

**Committee of Six Minutes
of Monday, September 25, 2006**

The fifth 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 25, 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 18 were given to the Dean, and he distributed to the members the final draft minutes of September 11.

The Committee returned to its discussion of admissions policy and of issues surrounding the academic profile of the incoming class. President Marx said that, anytime admissions goals and policies, and their results, are discussed in public, it would be important that individual students not become a focus. He reiterated that all current Amherst students must feel valued here. President Marx explained that it is clear that the applicant pool for this year’s first-year class shifted in ways that were welcome and unexpected and that the yield was higher than anticipated for some students who met certain admissions goals, all reflecting the hard work of our fine admission staff. He said that it is important that the Faculty Committee on Admission and Financial Aid (FCAFA) assess admissions results in relation to Amherst’s current admissions policies, goals, and standards, and that the committee report its findings and make recommendations to the Faculty. The President emphasized that it is not workable to shape admissions policy on the floor of a faculty meeting, and that the faculty committee structure is the best mechanism for evaluating such policy, in consultation with the Offices of Admission and of Institutional Research.

Professor O’Hara agreed, pointing out that the Committee of Six has limited information with which to assess the current admissions situation and to make predictions about the probable results of applying current policies to future applicant pools. The Committee agreed and asked the Dean to draft a request to the FCAFA to explore these issues. Dean Call agreed to draft such a charge.

President Marx emphasized that, apart from making determinations about admissions policy and its ramifications, it is the College’s responsibility to be responsive to the needs of all students who have been admitted and to be mindful of differences in their level of preparation. He said that the College will make available additional resources to provide support for students as needed, noting that such assistance should not wait until the Committee on Academic Priorities (CAP) initiatives surrounding writing and quantitative skills are funded.

Professor O’Hara agreed that such help would be welcomed, but raised the concern that, if this year’s trend continues, there will be a greater number of students at Amherst who may benefit from such resources. She suggested that plans must be made now to meet their needs. Professor O’Hara offered the example of students who are underprepared in math. At present, these students are often advised to begin their studies with Math 5. Once they are enrolled in Math 5, they are disappointed to discover that they cannot simultaneously enroll in Chemistry 11, the only pre-medical science course open to first-semester students, because both courses are offered at the same time. This scheduling is done intentionally, because the faculty members in Chemistry believe that it is in the best interests of these students to wait a semester before taking Chemistry 11, and, more importantly, to have completed Math 6 before enrolling in Chemistry

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12, the second of the chemistry courses taken by most students interested in preparing for the study of medicine. Chemistry 12 lists Math 11 (or Math 5 and 6) as a prerequisite. Students who are put in this situation, especially those who are considering majors in the sciences or who wish to be pre-med, have expressed intense frustration. They fear that they will fall behind and be unable to meet pre-medical or major requirements. Many also feel that they have been misled during the application process in not being told that they would have to delay their plans because they were underprepared. Professors O'Hara and George emphasized that the College should be providing additional gateway science offerings for students in this situation. At present, staffing levels do not permit such courses to be taught, they said.

While acknowledging that these issues surrounding the needs of students in the sciences are significant and should be addressed, the President pointed out that they should not be conflated with the effects of the shift in the applicant pool this year. Professor Hilborn agreed that the College has been facing issues surrounding underpreparedness in quantitative skills and the sciences for some time and said that it is his hope that initiatives to provide additional support will move forward.

Dean Call said that he will examine possible means of providing further support in January and in the summer for students who are less prepared in math and science. He explained that he has already begun discussions with Professor O'Hara and other faculty members in the sciences about enhancing the Phoenix Program and the summer science program. The Dean noted, however, that an expanded summer program would benefit members of the Class of 2011, rather than of the Class of 2010. He said that, as rising sophomores, members of the current first-year class would be eligible to apply for summer research fellowships, while noting that he is interested in engaging in more conversations about developing ways to support this cohort.

