

### **Committee of Six Minutes of Monday, September 11, 2006**

The third meeting of the Committee of Six for the academic year 2006–2007 was called to order by President Marx in his office at 3:30 P.M. on Monday, September 11, 2006. Present were Professors George, Hilborn, O’Hara, Parker, Schneider, and Woglom, Dean Call, President Marx, and Assistant Dean Tobin, Recorder. Corrections to the minutes of August 31 were given to the Dean, and announcements from the President followed.

President Marx informed the members that he was in the final stages of drafting a letter to the College’s alumni body to explain the set of priorities and goals that were endorsed by the Faculty last year, after deliberations on the Report of the Committee on Academic Priorities (CAP), which will guide initiatives in curricular and co-curricular areas. It is the President’s hope to engage the alumni in the ongoing conversations about Amherst’s future, as the Trustees deliberate and the College prepares to raise funds to support the goals that emerged through the CAP process. He said that he looks forward to receiving feedback from the recipients of the letter. Professor Parker asked if the letter would be shared with the Faculty; the President said yes, it would.

Dean Call next made a series of announcements. He reported that the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) has put on its agenda the issue of how to spread courses more evenly across the time slots available. Professor Schneider said that it was his impression that there are more early-morning classes being held now than in previous years. Dean Call said that, at the request of the CEP, his office is gathering information on the range of time slots being used this semester, and that he will report back to the CEP and the Committee of Six once he has this information.

Continuing his announcements and reporting back about some matters raised at previous meetings, the Dean informed the members that, with the addition of two members, the search committee for the position of Director of the Center for Civic Engagement is now in place. Its members are Professors Aries, Cobham-Sander, and L. McGeoch; Donna Abelli, Administrative Business Manager of the Mead Art Museum; Suzanne Coffey, Director of Athletics; Ben Lieber, Dean of Students; and Robyn Piggott, Special Assistant to the President for Principal Gifts. Dean Call next reported that the Registrar, Mr. Mager, saw no problems with moving the due date for turning in theses and departmental recommendations for *summa* to the Registrar’s Office from Friday to Thursday of the week in which they are typically received, as the Committee had proposed at its last meeting. Bringing up a related topic, the Dean noted that last year’s Committee of Six expressed the view that the recommendation for *summa* for interdisciplinary theses should be unanimous. The members had suggested that, if a member of a thesis committee disagrees with the committee’s recommendation for *summa* that is being put forward, he or she should write a separate letter to the Committee of Six expressing his or her dissenting views. This year’s Committee agreed that this procedure should be used beginning this year. The Dean noted that last year’s Committee also expressed concerns about the number of typographic and grammatical errors in senior theses, generally. He said that he would ask Mr. Mager, in his annual letter to the Faculty about honors theses, to include information about the new due date and the procedure to follow if an interdisciplinary thesis committee’s recommendation for *summa* is not unanimous, as well as a reminder about the need for careful proofreading.

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Dean Call also informed the members that Professors Mehta and Tranbarger have agreed to serve on the Committee on Student Fellowships, Professor Kallick has agreed to serve on the Mead Acquisitions Committee, and that Professor Frank will serve on the Ad Hoc Advisory Committee on Parking. The Dean said that he was pleased to announce that Betsy Siersma, who retired two years ago as Director of the University Gallery at UMass, Amherst, has agreed to serve as Interim Director of the Mead Art Museum on a half-time basis for at least eight months, beginning November 1.

Dean Call next asked for permission to invite Professor Viggo Kann, a Swedish computer scientist who is in residence at the College this semester on a STINT Fellowship, to attend meetings of the Faculty as a guest without vote for this semester. Dean Call informed the members that Professor Kann is here to observe how Amherst, as an American liberal arts college, organizes its curriculum and to learn about faculty governance. The members agreed that Professor Kann could attend faculty meetings this semester. The Dean then reported briefly on his meetings at the end of the spring semester with newly reappointed faculty members and the chairs of their departments. He said that he felt that these conversations had gone well and that all involved had been appreciative of the feedback shared with them, based on the Committee of Six's conversations.

