

### **Committee of Six Minutes of Monday, October 16, 2006**

The eighth 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, October 16, 2006. Present were Professors George, Hilborn, O’Hara, Parker, Schneider, and Woglom, Dean Call, President Marx, and Assistant Dean Tobin, Recorder.

The Dean began the meeting by distributing to the members an amendment to the motion regarding reporting at the Commencement Meeting of the Faculty the minimum grade point average for students earning a degree with Distinction. Professor Tranbarger sent the amendment to the Dean, and Dean Call said that it would be distributed at the Faculty Meeting. It reads as follows:

That the Faculty authorizes the Registrar at the Commencement Meeting of the Faculty to report **information about the minimum distribution of** grade point averages **for students earning a degree. Such information may include,** to two decimal places, ~~for students earning a degree with Distinction~~ **the minimum, maximum, 25<sup>th</sup> percentile, 75<sup>th</sup> percentile, median, and mean.**

Some members of the Committee expressed concern that the amendment calls for information that is not relevant to the issue at hand, and that this revised language could confound the consideration of whether the cutoff for a degree with Distinction should be discussed publicly. At the same time, they noted that the full data set of grade distributions would be of interest in other contexts.

The Dean next passed out to the Committee revisions that were made by the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) to the revised charge to the committee that was proposed by the Committee of Six. The charge, incorporating both committees’ changes (the Committee of Six’s changes in bold capital letters and the CEP’s changes in bold) follows:

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; a researcher from the Dean’s office, 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, **and the researcher serves as committee secretary.** 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.

The Committee on Educational Policy is expected to **study-review and evaluate, and to report to the Faculty,** on the general educational policy of the college;; to consider suggestions from departments or from individual ~~F~~faculty members or students relating to changes in educational policy, including proposals for new

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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 **TENURED AND TENURE-TRACK** faculty positions to departments. **IN MAKING RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FTE SUCH ALLOCATIONS, THE COMMITTEE CONSIDERS THE CURRICULAR NEEDS OF INDIVIDUAL DEPARTMENTS AND THE COMMITMENT OF DEPARTMENTS TO OFFER COURSES THAT MEET IDENTIFIED COLLEGE-WIDE PRIORITIES AND CURRICULAR NEEDS.**

Professor Hilborn commented that the CEP's revisions are effective in making explicit the role of the CEP and the regularity with which the committee would be reporting to the Faculty.

In regard to the revised charge, Professor George asked the Dean if there are cases of staff members serving on faculty committees and expressed some discomfort with having the CEP Researcher serve on the CEP, even without a vote. He noted that he does not have any objection to the individual who is currently serving as the Researcher, but questioned the structure that is being proposed. The Dean said that the CEP has requested this structure, and that, under this proposal, the Researcher would serve as a liaison between the CEP and the Office of Institutional Research and take the minutes of the CEP meetings. The Researcher has also been asked by the CEP to review course proposals and to bring to the committee's attention courses that appear not to conform to the CEP's stated guidelines. Dean Call noted that the members of the CEP would receive copies of all course proposals, not just those identified by the Researcher in this way. Professor Woglom asked if it might be beneficial for the Director of Institutional Research to serve on the CEP. Dean Call said that such a structure has been discussed, and the CEP felt that it would not be the most efficient use of the Director of Institutional Research's time to have her serve on the CEP, but that she should be asked to meet with the Committee on an as-needed basis. Professor O'Hara agreed that it would be valuable to have an institutional research presence on the CEP, but she did not see the necessity of having the individual who provides the administrative support to the committee serve as a member and of including the Researcher in the charge in this way. Other members agreed. The Dean said that he would convey the Committee's views to the CEP and would report back.

Under "Questions from Committee Members," Professor Parker said that he has heard from colleagues that some Amherst students who come from less privileged backgrounds have unique non-academic needs, including debt incurred prior to matriculation, and face substantial economic challenges that should be addressed by the College. He noted that the Dean of Students Office is providing a great deal of valuable assistance, but that it appears that more needs to be done. President Marx agreed, noting that there is a clear need for support in this area, as has been discussed in recent years by many committees of the Faculty. He noted that last year, he created a "green dean" position in his office for the purpose of developing ways to assist students who come from less privileged backgrounds. Rachel Cardona '04, who assumed the position last year and is continuing this year, has helped to establish programs for peer mentoring and to bring families to campus for Family Weekend who otherwise could not afford to come. She has also helped develop systems for resolving financial challenges that are unique to students

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from these backgrounds. Professor O'Hara said that help seems to be offered most often on an episodic basis and that it is beneficial to put additional systems in place to serve students' needs more effectively and proactively.

The Dean informed the members that, in consultation with Deans Lieber and Snively, he has arranged for supplementary support so that the Writing Center can hire additional tutors and double the number of sessions that will be available to students this year (Sunday through Thursday evenings). In addition, a former Writing Center fellow has been hired to provide further support during crunch times in the semester.

Continuing "Questions from Committee Members," Professor George said that some colleagues have suggested to him that he is attempting to shut off the discussion at Faculty Meetings of issues raised in the Committee of Six minutes. He asked to be recognized at the Faculty Meeting so that he can explain his view that more of a distinction should be made between questions about the Committee of Six minutes and questions to the administration. He said that he would emphasize that the Committee of Six is not an arm of the administration and that the President and the Dean should not be answering all questions for the Committee of Six. Professor Woglom said that an explanation is not necessary, since it is the Committee of Six's responsibility to develop the order of business at Faculty Meetings. Professor George said that he wanted to reassure colleagues that he is not attempting to suppress or manage faculty discussion. The President agreed to recognize Professor George at the Faculty Meeting as he had requested.

