

**Committee of Six Minutes  
of Monday, April 30, 2007**

The thirty-sixth meeting of the Committee of Six for the academic year 2006-2007 was called to order by the Dean at 3:00 P.M. on Monday, April 30, 2007. Present were Professors George, O'Hara, Parker, Schneider, Sinos, and Woglom, Dean Call, President Marx, and Assistant Dean Tobin, Recorder.

The meeting began with "Announcements from the President." President Marx informed the members that he had met with the Ad Hoc Advisory Committee on Parking to discuss parking on the Quad and other parking issues. For the past four years, construction has necessitated that parking be eliminated on part of the Quad. After discussing various proposals and considering issues of access, the ad hoc committee and the President agreed that the forty-two current parking spaces should remain on the Quad once current construction is complete and before any future construction, rather than increasing or decreasing that number. Professor O'Hara noted the shortage of parking spaces within walking distance of College buildings and the need for visitor parking. Professor Schneider reiterated that this is a particular problem for events at the Mead. The President acknowledged that these are serious issues that should be addressed, while noting that the number of students parking on campus is decreasing, which might alleviate the problem to some degree.

The President next informed the members that, as recommended by the Committee on Priorities and Resources (CPR), the Trustees are considering an increase to the grant-in-aid benefit, which provides aid for employees with children in college. Professor Schneider, noting that the benefit seems inefficient, said that the effect of grant-in-aid is often to reduce a student's financial aid award (by reducing his or her demonstrated need by the amount of the grant) from the college to which they are applying. In essence, with this benefit, Amherst subsidizes the financial aid programs of other institutions, he said. Professor Schneider wondered whether offering other options, such as using funding to increase employees' contributions to retirement plans during the time that a child is in college, might be a better idea. The President agreed that the grant-in-aid benefit has some inefficiencies, but said that there are a number of reasons for continuing the program and raising the amount of assistance provided. He and the Dean noted that so-called "cafeteria plans," which allow employees to choose where their benefit dollars are spent, have been discussed in the past but have not proved to be practical to implement because of tax implications. Further, the President said, Amherst is an outlier among its peers in the amount of grant-in-aid that it offers to its employees. He noted that the amount of the benefit has been unchanged for about twenty years. The President said that Amherst should offer competitive grant-in-aid because the benefit has an effect on faculty and staff recruitment. Professor Woglom noted that there is inequity inherent in the benefit. Those who have the highest salaries, who might not qualify for financial aid, benefit most. Those at lower income levels, who would probably qualify for financial aid, would have their awards reduced, unless the school to which a child is applying does not make an offer of aid. The President noted that most of higher education cannot meet full need and that grant-in-aid is a direct benefit to many faculty and staff. Of the eighty-five faculty and staff using the benefit at present, 20 percent have children at institutions that meet full need, with 80 percent enjoying the full effect of the benefit. The Dean suggested that it might be informative to read the CPR discussions of this topic and its report on grant-in-aid, all of which are posted online.

**Committee of Six Minutes  
of Monday, April 30, 2007**

The Committee then reviewed five course proposals and voted unanimously to forward them to the Faculty.

At 3:30, the Committee was joined by the members of the Ad Hoc Committee on Writing, comprised of Professors Barale, chair; Bosman, Brandes, Lopez, and Greenstein. The Dean thanked the ad hoc committee for all of their efforts since last July, when the committee was charged by the Committee of Six with developing a proposal to implement the recommendation of the Committee on Academic Priorities (CAP) that a writing requirement be adopted.

Professor Barale explained that the ad hoc committee had been purposeful in their decision to take a broad and organic approach to the consideration of writing instruction at the College. She and her colleagues believe that it would be premature to recommend the implementation of a College-wide writing requirement at this time. Instead, they focused their efforts on considering faculty-driven ways of building flexible-but-rigorous structures to support writing instruction and to integrate it within the curriculum. Professor Brandes noted that the ad hoc committee's work had been informed greatly by conversations with colleagues.