Discussion turned next to tenure procedures for creative and performing artists. The Dean summarized the history of the Committee of Six's consideration of this issue over the past two years. In 2004-2005, at the Dean's request, the Committee discussed procedures for early selection of outside reviewers for candidates for tenure who are creative or performing artists. Under consideration was whether the need for reviewers to attend, to the degree possible, productions and exhibitions over a number of years necessitates making available the option for outside reviewers to be selected earlier than current procedure dictates. Ideally, such selection would take place soon after reappointment. The Dean noted that the procedures that were discussed were modified versions of standard procedures. Some outside reviewers, it was thought, would fulfill their role over a more extended time period than is typical, but they would be selected in the usual manner and by standard criteria. Ultimately the Committee drafted a motion to modify the language in the *Faculty Handbook* to allow for the early selection of reviewers and sent it to the Departments of Music, Fine Arts, and Theater and Dance for their response.

Time did not permit any further action in 2004-2005 on this issue, but in 2005-2006, the Committee revised the motion and resubmitted it to the departments. The responses of the departments to the proposed procedures, which would be voluntary, varied considerably. The divergent nature of the departmental views led the Dean to believe that it might be best to adopt an ad hoc approach, rather than having the Faculty vote on a change to the *Faculty Handbook*. Some members of the Committee felt that different disciplines seem to have different needs in presenting creative work for review and assessment. Recording performances or concerts, rather than having reviewers attend them, sometimes appears to be preferable. Dean Call said that the aim is to provide the fairest and most thorough evaluation possible for each candidate. Last year, the members asked the Dean to review the tenure procedures outlined in the *Faculty Handbook* to see if adopting the proposed procedures, on a voluntary ad hoc basis, would be permissible. This is where matters stand now, Dean Call said.

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The Dean said that he had reviewed the current relevant *Faculty Handbook* language and had consulted the College attorney. He feels confident that the current language, as written, provides the flexibility to adopt the proposed procedures on a voluntary ad hoc basis. He said that he favored deciding on a case-by-case basis whether to select reviewers early, based on discussions with candidates and their departments about which procedures would provide the fullest information. If candidates and their departments request support to facilitate professional recordings of musical and theatrical events and exhibitions—in addition to having reviewers present, or in place of having them present—the Dean said that he would provide this funding. These recordings could then become part of the tenure file, should the candidate and his or her department so wish.

Professor Schneider expressed concern that having to make a choice about selecting reviewers early would place a tremendous burden on the candidate and add new levels of complexity to the tenure process. He pointed out that the department and the candidate might not be in agreement about whether to select reviewers early or whether creative work should be viewed live or in a recorded form. He also said that he found it troubling that some reviewers—those selected early—would be judging a case based on different information than what would be available to reviewers selected later and to the Committee of Six. He wondered, as well, whether it would be possible to get experts in a field to agree to attend multiple live performances or exhibitions over an extended period. President Marx said that there is also a danger that, by trying to ensure equity, the result might be ensuring that only the minimum amount of information could be gathered when the maximum is needed. He wondered whether the need to have all outside reviewers and the Committee of Six consider uniform information outweighs the benefits of having some reviewers see work in real time. Professor Schneider said that the creative arts occupy an awkward fit within traditional systems of academia, and that he believes that educating the Committee of Six about the fields of tenure candidates in arts would be most valuable. Professor Parker wondered how confidentiality could be ensured if a reviewer was present at multiple performances or exhibitions.

Professor Schneider said that he feels that the creative and performing arts departments each had internal dialogues about the question of selecting reviewers early. As a result, he believes that there were insufficient cross-disciplinary conversations and dialogue with the administration about changing the tenure procedures for working artists. Professor Woglom suggested that the Dean have a meeting with the three departments together to discuss this issue, and Dean Call agreed to do so.

The Dean next informed the members that, as recommended by the CAP, the CEP plans to ask members of the Faculty to determine where each of their courses fits within the six broad areas (outlined on page 61 of the College Catalog), each of which students are encouraged to sample broadly. This information can then be used by students and their advisors to reveal the patterns of a student's course selections for purposes of advising and self-assessment, and to encourage breadth in course selection. In addition, this information in the aggregate can offer information about how students are taking advantage, or not taking advantage, of the education Amherst offers. The President feels that the areas designated in the Catalog are sufficiently broad and flexible to be workable for this experiment. He suggested, however, that the wording of one category, "knowledge of culture and a language other than one's own and of human

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experience in a period before one's lifetime" contains too many parts to track accurately students' course selections within this multi-faceted area. He suggested that this category could therefore be subdivided graphically for purposes of clarity. Professor Woglom noted that, after experimenting with using this new system, the Faculty may want to re-consider these categories. The members noted that the consideration of any changes to the categories would be within the purview of the CEP and would require the vote of the full Faculty.

