

**Committee of Six Minutes
of Thursday, August 31, 2006**

The second meeting of the Committee of Six for the academic year 2006–2007 was called to order by President Marx *en plein air* outside Converse Hall at 3:00 P.M. on Thursday, August 31, 2006. Present were Professors George, Hilborn, O’Hara, Parker, Schneider, and Woglom, Dean Call, President Marx, and Assistant Dean Tobin, Recorder.

The meeting began with announcements from Dean Call. He proposed that the Committee’s regular meeting time be from 3:30 P.M. TO 6 P.M. on Mondays, and the members agreed. The Dean said that it may become necessary to schedule additional meetings, and the members agreed to discuss at their next meeting potential times for additional meetings. He next informed the Committee that Assistant Dean Janet Tobin will continue to serve as the recorder of Committee of Six minutes and that Robyn Piggott will once again serve as the recorder of the faculty meeting minutes.

The Committee then considered three course proposals. Professor Woglom asked the Dean if the Department of Political Science had approved Colloquium 15, as there was no indication on the course approval form to this effect. The Dean reminded his colleagues that colloquia are interdisciplinary courses not affiliated with a department, so that a departmental signature is not required. He noted that the Department of Political Science had chosen to list Colloquium 15 as a related course and to accept it as credit toward the major. The Committee then voted to forward all three course proposals to the Faculty for approval.

Continuing his announcements, the Dean informed the members that community teas will continue this year on Thursdays at Frost Library, at 3:30 P.M., and that coffee, tea, and confections will again be provided at Lewis-Sebring from 8:00 A.M to 11:00 A.M, Monday through Friday. President Marx asked whether these ongoing events have been successful. The Dean replied that there is a loyal following of faculty members and staff who frequent the morning gatherings at Lewis-Sebring. He said that the library teas were very popular among students, but that attendance by Faculty and staff was modest. Dean Call feels that both events are valuable ways of bringing members of the College community together. He then reminded the Committee that, during the first week of classes, Monday classes are held on Wednesday.

The Committee turned briefly to committee assignments.

The Dean next informed the members that Jill Meredith, Director and Chief Curator of the Mead Art Museum, has resigned her position, effective October 31, 2006. He noted that she then plans to conduct research and would be available to assist with the Mead’s reaccreditation process, which is now under way. Dean Call said that it is his hope to appoint an interim director, probably on a part-time basis, to provide administrative support at the Mead. He informed the Committee that he would soon bring suggestions for search committee members to the Committee of Six, with the goal of beginning a national search as soon as possible and having a new museum director in place by the beginning of the 2007-2008 academic year. President Marx said that this time of transition at the Mead provides a further opportunity to explore ways of engaging the museum more fully in the life of the College.

Under “Questions from Committee Members,” Professor Woglom reiterated his desire that consideration be given to the issue of including faculty members who become members of the administration in the FTE count. He said that, while he understands that teaching support is needed when a regular Amherst faculty member takes on an administrative role at the College, he feels that visiting faculty members should not be viewed as substitutes for FTEs. He wondered

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whether the Committee on Priorities and Resources, the Committee on Educational Policy, or the Committee of Six might be the appropriate body to explore this issue. The Dean said that he would consider which committee should take up this subject.

Professor Parker next asked if there would be an opportunity for the Committee to discuss the final report of the Faculty Committee on Admission and Financial Aid (FCAFA) for the 2005-2006 academic year, which was recently distributed to the Faculty. He said that he was unfamiliar with issues surrounding C-Band “athletic admits” and that he felt that having an understanding of these issues would be necessary in order to evaluate the FCAFA’s recommendations. Professor George noted that the FCAFA report is a report to the whole Faculty, not to the Committee of Six. He said that the role of the Committee of Six is to organize the business of the Faculty, not to do that business by itself.

Dean Call responded that, in his view, part of the Committee’s job is to engage with the work of various faculty committees and to put the members’ conversations about such content before the Faculty. This function can be understood as part of the Committee’s role of setting the agenda for faculty meetings, the Dean said. By discussing matters such as the report of the FCAFA and recording these conversations in the minutes, the Committee can get a sense from the Faculty’s response as to whether colleagues would like to take up a particular issue. Returning to Professor Parker’s specific question, the Dean noted that, in the past, there was a faculty meeting devoted to a discussion of admission practices and the composition of recent entering classes. Changes in the way the admission profile of classes can be summarized, and dwindling attendance at open meetings for the Faculty on admission-focused issues led to the discontinuation of this practice, the Dean said. He wondered whether reinstating such a meeting might be useful.

The President pointed out the need to be sensitive about admission discussions that can be misunderstood as denigrating. President Marx said that it is important that every student at Amherst feel valued and included here.