Noting that the ad hoc committee had reduced an initial seven-page draft of their report down to the current three-and-a-half-page version (appended), Professor Barale discussed the range of initiatives recommended by the ad hoc committee, a time line for implementation, and the need for outside evaluation at the conclusion of what is meant to be a three-year pilot program. Some members of the ad hoc committee suggested that the Faculty might return to the question of whether to implement a writing requirement in three years. Professor Greenstein commented that the ad hoc committee had decided that the best way to proceed at this time was to find ways of giving greater attention to the teaching of writing across the College—within departments and disciplines—and to furthering conversation about writing instruction, rather than proposing a single requirement. He feels that, once additional support structures are in place, greater attention will be paid to writing, and that will act as seeding for a future writing requirement.

Professor Parker, who said that he admired the writing program at Bryn Mawr, in particular, and found similarities between it and the ad hoc committee's recommendations, asked the members of the ad hoc committee if they had researched writing programs at other institutions. Professor Barale noted that the Working Group for Writing Instruction at Amherst College had done a good deal of this sort of work to inform their report (2005) and that the ad hoc committee had reviewed this information.

Professor Woglom expressed disappointment that the ad hoc committee had not put forward a plan for implementing a writing requirement. Professor Barale said that she does not believe that the Faculty would support a writing requirement at this point. Some Committee of Six members said that they found much to admire in the ad hoc committee's report and approach, in particular the committee's recommendations to create a named, rotating professorship devoted to writing and a standing faculty committee to oversee the pilot program. Professors Sinos and Schneider noted that faculty conversation thus far has already resulted in greater attention being given to writing at the College and an increase in the number of courses being offered that are attentive to writing. They anticipate that further progress would be made if the ad hoc committee's recommendations are implemented.

**Committee of Six Minutes  
of Monday, April 30, 2007**

Professor Bosman noted that the ad hoc committee's recommendation that the Faculty take ownership of writing instruction—apart from the Writing Center—is not as modest as it might seem and represents a development of the view of the Working Group for Writing Instruction. It was noted that the ad hoc committee has recommended enlarging the Writing Center. Professor Bosman responded that this is the fifth recommendation out of five, and that the emphasis of the report is that the Amherst Faculty should be responsible, in a central way, for teaching students writing throughout students' time at the College.

Professor O'Hara suggested that it would be beneficial for the Writing Center (as well as the Quantitative Center) to report to the Dean of the Faculty, in addition to the Dean of Students. Such a structure might strengthen the relationship between the centers and the Faculty, she noted. Professor Parker agreed, noting that such a restructuring of the reporting structure of the Writing Center would signal that the teaching of writing is an intellectual issue that concerns the entire curriculum. Professor Bosman also expressed his support for having the centers report to the Dean.

Professor Parker asked if the ad hoc committee envisions reserving future FTE faculty positions for so-called "compositionalists," who, as the name implies, are trained in the teaching of writing. The Dean wondered if the ad hoc committee was suggesting that the rotating professorship be filled by colleagues from the Amherst Faculty or by faculty who would be brought in from outside the College. Professor Barale responded that it would be essential for the rotating professorship to be filled by a senior member of the Amherst Faculty, since part of the purpose would be for the person in this position to explore how the College understands its own pedagogy. She feared that relying too heavily on compositionalists would create a two-tier faculty system, while not being opposed to having a compositionalist permanently on staff at the Writing Center to work with faculty and students.

Continuing the conversation, Professor Parker emphasized that composition has become a serious academic field, and that graduate education in many disciplines now includes instruction in writing pedagogy. Professor Barale suggested that, perhaps, one individual could provide both ESL services and writing instruction. She noted that Susan Snively, Associate Dean of Students and Director of the Writing Center, does not have the resources to provide assistance to students who are writing honors theses. While praising the Writing Center, Professor Bosman reiterated that trust should be put in the Amherst Faculty to teach writing across the College. Professor O'Hara, who said that she supports having a "compositionalist" to provide training to the Faculty on writing instruction, noted that if the College wants students to gain writing competency, it is essential that the Faculty be competent at teaching writing.