In another matter relating to the October 17 meeting of the Faculty, Professor Hilborn noted that the proposals for the three Five-College certificates that will be discussed were endorsed and brought forward by the CEP last year. Typically, a member of the CEP would make the relevant motions at the Faculty Meeting during which these certificates would be considered, he said. The Committee agreed that, because these proposals had been carried over from last year and the membership of the CEP has changed since the endorsement, the Committee of Six's role would be to put the proposals before the Faculty. Current and former members of the CEP and colleagues who are most interested in the proposals should then be called on to address these programs. The Dean said that he had contacted the colleagues who have been most involved in these proposals to see if they wish to speak at the Faculty Meeting.

The Dean was next asked a procedural question relating to personnel matters.

The members reviewed eleven course proposals and voted six in favor and zero opposed to forward them to the Faculty. They expressed concerns relating to enrollment limits, the requirement of instructor's consent, and poor writing in regard to some course proposals. The Dean agreed to convey the Committee's views to the faculty members involved and to make corrections, when needed, before the courses should be forwarded to the Faculty.

In the course of the conversation about enrollment limits, Professor O'Hara recalled a faculty discussion about explicit criteria that the Faculty might use to limit enrollment in their classes during pre-registration. She asked Dean Call to refresh her memory. He said that he believes that the discussion to which she was referring took place in 2003-2004 as part of the CEP's consideration of this issue, which culminated in a motion that was brought before the Faculty and approved in May 2004.

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The Dean reminded the members that all courses now remain open throughout the pre-registration period, even if the number of students pre-registered for a course exceeds the enrollment limit for the course. At the end of pre-registration, faculty members whose courses are oversubscribed may instruct the Registrar to choose by lottery which students to drop from the course. Faculty members continue to have the option of determining their own class lists, whether after pre-registration, or during the add/drop period, the Dean said. The Registrar, at the request of the instructor, will remove students from the class list if they are registered for the course but are not in attendance during the add/drop period.

The Committee then turned to personnel matters.

The Dean next distributed to the members a letter (appended) that was sent to the Committee by Professor Himmelstein, Chair of the Committee on Educational Policy, on behalf of the committee. The CEP expressed concern that there is a discrepancy between the sum and substance of the Faculty's discussion of writing instruction during its consideration of the report of the Committee on Academic Priorities and the letter sent by the President to alumni on September 22, in which President Marx wrote that the "faculty has resolved to institute a new requirement: that all students select among courses specifically designed to improve writing and offered across the curriculum." The CEP expressed the view that the Faculty has not voted to institute a writing requirement and that the Faculty has not agreed that such a requirement would involve courses "specifically designed to improve writing."

President Marx acknowledged that the language used in his letter could have provided greater clarity. He noted that, immediately after the letter was sent to alumni, he began hosting a Web discussion forum at <http://www.amherst.edu/alumni/future/>, which features his responses to comments and questions from alumni, parents, and friends; information about emerging initiatives; and related information. The language used on this site more fully reflects the ongoing process of developing implementation proposals for writing, he said. (The site reads as follows: "In coming months, the Committee on Educational Policy, in consultation with a faculty-led working group on writing and the College's Writing Center, will be formulating an implementation proposal to bring before the faculty for deliberation and a vote.") President Marx said that he continues to respect the Faculty's deliberative process.

The meeting adjourned at 6:00 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Gregory S. Call  
Dean of the Faculty



AMHERST COLLEGE  
Department of Anthropology and Sociology

October 13, 2006

Greg Call  
Dean of the Faculty

Dear Greg:

Please communicate to the President and the Committee of Six our great dismay at the following assertion in Tony's September 22 letter to "Alumni and Friends":

For the first time since 1978, the faculty has resolved to institute a new requirement: that all students select among courses specifically designed to improve writing and offered across the curriculum.

We don't think that the faculty has in fact voted to institute a writing requirement. We also don't think that the faculty has agreed that such a requirement would involve courses "specifically designed to improve writing."

This is simply not what the "Sum and Substance" of Faculty discussion of the CAP report says. That document says that there was "broad support for the proposition that the College needs to insure better instruction in writing." However, it notes that "some faculty members ... expressed reservations about whether a requirement was the best way to ensure that all students receive the writing instruction they need." It also says that the details of any writing requirement will have to be voted by the faculty. This leaves open the possibility that the faculty might reject any proposal that comes before it.

In addition, neither the Sum and Substance nor the CAP report expresses an opinion on whether these courses need to be "specifically designed." Indeed, the report of the Working Group on Writing defines "writing attentive" courses in a way that many existing courses would qualify.

Tony's letter also pre-empts the CEP, the new Committee on Writing, and the normal channels of faculty governance. We are implicitly under the injunction to come up with a writing requirement. We are apparently precluded from concluding any of the following: (1) A writing requirement is not the best way to insure adequate writing instruction; (2) Priority should be placed on improving the teaching of writing before considering a writing requirement; (3) A writing requirement should be implemented largely using existing courses. The CEP thinks that there is much left to be discussed here before presenting a proposal of any kind to the Committee of Six and the Faculty.

Finally, constraining the role of the CEP in this way runs counter to the CAP's recommendation that the policy-making powers of the CEP be strengthened.

Sincerely,

Jerome L. Himmelstein  
Chair, Committee on Educational Policy