Professor Schneider asked for further clarification of the charge of the Committee of Six, as he feels that the charge, as written, does not express the breadth of the Committee’s duties. Dean Call first read the charge and then offered further explanation. He noted that the Committee is the executive committee of the Faculty. As such, it sets the agenda for the faculty meetings; drafts charges for faculty committees; moves forward conversations about reports and campus issues; evaluates cases for reappointment, tenure, and promotion; and evaluates faculty grant and fellowship proposals. President Marx also relies on the Committee, as the elected committee of the Faculty, to provide a faculty perspective and advice on important matters that are under consideration. Professor George said that he objects to putting the Committee in such a role, as he believes that the members are not elected because they have any particular expertise, with the exception, possibly, of experience or good judgment regarding personnel matters. Professors Hilborn and Woglom disagreed, noting that they feel that colleagues elect individuals to the Committee of Six because of the judgment and experience of these individuals. They said that they are comfortable expressing views—as individuals and members of the Committee—because there are often important faculty interests at stake.

Continuing the conversation, Dean Call said that it is part of the Committee’s work, through the minutes of its conversations, to put arguments about significant issues before the

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Faculty. Professor George then questioned the practice of keeping some Committee of Six conversations confidential, and expressed his discomfort with this system. He wondered, too, about the extent of this practice. President Marx said that having weekly meetings with the elected representatives of the Faculty is a uniquely valuable resource for the Dean and himself. The President pointed out that he has erred on the side of seeking guidance from the Committee, but that very few conversations (with the exception of personnel matters and committee nominations that are under consideration) have been kept out of the public minutes of the Committee. Minutes of discussions of certain sensitive or unresolved matters and plans in their formative stages, about which the President and/or the Dean are seeking the advice of the Committee of Six, are sometimes kept confidential, he said. Often, discussions of these issues are made public once the matter is in a less tentative state, President Marx added.

The President expressed concern that, if he is unable to keep any sensitive conversations with the Committee confidential, he might not be able to get the guidance of faculty colleagues. This approach would be counterproductive to faculty interests, he added. Professors Woglom and Hilborn agreed. Professor George responded that, on the other hand, insistence on confidentiality might make him uncomfortable with expressing his views and offering confidential advice, as an individual with no expertise about a particular matter. Professor Parker agreed and noted that, under such circumstances, it would be impossible for a Committee of Six member to seek the opinions of the colleagues who had elected him or her. Dean Call noted that the Committee does review each case of potential confidentiality in the minutes, and that the question of whether a matter should be kept confidential is open to debate. The Committee might also consider referring certain questions to another faculty committee that the members view as having particular expertise in the matter under discussion. The President, the Dean, and the members agreed to strive for transparency in the minutes.

Continuing the discussion of the Committee's minutes, the Dean noted that the public minutes should be used as a guide in questions of whether matters can be shared with others. The members agreed that the minutes should be as concise as possible, but should communicate fully, and that, for reasons of transparency, there should be direct quotation in the minutes. Dean Call informed the members of the longstanding policy of appending letters to the minutes when the matters contained within them have been discussed by the Committee. Colleagues are informed by the Dean's office as to when their letters will be appended. If a colleague states at the outset that he or she does not want the contents of a letter discussed in the public minutes, the Committee will decide whether it wishes to take up the matter in question.

The Committee then discussed the circumstances under which it would communicate via email. It was agreed that email communications would not be used to communicate about personnel or other confidential matters and that, in general, the use of email would be kept to a minimum. Professor Woglom noted that email is particularly useful when the Committee is drafting, collectively, motions or other formal language and when decisions have to be made under deadline pressure. The members agreed that email can be a valuable tool in such instances. Dean Call then reviewed rules governing participation in the Committee's tenure discussions when members belong to the department of a tenure candidate.

The Committee next discussed issues surrounding Professor Hilborn's departure from the College this January. As Professor Hilborn informed the members over the summer, he has

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accepted an appointment at the University of Nebraska, where his wife has taught for a number of years. He also informed the Committee over the summer that he is willing to serve in the fall of 2006, if this is the Committee's pleasure. The members congratulated Professor Hilborn, while expressing regret over the College's loss of such a fine colleague, and then considered when it would be best to elect a replacement. They discussed the advantages and disadvantages of having a new colleague begin serving this fall, this spring, or at the beginning of the 2007-2008 academic year.

The Dean informed the members that the technology is now in place to conduct the election electronically, and that last year's Committee of Six had agreed that online elections are permitted under *Faculty Handbook* guidelines, providing, of course, that colleagues not using the Web were provided with appropriate means to participate. He noted that it would be advantageous to hold an election after November 1, because the Faculty is not required to inform him of leave plans until then. He told the members that, in addition, an election must also be held at that time for the Advisory Committee to the Trustees' Committees on Honorary Degrees and Trusteeship.

Professor George informed the members that, with the assistance of the Dean's office, he had explored whether there was a precedent for mid-year Committee of Six elections. He found that there have been two mid-year turnovers during the past several decades. He noted that one difference between these cases and the one now before the Committee is that the colleagues who joined the Committee of Six in mid-year served only for the remainder of that year, which in both cases was the second year of the term of the person they replaced. In November 1975, Professor Fink resigned from the Committee for personal reasons, having been elected in spring of 1974 to serve for two years. An election was held, and Professor Yost was elected to serve only the remainder of that year, i.e., the remainder of Professor Fink's term. In the other case, President Julian Gibbs died in February 1983. Professor Craig, who was then on the Committee in the second year of his term, was named Acting President. Professor Beals was then elected to serve for the remainder of the spring semester that year.