Under "Questions from Committee Members," Professor Woglom expressed concerns about whether there have been negative effects on the academic profile of the incoming class that appear to be the result of recent efforts to diversify the student body. He said that he fears that the College might be moving toward changing its standards for admission. Professor O'Hara raised her uneasiness with the recent characterizations of the incoming class as having a greater range of diversity while maintaining and even raising the average SAT. It is her impression that the range of academic preparedness in students electing to begin work in science is getting wider and wider. This increasing spread is masked when incoming classes are characterized by an average SAT. While she supports the goal of diversification, Professor O'Hara feels that it is important to be honest about the effects of taking steps in this direction and the needs that are created. Implying that students at Amherst today are as capable or even more capable of succeeding in their academic goals undermines the institutional challenges of providing academic support for all students. Professor O'Hara suggested that making use of additional statistical measures that offer a fuller picture of the distribution of SAT scores should be employed when characterizing the class. Professor Woglom said that he shared Professor O'Hara's concerns.

While noting that admission decisions are based on many factors, performance on standardized test scores being only one among them, President Marx said that it is important that the College be clear about its admissions goals and policies, and their results, and also be honest about the needs of our students. He explained that the publicity surrounding the College's desire to broaden the economic profile of its student body, and the success of recruitment efforts undertaken by the Office of Admission in this regard, had an effect on the College's applicant pool this year; a greater number than expected of qualified students from lower socioeconomic groups applied to the College and, meeting established standards, were accepted—with a higher yield. This unanticipated change in the pool and the yield contributed to a reduction in average SATs, as did the national decline in SAT scores this year. The President noted that Amherst remains the most selective college, with the highest SAT averages; he expressed great confidence in the judgment of the admission office and pride in our students. President Marx said that the Office of Admission is preparing a range of data for him; that the Faculty Committee on Admission and Financial Aid (FCAFA) will also be assessing this year's admission results in relation to goals and standards; faculty will receive a more in-depth report and that the Board of Trustees will also explore this issue as it relates to CAP goals and funding.

Professor George asked the President to identify which committee of the Board examines questions of admissions. President Marx said that the Instruction Committee's mission touches on admissions and that the Budget and Finance Committee is concerned with the financial aid budget. He suggested that the Committee should return to this matter once complete information about this year's class is available, including comparisons with previous classes. He noted that

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conversations on this topic are sensitive and that they should be transparent, but that it is important for current students not to be made to feel denigrated or devalued in any way.

Continuing the conversation, the President noted that a proposal from the Quest Foundation has come forward to assist underprepared students who aspire to be physicians, allowing them to ease into the pre-medical science and math courses more gradually than often happens now. Typically, students who are interested in attending medical school take a challenging sequence of courses beginning in their first semester. When underprepared students struggle and receive low grades in these courses, they sometimes give up their career aspirations very early on. As a result, their entire college career can be colored by a sense of failure. The proposal is to identify, during the application process, students who may need to start more slowly. These students would be offered admission to Amherst with the understanding that they may take an extra semester or perhaps an extra year at the College, with demonstrated financial need continuing to be met, in order to complete their pre-medical requirements. President Marx said that there are many uncertainties and issues at this preliminary stage of discussion, including questions of how to determine eligibility for such a program. He said that the FCAFA could take up these questions. Professor Schneider asked why such a program was only being considered for students who are interested in medicine. He said that the same early barriers to success for underprepared students exist in many fields. Professor Parker agreed, offering the example of lack of language fluency holding back students who wish to explore the literature and culture of a country in its native language or study abroad. The President said that these are important questions, and that it is his hope that the College will soon be able to provide students with the resources to increase their language skills over the summer by providing opportunities for language study in this country and abroad. He noted that questions of whether to have an extended pre-med option remain and should be discussed in this broader context.

