

Amended May 5, 2008

The twenty-fifth 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, April 7, 2008. Present were Professors Frank, S. George, Jagannathan, O'Hara, Servos, and Sinos, Dean Call, President Marx, and Assistant Dean Tobin, Recorder.

The meeting began with announcements from the President. President Marx said that, in light of the recent vote by the Faculty to add another standing committee (the Committee on International Education) to the roster of faculty committees, knowing that some proposals for other new committees are already under discussion, and recognizing the burden that committee service places on the Faculty, he would like to discuss ways to re-configure the committee architecture at the College. The goal would be to ensure appropriate faculty oversight, while improving efficiency and thereby reducing the time that faculty members must take away from their teaching and scholarship to devote to committee service. Past attempts to eliminate or combine committees have not enabled the governance process to overcome encumbrances and have not provided the Faculty with relief from the demands of committee service, he noted. President Marx suggested that the Dean and he, taking a broad perspective, consider how committee structures might be re-conceived and re-structured, and that they develop a proposal that would be brought to the Committee of Six for discussion.

While in favor of the idea of enhancing the efficiency of faculty governance, some members cautioned President Marx that possible solutions, such as combining committees, might make matters worse, particularly if issues such as committee workloads, rather than the number of committees, lie at the heart of the problem. Professor Sinos commented that she is not in favor of eliminating, or combining with other committees, all committees that are not active right now. If, for example, an issue of concern to the Faculty regarding housing arises, a housing committee should be in place, she said. Professor Servos noted that it is difficult to predict the workload of committees. While a certain committee might have a light workload for an extended period, if a major issue comes up that falls within its purview, the workload may increase dramatically and abruptly. He noted, for example, that, up until 1997, when the Faculty Committee on Admission on Financial Aid (FCAFA) was asked to review the role of athletics in the admission process, service on the FCAFA was not too demanding. The workload of that committee increased in response to that assignment, and it has continued to have a heavy workload since that time. Professor Servos commented that the workloads of other committees, such as the Fellowships Committee, have simply grown over time in response to the needs of students—in the case of fellowship applications—or the College. Professor George said that chairing a department can present more of a burden than committee service. Professor Jagannathan commented that the number of faculty members who are available for committee service has been reduced as more faculty colleagues join the administration, and he questioned the necessity of taking so many colleagues out of the classroom for this purpose. President Marx responded that, despite recent and much-needed additions, Amherst's administration remains the leanest among the College's peers, and highly integrated with the Faculty, which is a strength. Professor O'Hara said that she thinks it would be beneficial to consider how committees might be re-shaped, particularly in the context of the College's new programs and new directions. With the Committee's support, President Marx said that the Dean and he would consider the College's committee structure. The other members agreed.

President Marx next raised concern about the number of students in classes at the College that have enrollments of more than fifty. The President noted that, in the current

Amended May 5, 2008

academic year, some 12.5 percent (fall) to 15.5 percent (spring) of Amherst's enrollments were in courses of this size. It is open for debate as to whether having students learning in too many large courses is consistent with the aspirations and values of a small liberal arts college, and he wondered if capping the enrollments of Amherst courses at fifty might be a step that should be considered. President Marx said that, if all courses had enrollment limits of fifty, only about 4.4 percent of students would not get in to courses that they want to take because of enrollment caps, but a greater breadth of the curriculum would be available to students.

Continuing the conversation, Professor George asked if the statistics that the President had cited about the total enrollment in Amherst courses with enrollments of more than fifty students included the lab sections of classes in the sciences that combine lectures with lab sections. He noted that, while lectures may be given to a class of many students, the lab sections typically have small enrollments. President Marx said that the numbers that he quoted did not include large introductory science classes that were then broken down into smaller lab sections. The President wondered whether some students might be taking a disproportionate number of courses with large enrollments. Professor Jagannathan suggested that it would be useful to track this information, by student, to get a sense of the distribution of large and small courses within a student's portfolio over four years at Amherst. Dean Call noted that, a few years ago, the Registrar's office conducted a study that was aimed at getting a sense of the student experience by examining the number of large and small classes being taken by individual students. Professor Servos commented that, as an advisor, he feels confident that students will have an excellent experience in some large classes, just as they will in some small classes, and he feels comfortable recommending both kinds of classes. He believes that the quality of the course is not a function of its size. Professor Jagannathan commented that there are some popular large classes that have become part of the fabric of the Amherst experience. Students who have taken these classes share a bond, and these classes, for this reason, serve the institutional purpose of providing a common experience that unites students and alumni. President Marx argued that there is no reason that students cannot have a similar sort of bonding experience in small discussion classes, and agreed that large courses can be excellent, though trade-offs remain.