In addition to ways of helping on the math and sciences front, Dean Call said that he is considering other vehicles for providing support to the incoming class. He noted that demand for the services of the Writing Center was up last year and that there is a similar trend this year. Dean Call said that he will be in touch with Ben Lieber, Dean of Students; Susan Snively, Director of the Writing Center; and Jennifer Innes, Director of the Moss Quantitative Center, to explore the possibility of adding support to both centers. He also plans to speak with Senior Associate Dean of Students Charri Boykin-East, who coordinates academic support services at the College.

Returning to the discussion of admissions policy, Professor Woglom expressed the view that the College is being irresponsible by not further gathering and analyzing data on how students perform academically during their years at Amherst and how they navigate the College curriculum. He noted that the Special Committee on the Place of Athletics at Amherst (of which Professor Woglom was a member) recommended in 2002, in its report titled *The Place of Athletics at Amherst College: A Question of Balance*, that the College provide ongoing monitoring of identified areas of concern, among them the academic performance of athletes. Professor Woglom said that the special committee recommended that the Office of Institutional Research gather data about this and other issues of concern and produce a report on an annual

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basis. He expressed dismay that this recommendation has not been implemented, while suggesting that the College should also take particular care in tracking the performance and curricular choices of less well-prepared students. Professor Woglom said that he suspects that current programs that are designed to offer support for these students are not coordinated or sustained and are insufficient for meeting the needs of students who arrive at Amherst without the background needed to succeed in quantitative courses here.

Professor O'Hara agreed that more information about student learning outcomes should be gathered and analyzed. Professor George noted that, when students receive information from the admission office, they may get the impression that they will be prepared for the rigor of Amherst's curriculum, when, in fact, this is not always the case. He said that it is understandable that the admission office emphasizes positive messages when reaching out to prospective students, but he feels that such an approach may raise some less well-prepared students' expectations to a degree that is unrealistic for them. Professor Schneider agreed that such "advertising" does not always serve the College and students well. He also raised concerns that grade inflation at the College may mask the degree to which less well-prepared students are integrated into the intellectual community at Amherst. President Marx suggested that conversations about grade inflation should occur in the context of these issues and as part of a larger discussion about the intellectual engagement of all Amherst students. He worries that some number of students may not be making the most of their academic experience at the College. He also agrees that it is important that the College evaluate the effects of its admissions policy. He said that he is pleased that the appointment of Marian Matheson as a full-time Director of Institutional Research has reinvigorated the Office of Institutional Research at the College and noted that staffing in her office will soon be increased to accommodate the increasing demand for institutional research at Amherst.

Noting that the College aspires to have a diverse student body and high academic standards, President Marx said that achieving this aim requires making choices in admissions policies. He said that it is his hope that the Faculty's consideration of admissions issues would result in a number of policy outcomes. While the College remains the most selective liberal arts college in the country, we must continue to strive to raise our standards even further, across the board. He noted that the CAP has recommended adding twenty additional spaces to incoming classes, and that this would enable the College to offer admission to all of our applicants with the top academic reader rating.

Dean Call requested that the members consider how to put these issues before the Faculty and the schedule for doing so. The Committee agreed that the FCAFA should be asked, as a part of its standing charge, to undertake its review as soon as possible and should report to the Committee and the Faculty by the end of the fall semester.

The Dean next asked the members to consider colleagues for a Memorial Minute Committee for Benjamin McCabe, Parmly Billings Professor of Physical Education, Emeritus, who died on September 13. He said that he would report back to the Committee of Six once the membership of the Memorial Minute Committee was finalized.

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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.