Professor George next raised the issue, in the context of faculty meetings, of what constitutes the distinction between questions about the minutes of the Committee of Six and questions to the administration. He said that the business of the meeting is obstructed when the President answers at length, at the beginning of a faculty meeting, a question that does not revolve around factual issues relating to the minutes. Professor George suggested that, when a question is asked that arises from the minutes but is actually related to administration actions rather than Committee of Six business, the President should say that he would be happy to answer questions to the administration at the time designated for doing so. If the President should be uncomfortable with making this decision, perhaps a Committee of Six member could call a point of order, he said. Professor George suggested that a guide to determining whether questions are actually about the minutes of the Committee is whether any member of the Committee of Six can answer them. The members agreed, and Professor George noted that the impression that is being given currently is that the administration is answering for the Committee of Six. Professor Woglom's understanding of the practice that evolved last year is that questions about Committee of Six minutes were meant to be questions of facts and that substantive questions about issues raised by those minutes should come after the Faculty has dealt with the scheduled business for that meeting. He said that he would also like to encourage colleagues who are concerned about substantive issues raised by the Committee's minutes to write to the Committee of Six. The Committee can then make sure that their concerns are heard by all and,

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in that way, better prepare faculty colleagues to discuss these important issues at faculty meetings.

Continuing “Questions from Committee Members,” Professor Parker asked if a committee might be formed to examine the troubled state of Film Studies at the College. He noted that Amherst does not participate in the Five-College major; Film Studies courses are currently offered in an uncoordinated manner among a number of departments; ways to house and offer courses in the production of moving images on a permanent and systematic basis need to be developed; and the College lags far behind its peers in this rapidly changing field. Dean Call replied that he recognizes these concerns; he noted that he has been considering forming just such a committee and that he has been in conversation with Professor Cameron, who is also in favor of establishing this committee. President Marx asked whether such a committee would examine how to improve this situation by using available resources and/or improving organization, weighed with the possibility of additional resources. Professor Parker said that he believes that a committee would conduct a thorough review and that, in any case, all of its recommendations would not have to be implemented. The Dean, the President, and the Committee agreed to put a discussion of Film Studies on the Committee’s agenda for next week.

The Dean next confirmed with the members that they wished to conduct the election electronically this fall for Professor Hilborn’s replacement on the Committee of Six and for the Advisory Committee to the Trustees’ Committees on Honorary Degrees and Trusteeship. After some discussion, the members agreed that the prospect of increased efficiency and fuller participation (it was noted that colleagues could vote online while on leave, even if they were out of the country) suggest that online elections are a worthy experiment. The members reiterated that it is essential that colleagues not using the Web must be provided with appropriate means to participate. The Dean also reviewed with the members potential dates for future meetings of the Committee.

The Committee turned to a consideration of whether there was sufficient business to warrant having a faculty meeting on September 19. In this context, Professor Woglom raised the question of whether the Faculty should vote on adopting the FTE allocation system outlined in the Report of the CAP. The Dean said that, in effect, by voting to amend the charge of the CEP as written in the *Faculty Handbook*, the Faculty would vote on the method of allocation, which takes into account institutional priorities outlined in the report. The Dean said that last year’s Committee of Six had begun to revise the charge; the members agreed to review this draft and to put forward a motion to adopt the revised charge at the next faculty meeting.

The Dean noted that the CEP has also recently discussed the question, which has been brought up at the final faculty meeting over the past two years, of whether the Registrar should announce publicly the grade point average cutoff point for the top 25 percent of the class, if asked at a faculty meeting. The CEP confirmed that the Registrar was following the Faculty’s will when he declined to provide this information at the meeting. The Registrar told the Faculty that he would provide the information on request to any individual member of the Faculty. The President said that, since the question has come up repeatedly, the Faculty could debate it and then vote. The members agreed. After some discussion about the pros and cons of having a meeting on September 19, the members agreed that the next faculty meeting should be on October 17.

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The Dean next informed the Committee that the members of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Student Evaluation of Teaching have requested that their charge, and possibly their name, be broadened to include the goal of improving teaching. He noted that this committee is charged with recommending ways to implement the following resolution voted by the Faculty on May 25, 2006:

The Faculty endorses the larger CAP Report goal to improve teaching throughout the College. In order to help achieve this goal, student teaching evaluations of all Faculty should be required. The evaluations solicited for senior faculty will be made available only to the faculty member in question.

Professor O'Hara said that she would like time to review this situation and suggested that the Committee return to this issue at its next meeting. The Committee agreed.

The members turned to issues raised in a letter (appended) sent to them by Professor Guttmann. The Committee agreed that faculty members should not accept papers written after the end of the exam period, unless an extension is granted in writing by both the instructor and the Class Dean. This policy, they noted, is stated clearly on page 56 of the College Catalog. Professor George noted that a final paper due during exam week is an exam by definition. The Committee asked the Dean to remind the Faculty of the rules governing the submission of work after the end of exam period and requested that the Dean of Students be asked to remind students of these same regulations. The Dean agreed.

