

Amended May 5, 2008

The twenty-seventh 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 Monday, April 28, 2008. Present were Professors Frank, S. George, Jagannathan, O'Hara, Servos, and Sinos, Dean Call, President Marx, and Assistant Dean Tobin, Recorder.

The Committee began the meeting by addressing a personnel matter. Under "Announcements from the President," President Marx expressed interest in exploring ways to shift the timing of some of the College obligations that occur on the Labor Day holiday, so that members of the Faculty can enjoy the holiday more fully. Convocation and the first Faculty Meeting of the new academic year are currently held on Labor Day, and Faculty have advising responsibilities, from 1:30 to 3:30, on the holiday, as well. The Committee discussed suggestions that included moving Convocation to a time after classes begin, re-scheduling the Faculty Meeting from the morning to the afternoon or evening of Labor Day, and re-scheduling the Faculty Meeting early in the semester other than Labor Day.

Professor Servos expressed strongly the sentiment that Convocation be held prior to the beginning of classes. He noted the ceremony's symbolic significance as the first time that first-year students gather to be welcomed formally to the College, as well as the fact that the speech given at Convocation is sometimes the subject of conversation at the first meeting of First-Year Seminars. Other members, the President, and the Dean agreed that Convocation should remain on Labor Day. The Committee expressed support for changing the time or day of the Faculty Meeting. President Marx noted that the only business that might necessitate having the meeting on Labor Day would be the late approval of fall courses. If a Faculty Meeting is held on Labor Day, the Committee agreed that it should be brief, and that it could be moved to 4:00 P.M.—soon after advising sessions for first-year students end at 3:30—or to the evening, right after Convocation, for example. The President thanked the members for their suggestions and said that he would consider this matter further and would report back to Committee.

Continuing his remarks, President Marx informed the Committee that he has been in discussions with attorney Paul Murphy '73, who has agreed to serve as a consultant two days a week at the College. The President said that he would like to experiment, on a limited basis, with the model of having in-house legal counsel at the College. He informed the members that he would like to invite Mr. Murphy to attend Faculty Meetings as an invited guest, and they agreed that doing so would be informative for this consultant.

Under "Announcements from the Dean," Dean Call informed the members that he has appointed Professor Courtright to be Associate Dean of the Faculty, half-time, beginning July 1, 2008. Professor Basu will continue as Associate Dean, half-time, as well. He said that plans to appoint an additional (half-time) Associate Dean in his office in the near future. The Dean also informed the members that he and Dean Lieber have appointed Professor Gentzler to be Interim Associate Director of the Writing Center. Professor Barale is Interim Director of the Writing Center.

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The Dean next reported back to the Committee about research he had done to follow up on Professor Gentzler's suggestion, and the Committee's discussion of her 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. 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). The Dean said that he had learned from Dean Lieber that two or three students a year (over the past ten years) have been allowed to carry a reduced course load under the option. Dean Lieber said that he would support extending the option to students who meet the criteria described by Professor Gentzler. After discussion, it was agreed that the current Catalog language is broad enough to allow the option to be extended, without making any changes in the wording. The Committee agreed that only a very small number of students should be allowed to carry a reduced course load, and that it could become problematic if the numbers grow too much beyond current levels. Professor Servos suggested that a faculty committee, perhaps the Committee on Academic Standing and Special Majors, should be made aware of the number of students whose petitions for a reduced course load are granted each year. Dean Call said that Dean Lieber, or perhaps the Registrar, could certainly provide a faculty committee with this information on an annual basis, and that a faculty committee could thus provide oversight for this process.

The members noted that Professor Rosbottom has raised concern (in an email that is appended to these minutes) that membership continuity on important faculty committees is being threatened because balloting for the Committee of Six "trumps" all other committee appointments. Professor O'Hara commented that the exemptions in regard to other committee service that are currently in place in regard to inclusion on the Committee of Six ballot—being a current or retiring member of the College Council or the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) during the election year (in addition to exemptions for current, retiring, and a specified group of retired Committee of Six members)—are no longer reflective of the demands placed on faculty who serve on these and other committees. The Committee agreed that the workload of the College Council was more demanding at the time the exemptions were established, for example. The workload of the Committee on Priorities and Resources (CPR) has increased since that time, and an exemption should perhaps be established for the current and retiring members of that committee, Professor O'Hara suggested. The members agreed to discuss this issue in the context of a broader conversation about faculty committees.

