated long-range planning process. President Martin also noted that the Board had been enthusiastic about plans to renovate Pratt Field and Neuhoff-Lumley Track and had reviewed preliminary designs at the retreat. She said that she was pleased to report to the Board, and is now delighted to share with the Committee, that the project will be fully funded by new gifts from donors who are not prospects for gifts to our academic priorities.

Under "Announcements from the Dean," Dean Call asked the members to review a draft agenda for a Faculty Meeting for April 17. The Committee agreed that there was insufficient business for a meeting. Dean Call next reported back on discussions that he had had with Professor O'Hara about the work of the Ad Hoc Advising Committee. Professor O'Hara, co-chair of the committee, had informed him that its members are not focusing on the question of how to integrate learning goals into the advising process, as they do not see that specifically as part of their charge. Instead the committee is concentrating on ways to enhance equity among advisors in terms of the number of advisees for which each faculty member is responsible, and on enhancing the quality of advising and the relationship between students and their advisors. The Dean said that the Ad Hoc Advising Committee may offer a preliminary report during the Commencement Faculty Meeting. The Dean noted that Associate Dean Griffiths has made revisions in the language that he had provided to the Committee about learning goals. Dean Call informed the members that the new proposal would be provided to the Committee for discussion at the April 16 meeting.

Under "Questions from Committee Members," Professor Basu asked if the President and the Dean had learned if there had been a response to Dean Hart's email addressing the issue of sexual assaults on campus and whether efforts have been made to determine how pervasive assaults are on campus. President Martin and Dean Call said that they have not yet had the

Amended April 25, 2012

opportunity to discuss the responses to the email with Dean Hart, but said that they intend to do so. Dean Call noted that administrators have been receiving Title IX training about best practices and responsibilities in addressing sexual misconduct and other issues, and that he has found this educational initiative to be most helpful. President Martin said that the Senior Staff and she would be reviewing current policies and procedures in regard to sexual misconduct.

Continuing with “Questions from Committee Members,” Professor Umphrey noted that she had read in the local press that the Little Red Schoolhouse would be permitted to continue operations in its current location for the next academic year and wondered about that announcement’s relation to plans for the new science center. President Martin noted that a shift in the construction schedule had made it possible for the school to stay on campus in its current facility for the 2012-2013 year only. The remainder of the meeting was devoted to personnel matters.

The meeting adjourned at 6:50 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Gregory S. Call  
Dean of the Faculty