

**Committee of Six Minutes  
of Monday, September 18, 2006**

The fourth 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 18, 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 September 11 were given to the Dean, and the minutes of August 31 were approved.

In response to concerns that were raised at previous meetings by Professors George and Parker regarding the practice of keeping some Committee of Six conversations confidential and at the President’s request, Assistant Dean Tobin passed out a report in which she had categorized for the Committee the information that was kept confidential in 2005-2006. She described the category of “matters that were kept confidential when they were in formative stages and that were later made public” as being the most prominent. Those matters were the following: information regarding the possibility of hosting with Williams the Xavier University pre-medical cohort and Xavier faculty in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, during the time that Presidents Schapiro and Marx were in negotiations with Xavier; the members’ views on whether a particular faculty meeting should be held if the President could not be present; information about the possibility of establishing a program to bring pairs of lecturers or visiting faculty with divergent views on a particular issue to Amherst; and the proposed substance of a revised version of the Schupf Scholars Program, before the proposal for the revamped program was made to Mr. Schupf. Continuing her remarks, Assistant Dean Tobin said that the names of specific individuals who might be brought to Amherst as visiting lecturers or as speakers—during the period when such individuals might be under consideration or inquiries were being made—were sometimes kept confidential. In addition, statements made by individual Committee of Six members were kept confidential when members requested that their remarks not be made public. The identity of the individual (Congressman John Olver) who approached the College about establishing a Five-College center based at Amherst for the study of international affairs was kept confidential, as were some discussions of how to structure faculty meetings and discussions to consider the report of the Committee on Academic Priorities. Finally, Assistant Dean Tobin said that conversations in which the Committee discussed strategies about how best to present to the Faculty the proposal for revisions to the tenure procedures for the creative and performing arts were kept confidential. The members acknowledged that it is the practice of the Committee to keep confidential conversations surrounding personnel matters, committee assignments, leave and grant proposal review, nominations for named professorships, and departmental issues and reviews.

At the conclusion of the summary, Professor Woglom asked President Marx if there were plans to implement the proposal to bring pairs of lecturers or visiting faculty with divergent views to the College. President Marx responded that three sets of such speakers will participate in January 2007 in a new colloquium program, which will bring pairs of prominent individuals to campus for three or four days to discuss pressing societal concerns. Faculty, students, and alumni will be invited to join in the program, although the number of participants in each colloquium will be limited to encourage in-depth conversation. The President noted that, in July, an email about the program was sent to the entire Amherst community, requesting suggestions of topics and pairs of speakers. The program for this first year will be announced soon.

The Committee expressed interest in the College’s response to the proposal for a

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Five-College center for the study of international affairs. President Marx explained that Congressman Olver is currently pursuing this idea through the Five Colleges. At present, the President does not foresee the College, on its own, establishing any such thematic centers, though the revised Copeland Fellowship does allow for a thematic focus each year.

After reviewing the funding guidelines of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Summer Stipend Program and the criteria by which the College has selected nominees for this program in the past, the Committee reviewed NEH proposals and approved the nomination of two professors. The members discussed the decision by the NEH to change its regulations. In a departure from previous years, there is no longer a restriction on the career stages of nominees for the fellowship. The Committee agreed that putting forward the proposals of junior colleagues who apply, if their proposals are worthy, is particularly desirable.

Discussion turned to the request by the Ad Hoc Committee on the Student Evaluation of Teaching (Professors A. George, Jagannathan, Parham, and Sanderson) to broaden their charge, and possibly their name, to include the goal of improving teaching. The Dean reminded the members that the ad hoc committee has been 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 Woglom said that he is perplexed by the committee's request. It appears to him that the charge, as written, is broad and implies that the committee should be exploring and recommending ways to improve teaching, including a system of evaluating the teaching of senior faculty. Professor Parker noted that, in a letter sent to the Committee of Six in May 2006 (appended to the Committee of Six minutes of May 8, 2006), Professor C. McGeoch emphasized that student feedback is a limited tool for improving teaching. Professor Parker said that Professor McGeoch offered a list of other ways to improve teaching, such as attending workshops, exchanging course syllabi and exams with colleagues, co-teaching, participating in reading groups to discuss papers on pedagogy, and visiting other Amherst courses, and expressed his hope that the ad hoc committee would consider such mechanisms as part of its deliberations.

Professor Woglom agreed, while expressing his view that the current charge of the committee encompasses and encourages the consideration of these sorts of efforts as part of the Faculty mandate to recommend ways to improve teaching throughout the College. Professor George commented that the committee is being asked to implement a decision, in the case of requiring student teaching evaluations for senior faculty, that is unpopular with many colleagues. He said that he would be uncomfortable with broadening the charge to place even greater emphasis on exploring ways to improve teaching, noting that there is a danger that doing so could result in a lack of focus and that conversations might go on indefinitely.