Professor Woglom said that he would vote against having the figure announced. He reiterated that, while he feels that every faculty member has the right to know the cutoff figure, he believes that disseminating it widely will lead to grade-grubbing. Professor Parker commented that the Faculty had voted for grade-grubbing when it approved the honors policy. The Dean pointed out that, if this motion were to be approved, the Registrar would announce the cutoff figure at the final faculty meeting of the year, when it is too late for appeals to change grades. Professor Hilborn reiterated his view that having the cutoff figure announced would provide feedback to the Faculty about grade inflation, depending on the top 25 percent cutoff number. Professor O'Hara said that, after thinking about this issue, she believes that the Faculty has a responsibility to know how the grades that they give translate into the top 25 percent of the class. After review of a motion drafted by Professor Woglom, the Committee voted on the following motion:

The Faculty authorizes the Registrar at the Commencement Meeting of the Faculty to report the minimum grade point average, to two decimal places, for students earning a degree with Distinction.

The Members voted six in favor and zero opposed to forward the motion to the Faculty and four in favor and two opposed (Professors Woglom and Schneider dissented) on the substance of the motion.

Continuing the conversation, President Marx asked the members if they thought that announcing the cutoff would lead to further grade inflation. Professor Schneider said that he believes that most faculty members are unaware of how their grade distributions compares with those of their colleagues. President Marx asked the members if they wished to discuss the issue of grade inflation, it having been raised in earlier conversation. Professor Schneider suggested that the conversation be held for another time, as grade inflation was not on the Committee's agenda.

At the request of the President and the Dean, the members next reviewed the following preliminary assessment, prepared by last year's Committee of Six, of which bodies should be charged with considering each CAP recommendation. President Marx noted that adjustments might be required now that some CAP recommendations are beginning to be forwarded to various groups for further discussion. The members made a number of suggestions for additions to the list of bodies, which are indicated in bold uppercase letters in the following summary:

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1. We recommend that talented students from less affluent backgrounds be more vigorously recruited and that the Trustees seek funds to meet the additional aid burden.

FCAFA works out the details and reports back to the Faculty periodically on how the initiative is progressing.

Committee on Priorities and Resources (CPR) may discuss financial implications.

Trustees.

2. We recommend that the Trustees consider significant reductions in the loan burden of all our students, as has been done for our highest-need students, in particular to avoid the limit that loans may impose on future career aspirations.

FCAFA works out the details and reports back to the Faculty periodically on how the initiative is progressing.

CPR may discuss financial implications.

Trustees.

3. We recommend that the proportion of non-US students admitted be increased from about 6 to about 8 percent.

FCAFA works out the details and reports back to the Faculty periodically on how the initiative is progressing.

CPR may discuss financial implications.

Trustees.

4. We recommend that admission for non-US students be made need-blind.

FCAFA works out the details and reports back to the Faculty periodically on how the initiative is progressing.

CPR may discuss financial implications.

Trustees.

5. We recommend that entering classes be increased by between 15 and 25 students.

FCAFA works out the details and reports back to the Faculty periodically on how the initiative is progressing.

CPR may discuss financial implications.

Trustees.

6. We recommend that 5 new FTEs be devoted to new interdisciplinary ventures and the support of other forms of cross-departmental collaboration.

Academic departments initiate FTE requests.

CEP, with vote by the Faculty on any new programs or majors proposed.

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7. We recommend that 2.5 new FTEs be devoted to global comprehension, their distribution to be made by the CEP among departments that are willing to commit themselves to teaching courses with this focus.

Academic departments initiate FTE requests.

CEP, in consultation with the Special Committee on the Amherst Education (SCAE) Working Group on Global Comprehension.

8. We recommend that 4 new FTEs be reserved to meet existing departmental needs.

Academic departments initiate FTE requests.

CEP, in consultation with the Working Committee on the Arts.

AD HOC ARTS GROUP.

9. We recommend that 2 FTEs be reserved to allow accelerated hiring to take advantage of targeted “opportunity” hires that invigorate or enrich the racial, cultural, gender, and/or intellectual diversity of the faculty.

Academic departments initiate FTE requests.

CEP.

10. We recommend that all assistant professors be assured of a year of sabbatical leave at full salary after reappointment.

CPR.

Administration.

Trustees.