The Committee next discussed the need to return to some remaining agenda items for the year. Professor Frank said that she is interested in returning to the topic of the future of the humanities at the College. President Marx reiterated his interest in reviewing the current system of teaching evaluation for tenure-track faculty. At the Committee's request, the Dean agreed to review the unfinished business list with the members at the next meeting as a means of prioritizing agenda items for the remaining meetings.

Under "Questions from Committee Members," Professor George asked about long-term plans for the directorship of the Writing Center. Dean Call said that Professor Barale has agreed to serve as the director for one year. He noted that a long-term plan is not yet in place, and that the administration is open to considering different models and proposals. Professor Frank commented that the Department of English plans to invite experts in the field to come to campus to discuss a variety of approaches to structuring writing centers and to teaching writing. The Dean noted that the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) has been, and will continue to be, a part of the conversation about writing instruction. President Marx noted that some hybrid models have been proposed that would involve having a small number of compositionists support the Faculty in the teaching of writing. If such a model is adopted, faculty would be involved in the selection process for such individuals.

Amended May 5, 2008

Professor O'Hara next asked whether the administration plans to assess the outcomes of the President's Initiative Fund for Interdisciplinary Curricular Projects (PIF), a program that has now come to an end. The Dean noted that, while the PIF projects covered a wide spectrum of topics and encompassed a variety of approaches, he feels that all of the projects were valuable and brought new energy into the curriculum.

The members reviewed seven course proposals and agreed that they should be included among the courses for pre-registration, with the notation that faculty approval of them is pending. They also voted to forward the proposals to the Faculty.

Dean Call next asked the members to discuss two letters from Professor Ferguson, Chair of the College Council, which were distributed at the last meeting. The first letter outlined the committee's review of the Honor Code and included their recommendation that the Committee of Six forward to the Faculty a motion to renew the Honor Code for an additional four-year period. The other letter described the College Council's consideration of a draft of a three-year college calendar that would take effect in 2009-2010, and included a recommendation that the Committee of Six forward the draft calendar to the Faculty for approval. The College Council noted that the new calendar includes shortened reading periods (from three days to two) in the fall semester in two of the three years, as a result of the lateness of the dates on which Labor Day falls in those years. Dean Call noted that the calendar also includes a shortened add/drop period (to about ten days), a change that was recommended by the CEP and supported by the Five-College Deans and Registrars.

Professor George expressed concern that, in the fall of 2009, the proposed schedule included examinations through December 23. Bad weather resulting in delayed or cancelled flights could lead to some students not being able to leave campus by December 25. As a possible solution, the members wondered if the final exam schedule could, perhaps, be condensed, or the fall break shortened, to provide more of a cushion. Professor Jagannathan wondered if the College might begin the fall semester before Labor Day if Labor Day is very late. Providing additional information, the Dean said that, as has always been the case, an attempt would be made to schedule as few exams as possible on the final day of exams. He noted that the University may begin nearly two weeks earlier than the Five College Consortium's colleges in Spring 2012. President Marx said that he would like to learn the full details of UMass's plans before the Amherst Faculty votes on the calendar, although, he noted that Amherst could always approve the calendar this year and then vote revisions to it at a later date, if necessary. The Dean noted that, in 2006-2007, Professors Barale and K. Sweeney, as representatives of the College Council, were part of a four-college group that was charged with informing the university, before its faculty voted on the calendar question, of the views of the other members of the consortium regarding the calendar issue.

President Marx reiterated that he would be interested in confirming UMass's intentions and to know whether shortening Interterm might be under their consideration. Amherst might also wish to consider this option, he noted. Professors George, Jagannathan, and O'Hara noted that having an extended period of time in January to focus on thesis work is essential for students who are doing honors theses in the sciences. President Marx wondered about the adverse effects for such students if a week were cut from the Interterm period and added to spring break. An alternative might be to shorten Interterm and end the year a week earlier. Professor Frank said that she relies on the long break during January to recoup energy and to prepare for the spring semester. After some discussion, the Committee asked Dean Call to bring their concerns about

Amended May 5, 2008

the calendar proposal back to the College Council for additional consideration. He agreed to do so. The members next voted five in favor and zero opposed, with one abstention (Professor Jagannathan) on the substance of the College Council's motion that the Faculty renew the Honor Code, without modification, for another four years, until September 2012. The Committee voted six in favor and zero opposed to forward the motion to the Faculty. The members also agreed that the next Faculty Meeting should be held on May 6. The members spent the time remaining for the meeting on a personnel matter.

The meeting adjourned at 6:00 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Gregory S. Call

Dean of the Faculty