Continuing the discussion, President Marx noted that the Report of the Committee on Academic Priorities includes recommendations beyond evaluations to improve teaching, and he suggested that the committee might also consider these ideas. The Committee of Six agreed that

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the ad hoc committee should focus on implementing the resolution regarding teaching, as voted by the Faculty on May 25. The members decided that the name of the committee should be changed to the Ad Hoc Committee on the Evaluation and Improvement of Teaching to reflect its broad charge. It was agreed that developing a proposal for evaluating the teaching for all Faculty is clearly an important and pressing part of committee's work.

The Committee returned to its discussion of whether the Registrar should announce the grade point average cutoff point for the top 25 percent of the class, if asked at a faculty meeting. Dean Call provided the members with some additional background. He noted that members of the Committee on Educational Policy and other colleagues recall that the Faculty considered this issue as part of its discussion in 2002 surrounding a new honors policy. The Dean explained that the faculty meeting minutes of May 23, 2002, include a reference to the Registrar reporting the cutoff to the Faculty at a faculty meeting, but that there are no indications in subsequent minutes that such a report was given. Although there are no minuted conversations about changing the practice of reporting this information, the Dean feels confident, because of the timing of the change in practice and the recollections of colleagues, that, during the course of the 2002 discussion, the Faculty requested that the cutoff figure not be disseminated widely.

Professor George said that he does not understand why a distinction is now made between announcing the information at the faculty meeting and sharing it with faculty members on an individual basis, which is permitted. Professor Woglom said that he supports not having this information dispersed widely. Professor O'Hara noted that, if reported in the minutes, information about the cutoff figure might reach students—with the effect that they might lobby faculty members to raise grades to meet the cutoff, particularly if their GPAs are within close reach. Professor Hilborn pointed out that having the cutoff number widely available would offer opportunities for comparison and information about grade inflation over time. The President noted that the issue does seem to touch on the subject of grade inflation more generally, a topic about which he has heard that colleagues are concerned. Professor Woglom then agreed to draft a motion regarding the reporting of the cutoff for the agenda of the October 17 meeting of the Faculty.

The Committee next considered revisions to the charge to the CEP, which would have the effect of having the Faculty vote on adopting the FTE allocation system that is outlined in the Report of the CAP. This system, which was supported by the Faculty as part of its general endorsement of CAP priorities and goals at the end of the last academic year, takes into account institutional priorities outlined in the report. Dean Call noted that, in its letter of February 17, 2006, to the Committee of Six (appended to the Committee of Six minutes of February 20, 2006), the CEP requested guidance and affirmation of its role in implementing and evaluating the success of the new system of priorities. Professor George expressed his support for having the Faculty vote on the allocation system individually through the charge. He pointed out that this step would be consistent with the Faculty's understanding that it would endorse a set of general principles and then address specifics during the implementation of each of the recommendations that fall within its purview. The Committee agreed.

The Dean shared a draft of the revised charge to the CEP begun by last year's Committee of Six. It reads as follows (changes are in bold caps):

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**I. *The Committee on Educational Policy.*** The Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) is composed of five faculty members, each serving a three-year term; the Dean of the Faculty, *ex officio*, without vote; and three student members, each serving a two-year term. The Humanities, the Social Sciences and the Natural Sciences must be represented on the committee, by both faculty members and student members. Each year the committee chooses its own chair and secretary from among its five faculty members. The chair sets the committee's agenda. Nominations of the faculty members for the Committee on Educational Policy are made by the Committee of Six and reported to the Faculty in advance of the Faculty meeting at which they are to be elected.

Additional nominations may be made from the floor at the meeting. Candidates must receive the approval of a majority of the eligible voting members of the Faculty present at the meeting in order to be elected. Ideally, two members of the Committee on Educational Policy should be elected in two out of three years, and one member elected in the third. In this way, overlapping terms will create a continuity of membership. The student members of the committee are elected for two-year terms, two members being elected in one year, and a third in the other, alternately.

All members of the Faculty are eligible to serve on the Committee on Educational Policy, with the same exceptions as govern eligibility for the Committee of Six.

The Committee on Educational policy is expected to study the general educational policy of the college, to consider suggestions from departments or from individual Faculty members or students relating to changes in educational policy including proposals for new courses, new programs, and altered major programs or honors requirements, and to make recommendations to the Committee of Six and the Faculty. ~~In addition,~~ The Committee on Educational Policy advises the President and the Dean of the Faculty about the allocation of faculty positions to departments. **IN MAKING RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FTE ALLOCATIONS, THE COMMITTEE CONSIDERS BOTH THE CURRICULAR NEEDS OF INDIVIDUAL DEPARTMENTS AND THE COMMITMENT OF DEPARTMENTS TO OFFER COURSES THAT MEET IDENTIFIED COLLEGE-WIDE PRIORITIES AND CURRICULAR NEEDS.**

Professor Parker asked how the specifics of the new allocation system would be communicated to the Faculty, as he felt that the revised language of the charge is peculiarly moralistic. He expressed his discomfort with the use of the word *commitment* in the final paragraph, as its meaning in this context is unclear to him. He wondered how a sense of commitment could be measured, as he views *commitment* partially as a psychological state of mind. Professor Woglom said that the wording is clear if colleagues understand the legislative

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history behind the language. Professor Hilborn said that he views the language as being sufficiently directive, as it conveys that the CEP, when recommending FTE allocations to the administration, will take into account College-wide priorities. Professor Schneider said that he does not find the language to be ambiguous.

