

**Committee of Six Minutes
of Thursday, October 5, 2006**

The seventh meeting of the Committee of Six for the academic year 2006–2007 was called to order by President Marx in his office at 8:15 A.M. on Thursday, October 5, 2006. Present were Professors George, Hilborn, O’Hara, Parker, Schneider, and Woglom, Dean Call, President Marx, and Assistant Dean Tobin, Recorder.

The Dean thanked the members for agreeing to gather for a second meeting this week. The Committee agreed to focus on reviewing the Dean’s draft of their request to the Faculty Committee on Admission and Financial Aid (FCAFA), so that the FCAFA could begin its work as soon as possible. Professor Woglom said that, before turning to this task, he wanted to share some comments with the members.

While noting that he does not have a problem with the way that his remarks about admissions have been recorded in the Committee of Six minutes in recent weeks, Professor Woglom said that he wanted to make his points more clearly. He noted that he is not concerned with the effects that shifts in the applicant pool have on average SAT scores at the College. He also agrees that, once a student matriculates at Amherst, the College has a responsibility to make him or her feel welcome and to provide the student with the best possible education. He is, however, concerned with the number of matriculating students with low academic credentials and with the fact that these students have apparently been assigned better reader ratings than would have been the case in the past. He believes that the College has a responsibility to keep track of these students’ effect on and engagement with the curriculum. First and foremost, the College needs to know whether these students on average are being well served: 1) Do they take full advantage of our open curriculum; 2) Are there courses available for their particular educational needs; 3) Do they perform up to their potential? In addition, Professor Woglom said, the College has a responsibility to assess the costs of admitting these students to the College as a whole: 1) What is the quality of the students who are denied admission to accommodate non-academic admits; 2) How many resources are devoted to the special needs of these students; 3) What is the effect of these students on our curriculum? Professor Woglom noted that he does not mean to suggest that he knows the answers to these questions, but he feels that it is important to recognize that Amherst has no reliable answers to these questions and no mechanism in place to provide the answers.

The President responded that, in his view, there are three issues to cull from the Committee’s recent discussions about admissions: the need to provide support for underprepared students at the College; the need to explore admissions policy in the context of recent unanticipated events; and the ongoing need for the Faculty to have a full range of data available to inform admission policy decisions. The President reiterated his view that the College can accomplish its goal of increasing further the diversity of the student body while maintaining its academic standards. He said once again that the College will continue to strive to raise the floor in admission for all categories of applicants, through new outreach programs and other strategies, while working toward identified goals.

Professor Schneider noted that challenges surrounding underprepared students at Amherst are longstanding, pre-dating current initiatives to increase diversity. He suggested that issues of

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both admissions policy and practice should be examined. Professor O'Hara said that she feels that there are a greater number of underprepared students at the College now than there have been in the past. In her view, it is essential that the Faculty is trained in the best ways to develop the potential of the full spectrum of Amherst students. At present, she feels that the College, after admitting some students, is failing to enable them to fulfill their academic aspirations and meet their career goals.

The President reiterated that the College has been working and will continue to work toward providing a full range of academic support for less well-prepared students. Professor Woglom noted that there may be a threshold for such students at Amherst, and that the College should recognize that the Faculty may not be able to serve the needs of some students with low academic credentials. Professor Hilborn said that the College is currently not facing the consequences of admitting students with a broad spectrum of preparation. The President asked the members if they feel that there should be any adjustments in the admission process while the Faculty develops a better understanding of what is happening with admissions. They agreed that some adjustments might be useful. President Marx reiterated the importance of incorporating more subjective measures into the admissions process, noted the subjectivity also of the SATs, and expressed his confidence in the judgement of our admissions colleagues.

The members agreed that the FCAFA should be asked to examine these important issues surrounding admissions at Amherst and asked the Dean to communicate the following request to the members of the committee:

The Committee of Six asks the Faculty Committee on Admission and Financial Aid (FCAFA) to analyze the distribution of academic qualifications in classes over the last decade, based on data in the applications for admission, particularly standardized test scores and reader ratings. How do the distributions of these measures compare? The Committee of Six also requests that the FCAFA, Dean Tom Parker, and Marian Matheson review the compilation and presentation of admissions data available to the Faculty, and make proposals for any possible expansion thereof, including longitudinal and comparative studies of admissions statistics and models that will illustrate how student attributes at the time of admission contribute to their academic outcomes at Amherst in relation to their educational and career goals. In making this request, the Committee of Six reminds all members of the community that individual students should not become a focus of this review. The Committee asks for a brief response by the end of December 2006, to be shared with the whole Faculty on a password-protected basis.

Professor Woglom suggested that the Committee recommend that the Faculty postpone discussion of admission issues at Faculty Meetings until the FCAFA completes its report, which should be in December. He also agreed with President Marx that the cases of individual students

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should not be discussed at Faculty Meetings. Professor Parker said that he would feel uncomfortable asking colleagues not to ask questions. Professor O'Hara suggested that, at the October 17 faculty meeting, colleagues be asked to forward comments and questions about this admissions issue to the FCAFA. The Committee agreed that this was a satisfactory approach to this dilemma.

The meeting adjourned at 9:20 A.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Gregory S. Call
Dean of the Faculty