11. We recommend that the existing program of Senior Sabbatical Fellowships be expanded to cover as much as two semesters of leave after six years and that the College make every effort to secure sufficient funds to support all qualified applicants.

CPR.

Administration.

Trustees.

12. We recommend that the College create a staff position to assist faculty in applying for grants to support their research and creative work.

CPR.

Administration.

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13. We recommend that funding for the Amherst Academic Interns program and the Dean of the Faculty's resources to support student research across the disciplines be enhanced.

CPR.

Administration.

Trustees.

Discuss possible partnerships with relevant departments.

14. We recommend significantly expanding opportunities for community service and for summer and January internships.

Administration.

College Council.

Trustees.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE TO THE CENTER FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT.

15. We recommend that a visiting appointment be made to allow a faculty member to serve half-time as coordinator of community-based learning.

Administration.

CEP.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE TO THE CENTER FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT.

16. We recommend that the College provide need-based support to encourage students to enroll in intensive summer language programs in the USA and abroad.

CPR.

Administration.

17. We recommend that 2 new FTEs be reserved to support the development and teaching of "intensive writing" courses, their distribution to be made by the CEP among departments willing to commit themselves to teaching additional courses for this purpose.

Academic departments initiate FTE requests.

CEP.

18. We recommend that all students be required to take at least one course designated as Writing Attentive, with pedagogical support to be provided for faculty engaged in such writing instruction.

Fleshed out by CEP, in consultation with the SCAE Working Group on Writing.

AD HOC COMMITTEE ON WRITING.

Faculty vote.

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19. We recommend that 2.5 new FTEs be reserved for improving students' quantitative literacy, their distribution to be made by the CEP among departments that are willing to commit themselves to teaching "intensive" sections or new courses for these purposes.

Academic departments initiate FTE requests.

CEP, in consultation with the SCAE Quantitative Working Group.

20. We recommend that the Faculty adopt a policy that requires the soliciting of teaching evaluations from all students in all classes.

Fleshed out by Committee of Six.

**AD HOC COMMITTEE ON THE EVALUATION AND IMPROVEMENT OF
TEACHING.**

Faculty vote.

21. We recommend that the administration devote more resources and staff time to supporting programs in pedagogy, including programs to help teachers at all ranks.

Committee of Six.

Administration.

Discussion by the Faculty.

TEACHING AND LEARNING PROJECT COMMITTEE.

22. We recommend that a faculty innovation fund be created to support pedagogical projects of faculty at all ranks and that eligibility for Senior Sabbatical Fellowships be expanded to include proposals for contributions to pedagogy in the broadest sense.

Administration.

Trustees.

Professor Schneider asked if recommendation 16 was intended to be restricted to language study or whether it might apply to summer study in other disciplines. The members agreed that the members of the CAP had language study in mind specifically when they made this recommendation. Professor Parker asked the Dean if the Committee on Educational Policy and Committee on Priorities and Resources have been made aware of the issues that they are to consider. The Dean said the two committees were informed. In regard to recommendation 14, Professor Parker asked if the Center for Community Engagement, and its advisory committee, would be responsible for considering issues surrounding community-based learning. He wondered about the status of the CAP recommendation that a faculty member serve half-time as coordinator of community-based learning. President Marx noted that, for the short term, Professor Basu, who will start her term as Associate Dean of the Faculty in January, will play this role. He informed Professor Parker that there would be resources available through the Center for Community Engagement to assist faculty members with community-based learning courses

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and assistance for faculty members to make connections between curricular content and experiential opportunities.