Noting that a certain amount of trust would be involved in the allocation process, Dean Call explained that, in the revised charge, *commitment* refers to the promise that a department would make to teach courses every year to meet one or more College-wide priorities, should that department be awarded the envisioned FTE. The Dean said that the department would describe the priority or set of priorities that it would meet in its FTE proposal to the CEP. Professor Parker asked how long a “commitment” of this sort would last. President Marx responded that the duration will depend on whether the Faculty as a whole decides to revisit the priorities it has set. Professor O’Hara said that she supports the use of the word *commitment* because it is not overly prescriptive and allows for future possibilities. Professor Hilborn said that he is in favor of the proposed wording because it is a firm statement that will offer the guidance that the CEP has requested for implementing the allocation plan.

Professor George expressed concern that the last sentence of the revised charge implies that all FTE proposals must take College-wide priorities into account. Professor Woglom said that it is his understanding that a consideration of College-wide priorities could play a part in departments’ proposals for both new and replacement FTEs. Dean Call said that every request does not need to address College-wide priorities to be successful. However, he explained, proposals that include commitments to these priorities would be compared with those that don’t, and that colleagues should be aware of this aspect of the allocation process. The Committee agreed that the word *both* in the last sentence should be stricken from the draft charge to communicate that, in recommending FTE allocations, the CEP would consider proposals that focused only on curricular needs of departments and that a commitment to offer courses that meet identified College-wide priorities is not a requirement for departments making FTE requests.

The Dean suggested that the Committee next consider as part of its review of the revised charge language about the Dean’s membership on the committee. Dean Call reminded the members that he is now completing his third year as a member of the CEP ex officio this fall. At the time he joined the committee, it was agreed that the Faculty would review this experiment at the end of three years and would then decide whether the Dean of the Faculty should continue serving on the CEP. At the request of last year’s Committee of Six, the Dean consulted with the CEP about whether to include the Dean of the Faculty as a member ex officio of the CEP in the enhanced charge to the committee that the Committee of Six would formulate and that would be voted on by the full Faculty. It was the CEP’s view that the Dean’s term as a member ex officio of the committee should be extended for another three years, at which time the arrangement could be reviewed again.

The Committee agreed that the Faculty should vote on whether the Dean of the Faculty should continue to be a member ex officio of the CEP and asked the Dean to convey its view to the CEP and to remove himself (as he has done previously) during the committee’s discussion of this issue.

Conversation turned to possible changes in how members of the CEP are selected. The

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Dean noted that some members of last year's Committee of Six had suggested a mixed model in which some members of the CEP would be elected and some appointed, but that the CEP did not favor such an approach. Professor Parker said that he sees compelling reasons for continuing to have the members of the CEP nominated by the Committee of Six and approved by the Faculty. Professor Woglom noted that the CEP has an enormously important function and has the opportunity to influence the FTE process. He said that he supports having the members elected to ensure that the Faculty has the fullest confidence in the committee.

Professor Parker responded that much of the CEP's power, in terms of the FTE process, depends on having members who represent the different academic areas of the College. Professor Woglom said that colleagues consider such representation when they elect the Committee of Six and that they would exercise the same judgment when electing the CEP. Professor Schneider said that he would be concerned about limiting the pool if both the Committee of Six and the CEP were elected, and he noted that he doesn't see anything wrong with the current system of nominations. He expressed the view that the committee's potency derives from whether it is able to influence the administration's allocation of FTEs, in other words, whether it has clout. He also worried about possible unintended consequences of the election of the members of the CEP.

Professor Woglom responded that he believes that it would be more difficult for the administration to make decisions that would be contrary to CEP recommendations if the members of the CEP were elected, as the committee would have more authority. Responding to Professor Schneider's concern about limiting the pool for Committee of Six and CEP elections, Professor Hilborn said that such elections could be held sequentially, with the Committee of Six election happening first. Dean Call agreed that such a structure would be possible, but that the Committee of Six election would have to occur earlier than it does presently. Professor Hilborn suggested that, if the Faculty as a whole is interested in the question of electing the CEP, the Committee of Six could discuss the matter further and bring the issue to the Faculty for a vote. The members agreed.

The Committee then asked the Dean to share the following proposal for a revised charge with the CEP and to request their response:

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The meeting adjourned at 6:00 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Gregory S. Call  
Dean of the Faculty