Under "Questions from Committee Members," Professor Jagannathan asked the Dean when information about next year's faculty salaries would be available. The Dean replied that salary information would be provided in May, after the Commencement meeting of the Board. In regard to staff salaries, President Marx noted that the College will be providing larger-than-usual salary increases to all staff, and additional raises to the lowest paid, in light of recent economic difficulties. The grades of some staff positions are also being adjusted. Professor Sinos said that she is pleased to see that Amherst is taking the lead in regard to raising staff salaries, and she expressed support for decreasing the compensation gap between faculty and non-faculty salaries at the College.

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The Committee next discussed a matter relating to a course proposal. Prompted by the members' discussion about a colleague's decision to include a warning about the inclusion of sensitive material as part of the content of the colleague's proposed course, the members agreed that faculty members should exercise their own judgment when it comes to warning students about sensitive material in a course, and that such warnings should not be mandated. The members agreed on revised language for the course. Professor George noted that providing warnings of this nature might be particularly important for First-Year Seminars, since students register for the seminars over the summer before they come to Amherst, without the guidance of the Faculty, and because it is very difficult for students to switch seminars once they enroll in one. Professor Jagannathan said that sensitive material is a "misplaced euphemism" and said that warnings of "potentially disturbing" content would be preferable. Professor Frank agreed. Continuing the conversation, Professor O'Hara noted that students expect to be challenged when they come to college, but that faculty should think carefully about the line between reasonable challenge and potentially explosive and disturbing content. She feels that, if the content of a course has the potential to be very disturbing, a warning about that content is appropriate. In regard to course proposals more generally, Professor Frank commented that descriptions seem to be getting longer. Professors George and O'Hara noted that faculty members who teach First-Year Seminars have been asked to provide as full a description as possible about course content, since students select the seminars without the benefit of faculty advising. The members then voted to forward the course proposals before them to the Faculty.

Returning to a discussion of the College Council's consideration of a draft of a three-year college calendar that would take effect in 2009-2010, Dean Call noted that he has been consulting with Professor Ferguson, Chair of the College Council, and Dean Lieber about the concern that the Fall 2009 term might end too late and that the University may begin thirteen days earlier than the consortium's colleges in Spring 2012. (As was noted during the Committee's discussion of this issue on April 7, the proposed schedule in Fall 2009 includes 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.) Dean Call noted that he had been invited to attend the next College Council meeting to discuss a proposal that fall break be shortened by one day so that an extra day would be provided at the end of the Fall 2009 term. The first Tuesday of the semester would also be re-defined as a Monday. Professors George, Jagannathan, and O'Hara expressed some concern that, if this re-definition occurs, the opportunity to offer labs Tuesday through Friday, during the first week of classes would be lost. Dean Call pointed out that the proposal would not entail re-defining the first Wednesday of the semester, as all recent College calendars have required, so regular Wednesday classes and labs would be held during the first week. Professors George, Jagannathan, and O'Hara agreed that, with enough forewarning, the lab schedule could be adjusted, and that doing so was preferable to retaining the current schedule for the fall semester of 2009.

Turning to plans for the Faculty Meeting scheduled for May 6, the Committee discussed how best to structure the discussion of the "Report to the President on Diversity and Inclusion at Amherst" and the report of the Faculty Committee on Admission and Financial Aid (FCFA),

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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.” The Dean noted that he had consulted with Professor Cobham-Sander and Professor Lembo, who felt that it would be beneficial to discuss the two reports as a single agenda item in a committee-of-the-whole format, since the two documents focus on related issues. Professor George asked whether any recommendations or action items might emerge from a committee-of-the-whole discussion. The members agreed that the reports raise very important issues that should be discussed by the Faculty. At the Committee’s request, the Dean agreed to speak with Professors Cobham-Sander and Lembo about how they envision coordinating the discussion of the two reports and about having them each provide brief and informal summary statements about their reports at the Faculty Meeting, before discussion begins. It was agreed that the committee-of-the-whole discussion should conclude by 9:15 P.M.