Professor Sinos raised the question of how to develop a common language among the Faculty for teaching writing. The College has already brought experts on writing to campus to offer seminars on grading and ways to set up assignments, Professor Barale said. She envisions that such opportunities would continue to be offered. Faculty conversations about how to teach writing will help to develop a common language, she believes, although such a language will vary somewhat by discipline. Professor Schneider agreed that providing resources for training and conversation, and flexibility in how writing instruction is fostered, will facilitate greater attention to the teaching of writing at the College. Professor Lopez emphasized the importance of teaching writing across departments and across a student's four years at Amherst, rather than

**Committee of Six Minutes  
of Monday, April 30, 2007**

just at a limited number of isolated moments—such as during the first semester of the first year. Writing should become integral to students' entire education, he said.

The President asked about the governance implications of the ad hoc committee's decision not to develop a concrete proposal for implementing a writing requirement, given the Faculty's request for a proposal to debate, as a means of expressing the collective view. He said that, since he arrived at the College and before, the Faculty has been engaged in vigorous conversation about writing instruction. He asked for further explication of how the process proposed by the ad hoc committee would move the College toward meeting the goals for improving the writing of the following categories of students, as identified by the Faculty: that portion of students in each class who lack basic writing skills, those who avoid classes that require substantial writing, and the student body as a whole. He asked the ad hoc committee to help him understand how concerns for these constituencies would be addressed under the ad hoc committee's plan. He noted that, when the College identified students who were most in need of instruction in writing and encouraged them to enroll in writing intensive courses, only about one-half did so. He asked whether the College should feel satisfied that it is meeting the educational needs of those students who are most in need of intensive instruction, if they choose not to take advantage of the intensive courses that are being offered, or if students can and do graduate without any courses that include or improve writing.

Professor Greenstein said that the ad hoc committee's aim was to propose ways to meet the needs of all three constituencies. Professor Barale noted that the ad hoc committee was attempting to find solutions to writing problems that are intrinsically complex and multifaceted. Professor Parker said that having students take one writing-attentive course should not be confused with the goal of writing proficiency. The President agreed and wondered whether students would receive writing instruction before declaring their majors, if writing-attentive courses were situated within majors. Professor Greenstein said that in many fields students are required to take courses in the discipline during their first year, before they formally declare a major. Professor Brandes responded that the ad hoc committee is recommending that some percentage of First-Year Seminars be writing attentive. Professor Schneider noted that the advisor should also be responsible for helping to ensure that students focus on writing through their courses.

Professor O'Hara expressed strong support for the ad hoc committee's recommendation of a rotating professorship devoted to writing, coupled with a standing faculty committee on writing. She noted that the Thalheimer Professorship, which rotates among the Faculty every three years, could serve as an excellent model for the new professorship. The role of the Thalheimer Professor is to foster conversation and innovation in regard to teaching, and it has been very effective, Professor O'Hara said. Several members of the Committee agreed that the concept of a rotating professorship and faculty committee devoted to writing was an excellent one. Members of the ad hoc committee likened the committee on writing to the First-Year Seminar Committee. They envision that such a committee would monitor curricular developments and make curricular judgements.

The Dean noted the importance of defining the attributes of writing attentive and writing intensive courses. He also asked how progress could be assessed without taking this step. Some members of the Committee of Six suggested that the new writing committee might play a role in

**Committee of Six Minutes  
of Monday, April 30, 2007**

developing such criteria; the ad hoc committee emphasized that a College-wide process that encourages interdisciplinary debate should be employed. Professor Greenstein emphasized that writing is a fluid skill and that changes in students' writing might be subtle and difficult to quantify. Professor Bosman said that the ad hoc committee suggested beginning the three-year pilot in 2008-2009 in order to allow time for faculty discussion and for developing definitions for writing intensive and attentive courses. He emphasized that this should be a careful, slow, and deliberate process and that the criteria that are developed should not be too narrow.