Professors Hilborn and O'Hara suggested that the President and the Dean report back to the Faculty in the spring about where things stand with the CAP process. Professor Schneider agreed and asked if the order of implementation for these recommendations depends on securing funding and issues of timing and phasing. President Marx said that the Board hasn't met since the beginning of June and that the Trustees are now reviewing the priorities and goals of the CAP report and evaluating how to secure funding. The Trustees are also considering the timing of implementation in relation to financial and other factors. The President said that the Faculty will have input into these deliberations, since Trustee committees are planning to meet with faculty committees. Professor Woglom said that he fears that each committee would lobby for its own priorities and said that it will be important for the Trustees to receive a larger faculty view. Professor George said that in the past, to his dismay, he has found that the Board tends to equate the views of the Committee of Six with those of the full Faculty. Professor Woglom suggested that the Committee consider ways to convey a more comprehensive expression of faculty opinion to the Trustees. The Committee agreed.

The Committee next returned to a discussion of Film Studies at Amherst. Professor Parker provided some background for the members. He noted that, while the study of the history and analysis of film at the College began in the English department more than three decades ago, interest in film and newer technologies of the moving image has lately spread across the curriculum. At present, all the film courses offered at the College are listed in a section of the Catalog, but students can find no instruction there as to ways of pursuing a coherent course of study. Professor Parker noted that, whether viewed as an art form in its own right or as an instrument or tool for research, film requires courses in production that the College has offered only sporadically (and mainly through Five-College faculty). He informed the Committee that the three other Colleges in the Five-College Consortium have now approved a Five-College major in Film Studies and that the university is expected to do so soon. What, he asked, should be Amherst's response to these developments? He suggested that an ad hoc committee be formed to explore the future of Film Studies at the College, noting that there has been thus far inconsistent communication among faculty interested in film and new media.

Responding to Professor Parker's comments, Professor Schneider questioned whether the Committee of Six should be involved in this issue. While acknowledging that the case for Film Studies appears to be a compelling one, Professor O'Hara suggested that the appropriate path in cases such as this one is for like-minded colleagues to come together for the purpose of discussion and, if they agree, to make a proposal to the CEP for a new program or major. Ultimately, such a proposal would be brought before the full Faculty. Professor Parker reiterated that communication has broken down and that things are at a standstill. He feels that, unless there is a directive from the Committee of Six and the administration, a proposal will not move forward. Professor Hilborn offered the example of the recent proposal for an environmental studies program, noting that proposals should arise out of faculty self-assembly, self-assessment,

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and interest, rather than being imposed from above. Professor Woglom agreed, commenting that it is not within the Committee's purview to make educational policy. The members agreed that, if he wished, the Dean could form an ad hoc advisory committee to examine the future of Film Studies at the College, but that the Committee of Six should not play a role in the formation of such a committee.

The members next discussed proposals for Five College certificates in: Russian, East European, and Eurasian Studies; Asian/Pacific/American Studies; and Native American Studies, all of which have been endorsed by the CEP. Last year's Committee of Six voted to endorse these proposals and to forward them to the Faculty, and the Dean asked this year's members for their views. Professor Schneider said that he views all of the proposals as laudable, but that he is opposed to them in principle. He views such certificates as running contrary to the spirit of the liberal arts and has found that they cut into the liberal arts curriculum in a profound way. His experience with students has demonstrated that such certificates are also impractical, because it is difficult for students to fit the required courses into their schedules. Professor Woglom also expressed concern, as he did last year, over the proliferation of such certificates and agreed that an emphasis on such credentialing is at odds with the philosophy of a liberal arts education. He has found that students in pursuit of Five College certificates often end up taking courses for the sole purpose of meeting the requirements of the certificate. Professor George said that he agreed with the sentiments expressed by Professors Woglom and Schneider, noting that he and others at Amherst had declined to support a Five-College certificate program in an area related to his own field. However, for better or worse, Amherst does allow participation in these certificate programs, and Professor George said he doesn't see a basis for opposing proposals that are coherent and that have strong faculty support. Professor Parker expressed the view that the certificates are being brought forward for different reasons, in response to different pressures, and as different educational and intellectual exercises and should be considered separately. The members then voted six to zero in favor of forwarding the certificates to the Faculty and agreed to continue their discussion before voting on the substance of the motions to approve them.

The meeting adjourned at 6:00 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Gregory S. Call
Dean of the Faculty