In the course of the conversation, it was also stressed that the FCAFA’s report contains sensitive and confidential information, and the Dean noted that the report had been posted online with password-protection, and that the Faculty had been informed that the report was posted online and that they could receive a hard copy of it, upon request. In addition, it was communicated that hard copies would be available at the Faculty Meeting. Several members noted that the FCAFA’s report was quite substantial and asked that the Dean send an email reminder to the Faculty that it was posted online and that hard copies were available. He agreed to do so.

The members next reviewed and voted to approve the following motion, which reflects and formalizes their earlier vote (six yes, zero no, to forward to the Faculty; five yes, zero no, one abstention (Jagannathan), on content) in regard to the honor code:

As recommended by the College Council, the Committee of Six moves that the Faculty renew, without modification, the Honor Code for the next four years (until September 2012). The Honor Code (Student Handbook, beginning on page 23, under “Student Rights and Policies”), which was first approved by the Faculty in December 2004, is appended [to the agenda].

The Committee next reviewed the full agenda for the Faculty Meeting of May 6 and voted six in favor and zero opposed to approve it.

The Committee turned to a discussion of committee assignments and ways of possibly restructuring faculty committees. Conversation focused first on a proposed new standing committee to advise the Center for Community Engagement (CCE). Currently, an informal advisory group serves this role. The members agreed that the committee should continue as an ad hoc group for another year. The members, the President, and the Dean stressed that the decision to delay the formation of a standing committee is by no means meant as a signal that the College is not supportive of the center or that the Faculty is unwilling to take on an oversight role in relation to its activities. On the contrary, the Committee felt strongly that a standing committee should ultimately be created and charged, but that the proposal would be

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strengthened, and the CCE would be better served, if next year was spent regularizing procedures and gaining experience with the center's aspirations, operation, and activities.

Dean Call next put forward a number of proposals regarding committees. He suggested that the current Housing, "Green," and Wildlife Sanctuary committees be abolished, and that their responsibilities be assumed by the CPR, which has already taken on an expanded role in planning surrounding campus facilities and campus resources. The Dean also suggested that the Health and Safety Committee, which hasn't met in ten years, be abolished, and that the Ad Hoc Committee on Parking, which hasn't met in two years, also be eliminated. It was noted that the responsibilities of the faculty Health and Safety Committee are now shared among administrators at the College, who meet when necessary. President Marx and the Dean stressed that, if necessary, ad hoc committees could be re-formed if a significant issue emerged that could not be addressed by the CPR.

Professor Sinos expressed concern that absorbing the Housing Committee's responsibilities into those of the CPR would mean that there would no longer be a requirement that a certain number of colleagues who were charged with overseeing housing issues would, themselves, live in College housing. The Dean pointed out the Housing Committee has not met regularly in recent years, so the make-up of the committee has not been influential. Professor Jagannathan noted that he has long been aware of complaints about the housing system. He said that College housing is an important faculty benefit and has played a role in Amherst's ability to recruit faculty. If the College is reconsidering this benefit, the administration should do so openly, rather than taking the less overt route of abolishing the Housing Committee. He acknowledged that the Housing Committee may not be the most effective vehicle to address day-to-day concerns and complaints from faculty who enjoy that benefit. If that is the case, a more transparent and effective administrative mechanism should first be established before abolishing or absorbing the committee. Professor Sinos agreed and noted that there is a perception among the Faculty that housing is not addressed in a systematic manner, but that the benefit instead seems to be provided in an ad hoc manner, depending on the circumstances of individuals. The Dean noted that, by having the CPR address faculty housing issues, housing would be within the purview of a committee that meets weekly and that includes the Treasurer (who oversees the Housing Office). He noted that housing concerns largely involve relations between tenants and the housing office, and that most of these concerns, of which there have not been very many in recent years, are forwarded to him. He would much prefer having the CPR, a broader group of colleagues who focus on resource allocation, address housing questions and concerns.