Continuing the conversation about the current situation, the Dean recommended that Professor Hilborn continue to serve this fall and that a new member be elected for this spring and the 2007-2008 academic year. Professors George and Parker, who initially favored electing a new member beginning this fall, raised concerns about having a lack of continuity in terms of those who would be making personnel decisions. They felt that the same individuals should be evaluating cases of tenure, which are typically decided by the end of the fall semester, and reappointment and promotion, which are decided in the spring. They asked what would happen in the unlikely event that tenure evaluation is not completed by the end of the semester. The Dean replied that Professor Hilborn had agreed to return to Amherst to participate in deliberations until the cases were completed.

Professor Schneider said that it seemed more problematic that a new member elected after November 1 for the fall term would join the Committee in the midst of tenure deliberations and without the benefit of having the summer to review the scholarly work of the candidates. The Dean said that an election would take approximately three weeks to complete, if an online election was conducted, and that the election would have to take place immediately—before leave plans were known—if the new member were to serve this fall. It would not be possible to

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have a new member join the Committee for the fall once the tenure process got under way in October. Professor O'Hara said that she felt that having a colleague learn in the fall that he or she would be serving on the Committee immediately would be a hardship, as the colleague would not have the notice necessary to design a schedule that would accommodate the commitment of work and time that is expected of Committee members. Professor George expressed concern that, beyond personnel matters, a new member elected in the second semester would not have the benefit of participating in discussions in the fall. Other members noted that, with Professor Woglom being the only other returning member from the Committee of Six of last year, having Professor Hilborn continue in the fall would provide greater continuity from last year. At the conclusion of this discussion, the members voted five to zero (Professor Hilborn abstained) in favor of having Professor Hilborn remain on the Committee for the fall.

Turning to the question of whether a new member should be elected to the Committee for the spring, Professor Woglom said that he preferred continuing with five members during the spring term, as the new member would not have had the benefit of participating in committee discussions and decisions in the fall and would require time to get up to speed. The Dean noted that, often because of leave plans or the requirement that at least three members be elected to the Committee each spring, at least half the Committee is in this position each fall. Professor Parker said that he was in favor of having as many voices as possible on the Committee and therefore advocated having a new member elected for the spring. The members then voted four in favor of electing a new member to the Committee in November for the spring. Professor Hilborn and one other member abstained. It was agreed that the new member's term would be for a year and a half, beginning in January 2007.

The Dean asked the Committee to consider the issue, which was discussed at the end of the spring semester by last year's Committee of Six, of how to develop a mechanism to allow the Committee—when it has concerns or questions about an honors thesis—to have a dialogue with a department or set of departments recommending a candidate for the distinction of *summa*. Some members of last year's Committee felt that it was important to communicate any misgivings before a decision is made in order to offer feedback to the department(s) and to uphold standards. The Committee agreed that, because of the timing of when the members receive the theses to read—which is typically just a week before a final decision is needed—it is difficult to initiate any process by which concerns can be addressed. The members decided that the best way to solve the problem is to move the due date for turning theses in to the Registrar from Friday to Thursday of the week in which they are typically received. In this way, the Committee of Six could receive them on Friday and have the weekend before its Monday meeting to read them. If questions should come up, there would be time to contact members of the department or interdepartmental committees. It was agreed that, if one member of the Committee should raise questions about a thesis, a second member of the committee would read the thesis in question and render an opinion. The Dean said that he would check with the Registrar to determine if it would be workable to change the date on which theses are due.

In the brief time remaining, President Marx informed the Committee that another issue from last year that he would like to carry over for discussion this year is “class bunching” during a limited number of time slots within the schedule, a situation that he views as a barrier for students' ability to take full advantage of the curriculum. He said that he would ask the

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Committee's advice about how to spread courses more evenly across the time slots available, especially if efforts undertaken thus far have had little impact. A high proportion of student enrollments occur between 10:00 A.M. and 3:30 P.M on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The President noted that last year's Committee of Six had discussed whether the College should require departments to use every time slot for teaching courses before any slot is used a second time. Colleagues last year had pointed out that Williams follows this system. The members agreed to consider whether this structure might be workable and desirable at Amherst. Professor George pointed out that such a system would have a negative impact on the scheduling agreement that the science departments have developed to ensure that introductory science courses do not conflict. Professor Parker noted that his department already employs a system much like the one at Williams. President Marx acknowledged that the issue is complex, applauded the cooperation of the science departments, and agreed that their interests must be considered in further deliberations.

Finally, Dean Call noted that, after eliminating dates for which there were scheduling conflicts, the possible dates for Faculty Meetings this semester, based on the Faculty's longstanding practice of reserving the first and third Tuesdays of each month of the term for possible meetings, are September 19, October 17, November 7, and December 5. The members reviewed and approved the agenda for the Faculty Meeting of September 4 and adjourned at 5:00 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Gregory S. Call
Dean of the Faculty