

**Committee of Six Minutes
of Monday, October 30, 2006**

The tenth 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 30, 2006. Present were Professors George, Hilborn, O’Hara, Parker, Schneider, and Woglom, Dean Call, President Marx, and Assistant Dean Tobin, Recorder. The minutes of October 16 were approved, and changes to the minutes of October 23 were given to the Dean. During the review of those minutes, Professor O’Hara observed that the language of the following motion, which was approved by the Faculty on October 17, authorizes the Registrar to report information about the distribution of grade point averages in an ascending fashion:

The Faculty authorizes the Registrar at the Commencement Meeting of the Faculty to report information about the distribution of grade point averages for students earning a degree. Such information may include, to two decimal places, the minimum, maximum, 25th percentile, 75th percentile, median, and mean.

She noted that the Committee’s conversation about the distribution of grade point averages—and questions on this topic that have been raised during previous faculty meetings—has occurred in the context of discussions about the cutoff for earning a degree with distinction. As a result, the distribution has typically been described in descending order, that is, from the top 25 percent down. Professor O’Hara suggested that it would be best if the distribution of grade point averages is discussed in a consistent way in the future. The Dean agreed.

Under his announcements, President Marx informed the members that he has received many responses to the letter that he sent to alumni this fall about the priorities and future directions of the College. He noted that a number of alumni have expressed the view that the College should provide students with assistance with public speaking, a skill that many Amherst graduates find is of great value. President Marx remarked that this emphasis on public speaking took him a bit by surprise, and he asked the members where this question might be directed for consideration. Professor Hilborn asked the President whether the alumni who wrote feel that Amherst alumni lack public speaking skills. President Marx replied that it is more his sense that the alumni feel that it would be desirable to provide students with the opportunity to receive training or instruction in this area.

Professor Schneider said that he feels that faculty members in most disciplines already provide a healthy amount of instruction in public speaking within their classes by assigning students presentations and offering feedback on student performance. Professor Parker acknowledged the roles that oratory played at earlier moments in the College’s history, and noted the vestigial traces of its former prominence in the public speaking and debate competitions held on campus each year. He hoped that the alumni who wrote to the President about this issue would be interested in learning why, today, the notion of public speaking as a curricular end in itself is widely considered foreign to the mission of the liberal arts. Professor O’Hara wondered if addressing this request from alumni might be done through teaching and learning programs.

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Continuing his announcements, the President informed the members that Dean Call and he met with the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) on October 27. The CEP stressed to them that it would like to ensure that, after a number of years of intensive planning and the creation of a variety of ad hoc committees, the College should return to normal channels of faculty governance and should regularize the CEP's enhanced role. The President and the Dean agreed. They reviewed with the CEP the process by which the Ad Hoc Committee on Writing and the Ad Hoc Committee on the Evaluation and Improvement of Teaching were created and the committees' role in the process of refining the relevant CAP recommendations.

President Marx conveyed to the members that there has been some confusion about the role of the CEP in this process. He noted that the Committee of Six assigned to the CEP the role of working with the Ad Hoc Committee on Writing to develop a proposal for a writing requirement, which will be brought before the Faculty for discussion and a vote. However, the CEP has been under the impression that it would be developing this proposal. After discussion, it was agreed that the two committees should work together on a writing proposal, that the Ad Hoc Committee would issue a report that would go to the CEP, and that the CEP would deliberate on the report and then forward it, with its recommendations, to the Committee of Six. In turn, the Committee of Six would review the proposal and forward it to the Faculty for a vote.

In terms of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Evaluation and Improvement of Teaching, the President said that the CEP was not among the bodies originally charged by the Committee of Six with exploring and recommending ways to improve teaching, including a system of evaluating the teaching of senior faculty members. Because this issue was not strictly curricular, the Committee of Six had imagined that the Ad Hoc Committee would issue its report to the Committee of Six directly. The President said that the CEP feels that it should play a role in this process, particularly because the report may focus on broader pedagogical matters, not just evaluation, and because including the CEP in this reporting chain would be consistent with the enhanced role of the committee. The members agreed that it would be beneficial to have the CEP deliberate on the Ad Hoc Committee's report before the document comes to the Committee of Six, although several members said that it is important not to set a precedent that all committee proposals be channeled through multiple committees.

President Marx next shared with the members a report of the recent meetings of the Board of Trustees, as requested: "The Board is encouraged by the faculty endorsement of the CAP goals and priorities, informed by the sum and substance of the Faculty's discussion. The January Instruction meeting of the Board will be an opportunity for conversations with faculty members on pertinent College committees. The trustees look forward to discussing curricular, access and financial implications of the CAP goals and priorities with, among others, the Committee on Educational Policy, the Faculty Committee on Admission and Financial Aid, and the Committee on Priorities and Resources. These conversations should lead to the further refinement of plans for the future, including for a fundraising campaign." The members thanked the President for conveying this summary of the Board's views.

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The Dean made several announcements. He noted, with great sorrow, the death on October 29 of Trinkett Clark, Curator of American Art at the Mead Art Museum. He informed the members that the Amherst community can share memories, condolences, and thoughts about Trinkett Clark at www.amherst.edu/mead. Entries are public, but there is an option to leave a private message that will be delivered to the family. Plans are under way for celebration at the College of her life, and the Dean said that he will keep the community informed as details are finalized. The members expressed their sadness at this tragic loss.

The Committee then turned to personnel matters.

Dean Call next informed the members that the UMass Calendar Committee has decided that no changes will be made to the UMass calendar before 2009-2010. The Five-College Deans agreed that a Five-College calendar task force (made up of two faculty members from each institution) should be formed to deliberate on the university's proposal to begin the spring semester two weeks earlier than it starts at present and to assess the effects of such a change on the academic programs of the five institutions. After discussion, the members requested that the Dean ask the members of the College Council to put forward two of its faculty members as Amherst's representatives on the task force. He agreed.

Continuing his announcements, Dean Call confirmed that a search committee has been formed for the position of Director of the Mead Art Museum. The members are Professors Robert Bezucha (Chair), Carol Clark, Rick Griffiths (Associate Dean of the Faculty), and Carol Keller; Suzannah Fabing, former Director of the Smith College Museum of Art; Michael Kasper, Reference Librarian/Coordinator of the Collection Development for the Amherst College Library; and Kenneth Rosenthal '60, attorney, businessman, and former treasurer of Hampshire College. Lisa Graziose Corrin, Director of the Williams College Museum of Art, will be of counsel to the search committee. The Dean and the Committee expressed gratitude for the willingness of these colleagues to serve on the search committee.

Under "Questions from Committee Members," Professor Parker asked that the Committee discuss, sometime in the future, the topic of departmental external reviews. The Dean agreed to add this subject to the Committee's agenda.

The Committee then returned to personnel matters.

The meeting adjourned at 6:15 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Gregory S. Call
Dean of the Faculty