Professor George said he didn't understand the level of concern being expressed that service on less time-consuming committees is a serious detriment to teaching and research. Faculty are expected to shift even larger amounts of time away from teaching and research, compared to the time commitment of serving on some less weighty committees, when they are asked to chair a department, prepare tenure cases, participate in searches – both departmental and sometimes college-wide – or work on planning documents, e.g. for outside reviews or, recently, CAP and PIF. He said that faculty serving on specialized committees often do so willingly

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because they have a significant interest in the work of the committees. Since these faculty members consider their service to be worthwhile, he wondered why the President and the Dean seem to be focusing on eliminating these committees to serve the goal of reducing the overall number of committees. President Marx responded that he has heard many complaints from faculty members who see the volume of committee service as onerous and inefficient and as a distraction from their teaching and research. He reiterated his view that having a smaller 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, with efforts to ensure rotation and sharing of this burden.

He believes that, in terms of faculty governance, generally, committees can be more effective at oversight if they are considering an array of interconnected issues and making informed decisions based on a broad charge and broad view. Pressing or more specific issues can be addressed in such committees, but, when necessary, ad hoc groups can be formed.

The Dean continued with his proposals surrounding committees. He suggested that the Ad Hoc Committee on Academic Support should become a Dean's task force. He noted that, at present, administrators, including faculty, work on these issues, and that the committee brings other colleagues into their discussions as needed. A task force would be a better structure for the work of this group, he believes. Dean Call also suggested that the Ad Hoc Environmental Studies Committee had evolved into the advisory committee for the new Environmental Studies Program and major, and that that the Ad Hoc Film and Media Committee might similarly evolve, if a Film Studies major and program are established. He noted that a proposal for a Film and Media Studies major, which is currently being reviewed by the CEP, will likely be forwarded to the Committee of Six in the fall. In addition, the Dean proposed eliminating the Doshisha Committee and charging the Department of Asian Languages and Civilizations with that committee's responsibilities. The Dean said that, after consultation with Deans Lieber and Hart, he would like to propose that the College Council take on the responsibilities that currently rest with the Orientation Committee, which could then be dissolved. After some discussion, and with the understanding that new ad hoc committees could always be formed if necessary, the members agreed that the Dean's proposals, which do not require faculty votes, should be implemented.

President Marx asked if there was interest in any further restructuring of committees. One option, he suggested in light of the recent faculty vote on a term limit for the Committee of Six, would be to consider term limits and enforced rotation of committee work among the faculty, and a smaller number of committees that are charged with a broader array of interrelated responsibilities. For instance, with some re-assignment of responsibilities based on coherent thematic areas, the CEP, the CPR, the FCAFA, the College Council, and a new committee that would focus on faculty issues could be the primary faculty committees.

Professor Servos expressed concern that having committees assume broader charges would mean that faculty would be overseeing areas outside their own familiarity. Subsuming the Archives Committee and Committee on Research with Human Subjects into omnibus

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committees, he suggested, may dissociate expertise from oversight. The President expressed confidence that members of Amherst's faculty would not have difficulty mastering whatever issues were brought before them, and he viewed having heterogeneity of fields represented on these committees, and broad expertise, as a healthy and desirable approach to faculty governance. Professor Sinos suggested that the smaller committees might be retained and that they meet together to cover a broader array of issues. The Committee agreed to return to this discussion at its next meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 6:15 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Gregory S. Call  
Dean of the Faculty

From: Ronald Rosbottom  
Sent: Tuesday, April 15, 2008 11:12 AM  
To: Gregory Call  
Cc: Anthony Marx; Sean Redding; Sarah Turgeon  
Subject: Balloting for the C6

Dear Greg, Tony, and Colleagues:

On the penultimate ballot for election to the Committee of Six Sean Redding, Sarah Turgeon, and I were listed.

Suppose all three of us had been elected? Would you have been concerned that all faculty members of the present CPR would've had to move from that Committee to the C6? Sean is current chair (has had two years, and should have a third on the CPR), I will be the incoming chair (having had two years of preparation), and Sarah has had one year on the CPR.

I bring this up because I worry that continuity is often interrupted on important committees because balloting for the C6 trumps all other appointments. In terms of the CEP and the CPR especially, learned expertise would in effect be lost should such turnover occur.

I don't want to open a can of worms, but since you were concerned about colleagues serving too often, I ask if you considered other ramifications of our balloting procedures.

Best, Ron

Ronald C. Rosbottom  
Winifred Arms Professor in the Arts & Humanities  
Professor of French and European Studies

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