Dean Call noted that he had one final matter to discuss with the members. He shared with the Committee the following draft charge for a proposed committee, the Amherst College Wildlife Sanctuary Stewardship Committee:

The Amherst College Wildlife Sanctuary Stewardship Committee is composed of two members of the Faculty, the Director of Facilities Planning and Management, the Grounds Supervisor, two other staff members (either Trustee appointees or staff appointees), and two students. The Faculty members of the committee are appointed by the Committee of Six and serve for three-year terms. The Advisory Committee on Personnel Policies appoints the staff members, who serve three-year terms. The two student members of the committee are elected by the Association of Amherst Students each year. The committee, which is charged with the long-term oversight and management of the sanctuary, recommends priorities and policies; oversees academic, research, and other uses of the sanctuary; and acts as a steward for the sanctuary's wildlife and habitats. The committee may be advised by the conservation director (current or former) of the town of Amherst and other consultants.

The Dean noted that, in March 2005, Conservation Works, LLC, was engaged to work with the Sanctuary Advisory Committee to facilitate a preliminary study of the College's wildlife sanctuary. The committee was charged with making general recommendations regarding the long-term oversight of the sanctuary, including the management of red pine stands, and the

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sanctuary's use by the College (Amherst's proposed environmental studies program was mentioned in particular) for academic and recreational purposes. Conservation Works submitted a report to the committee in August 2005. It proposes boundaries for the sanctuary and recommends that the sanctuary be managed as an important bird and wildlife habitat. Conservation Works concluded that the sanctuary should be more actively used as a resource for long-term academic projects, and that the College should provide limited trail access to parts of the property for those outside the Amherst College community. Committee oversight of the use and stewardship of the sanctuary was recommended by the advisory committee and is a return to the structure that was established in the 1930s and 1940s, when the sanctuary was used extensively as an outdoor laboratory. With discussions about establishing an Environmental Studies program under way, renewed focus on the sanctuary is indicated. Finally, the report recommends that Amherst should compare notes with colleges such as Harvard, Trinity, Swarthmore, Mount Holyoke, Skidmore, and Williams regarding the management of their sanctuaries and arboreta. In particular, because of its close parallels to Amherst's sanctuary, the Hopkins Memorial Forest in Williamstown was cited as a useful example of a private college property that is used for academic and recreational purposes.

After some discussion about the dangers of adding to the already large number of faculty committees, the members agreed to create the committee as an ad hoc advisory committee to the President and the Dean and to accept the charge as proposed. As an advisory committee, this committee would not be added to the list of faculty committees in the *Faculty Handbook*.

The meeting adjourned at 6:00 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Gregory S. Call  
Dean of the Faculty



**Amherst College**  
**Amherst, Massachusetts 01002-5000**

Tel.: (413) 542-2134 (office)  
Tel.: (413) 548-9601 (home)

FAX (413) 542-2141  
[aquttmann\(@amherst.edu\)](mailto:aquttmann@amherst.edu)

13 August 2006

Dean Gregory Call  
Secretary, Committee of Six

Dear Greg,

I am seriously concerned about a problem that seems to have grown much worse in the last few years. Several years ago, a student demanded the right to submit papers written after the end of the exam period. Last semester, two students actually submitted work done after the end of the exam period, one without asking for permission to do so, the other after I refused permission. All three of these students claimed that other instructors do accept postsemester submissions. In the earlier case, the student's father berated me by telephone for my rigidity. In the two recent cases, I received (and replied to) a total of eleven letters of explanation, complaint, and accusation. In one of these letters, the student threatened to continue the discussion in September when I'll be back in my office (where, according to the student, I should have been in late May).

I don't know if it's true that some members of the faculty, without consulting with the Dean of Students, allow students to submit work done after the end of the semester. Whether or not it's true, I appeal to you and to the Committee of Six to do one of two things: (a) remind the faculty of the faculty's rules about postsemester submissions or (b) ask the faculty to change its rules so that students who feel they need more time may receive a temporary grade of "incomplete" (to be replaced by a permanent grade after they finish the semester's work). I'd prefer (a).

Affably,

Allen Guttman