

Amended May 5, 2008

The twenty-sixth meeting of the Committee of Six for the academic year 2007-2008 was called to order by President Marx in his office at 3:00 P.M. on Wednesday, April 16, 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 Dean Call noting that discussions are continuing at the Five-College level about changes to the Five-College calendar that the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, is contemplating, including reducing the length of Interterm by six days. President Marx, who noted that the College and other members of the consortium have an interest in schedule coordination, said that he plans to discuss this and related calendar matters with the Five-College presidents. The Committee next reviewed course proposals and voted to forward them to the Faculty. Under "Announcements from the Dean, Dean Call reviewed with the members remaining Committee of Six agenda items for this academic year. He noted that the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) is considering a proposal to modify the honors system. If the CEP develops a proposal, it will be forwarded to the Committee of Six, the Dean noted. A question brought to the attention of the Committee by Professor Gentzler is also on the docket, the Dean noted. Professor Gentzler raised concern that, given the socioeconomic diversity of the student body, the institution should be cognizant of the ways in which economic hardships faced by students from less economically advantaged backgrounds may create difficulties for them academically. She pointed out that these students may be less well prepared academically and may need to spend more time on their assignments, but may also have less time available to spend on their academic work than their more privileged peers because of their need to work to help support themselves and, sometimes, their families. Professor Gentzler suggested that the College consider ways of offering students additional time to complete academic work, offering as a proposal that the College make available to Amherst students, who, because of demonstrated financial hardship have "compelling employment responsibilities," the option to carry a reduced course load. She noted that this option is currently open to students who have a physical disability or a compelling family responsibility (see Amherst College 2007-2008 Catalog, page 68). To inform the future conversation about this issue, the Committee asked the Dean to ask Ben Lieber, Dean of Students, about the frequency with which his office grants petitions for this option and the typical circumstances, and for Dean Lieber's view of the idea of extending this option to students who meet the criteria described by Professor Gentzler. The Dean agreed to do so. The Committee said that it would also consider whether this matter might be referred to the Faculty Committee on Admission and Financial Aid (FCFA) or the College Council.

Returning to other possible agenda items for the Committee to consider, the Dean mentioned the issue of the format and manner of collection of course evaluations for tenure-track faculty members. The members agreed that it would increase efficiency during the tenure review process if departments would develop online forms for students. To ensure full student participation, the members suggested that a student's grades be withheld until he or she completes and submits course evaluation forms. They also agreed that each department should continue to develop its own forms. The Dean said that he would be pleased to work with

Amended May 5, 2008

departments to determine the best way to move to an online system and to provide the necessary support for doing so.

The members returned briefly to a discussion of ways in which faculty committees might be re-structured. The Dean and the President wondered if having a small number of committees might be preferable to the current structure of having many different committees with narrower charges. While service on such committees would be a substantial commitment, such service would be limited to a relatively small number of faculty members each year. Members of the committees could serve two- or three-year terms, and would then be free from committee service for a number of years, as service on the committees rotated among the Faculty. Professor Frank pointed out that there is often a learning curve of several years for the current, more important committees, noting that colleagues would cycle off the committees just as they had mastered their roles. The Dean commented that members' terms would be staggered, as they are now for many committees. In any case, the dilemma of the learning curve is something that is faced under the current system and is a situation that will remain no matter what system of committee service is put in place. Professor Sinos asked if the faculty members have the sense that many of our colleagues feel that committee work is a problem at the College. She noted that, while some committees have heavy workloads, others do not, and furnish a way for faculty to come to know new colleagues. Professor Servos noted that many faculty members' feelings that they have been over-burdened over the past four or five years do not stem from complaints about committee service, but rather from the burdens imposed by activities such as the following: teaching intensive courses, serving on working groups, developing and participating in President Initiative Fund projects, and participating in numerous faculty searches, particularly for visitors. President Marx said that the activity over the past four or five years has indeed been extraordinary, but noted that the outcomes of these efforts have been substantial and positive, and that curricular development and scholarship should remain the focus of faculty efforts. He said that it is his hope that, once the new tenure-track faculty members have been allocated, there should be fewer searches for visitors. Dean Call noted that he has tried to be generous with visiting appointments to meet as fully as possible the needs and requests of Amherst departments. The Committee agreed that the President and the Dean should continue exploring the inefficiencies of the current committee structure with the aim of making improvements.

Under "Questions from Committee Members," Professor Jagannathan asked if the Dean planned to consult with the Committee of Six about any changes that he might anticipate in how the position of Associate Dean would be structured once Dean Griffiths steps down from this administrative post at the end of this academic year. Dean Call said that he has not made any appointments yet. Dean Basu will continue in her role as a half-time Associate Dean, he noted. Dean Call said that he is considering how best to use Dean Griffiths's position, which is a full FTE, and that he may appoint two half-time Associate Deans. In addition, Professor O'Hara (as of July 1) and Sarat will serve as Senior Advisors to the Dean for Academic Life. Professors Jagannathan and George expressed some concern that changing the full-time Associate Dean's position to two half-time positions would remove one additional colleague from the classroom and would necessitate hiring two visitors instead of one. The Committee, the President, and the

Amended May 5, 2008

Dean agreed that it is important that faculty members who enter the administration have a broad, College-wide perspective. The Dean said that, once he has firm commitments regarding the Associate Dean positions he would inform the Committee and the Faculty. Professor Jagannathan expressed the hope that in the future, as in the past, the Committee of Six would be consulted about such appointments as well as about the structure of the positions.

Turning to plans for the Faculty Meeting scheduled for May 6, Professor Frank noted that she had spoken with Professor Cobham-Sander, Special Assistant to the President for Diversity and author of the “Report to the President on Diversity and Inclusion at Amherst,” about ways to structure the Faculty’s discussion of that report, as well as of the report of the FCAFA, which is titled “A Complicated Success? Assessing Academic Qualifications and Their Place in the Intellectual Life of our Students, with Special Attention to Diversity Initiatives.” Professor Cobham-Sander felt that it would be beneficial to discuss the two reports as a single agenda item, since the two documents focus on related issues. The President and some Committee members felt that it might be confusing to structure discussion this way and recommended that the Dean discuss this matter with Professors Lembo and Cobham-Sander. He agreed.

The members then turned to personnel matters.

The meeting adjourned at 6:00 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Gregory S. Call
Dean of the Faculty