Professor Brandes suggested that Faculty should self-identify courses that are writing attentive or writing intensive. Perhaps a meeting could be organized of faculty teaching such courses, she said. Dean Call said that, in order to move the conversation forward, it would be useful for the Faculty to reach a consensus on the broad criteria and/or guidelines for these courses in the near term. Professor Lopez agreed that there should be guidelines, but noted that there should be flexibility to allow for variation among disciplines and departments. President Marx said that, while the process of developing guidelines might be difficult, and it might be tempting to lean toward the least intrusive possibilities, he is confident that the Faculty will engage in this process.

Professor Parker noted that there are FTE issues intertwined with the teaching of writing attentive and intensive courses. Such courses are offered at the behest and cost of faculty members, who do not teach other courses within the departmental curriculum as a result. He asked how the allocation of FTEs would be implemented in relation to departmental commitments to offer writing attentive and/or intensive courses. This subject was not addressed by the ad hoc committee in its report. The President said that the CAP had recommended that two FTEs be devoted to writing, but noted that, the CAP process suggests that only when a common and tangible understanding of writing initiatives that are moving the College forward emerges can FTEs be allocated. The Dean noted that, ultimately, the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) would decide, based on the criteria that the Faculty establishes for writing attentive and intensive courses, whether a particular course would be "counted" as a writing attentive or intensive course.

Professor Bosman noted that the ad hoc committee had considered whether all First-Year Seminars should become writing intensive, but that the CEP had strongly discouraged this approach. The CEP's view is that some First-Year Seminars are focused on substance other than writing. Professor Woglom pointed out that First-Year Seminars could be writing attentive and accomplish other goals. It appears to him that the seminars present an excellent opportunity to introduce the seriousness of writing and to identify students who might be in need of extra help with their writing. Professor O'Hara noted that, in their responses to an inventory given to First-Year Seminar students in the fall of 2005, students indicated that their highest expectation of the seminars was that attention would be given to their writing. Professor Bosman reiterated that the ad hoc committee had been told that the First-Year Seminar program would be in upheaval if all of the seminars were required to be writing attentive. Professor Barale said that she worries, that, if First-Year Seminars were required to be writing attentive, there would be a conceptual shift at the College toward viewing the teaching of writing as taking place only at this one moment.

The Committee of Six, the Dean, and the President thanked the members of the ad hoc committee for their work, and the members departed at 4:50.

**Committee of Six Minutes  
of Monday, April 30, 2007**

The members discussed ways in which proposals regarding writing might move forward. The Dean said that the CEP, at the direction of the Faculty, will consider College-wide priorities when making recommendations for FTEs, while other forms of support and resources could and would also be added. He understood that any FTE requests made in regard to writing would require agreement on proposals that advance writing instruction, not just a further process for continuing such deliberation. Professor Schneider noted that majors in his department are required to take courses that could be categorized as writing attentive and that he believes that many other departments probably have similar requirements. Professor George suggested that the ad hoc committee might be asked to propose guidelines for writing attentive and intensive courses. Professor O'Hara wondered if the ad hoc committee, which expressed a preference to disband after much hard work, might be asked instead for suggestions about how to move this question forward.

The Committee next returned to its discussion of the proposal, forwarded by the CEP, for a major in Environmental Studies. Professor Parker asked how the major would be phased in. Professors Sinos and Woglom wondered whether the Faculty could vote on a major before FTEs have been hired. The Dean said that he envisions, following regular processes, that resource requests resulting from the proposal for the major would be evaluated by the CEP, and recommendations would be made to the administration. If new FTEs are allocated to Environmental Studies this spring, searches would be conducted in 2007-2008, and the major could be brought to the Faculty for a vote in fall 2007. Such a step would indicate to the Faculty and to the Board that a major is coming. He noted that the CEP has indicated that it is strongly supportive of creating a major. Curricular proposals are reviewed by the CEP and acted on by the Faculty, the Dean said. Professor George pointed out that the proposal is to create a program, so there would only be a need for the Faculty to vote on the proposed major. The Committee asked the Dean to research the history of faculty votes relating to the creation of the Department of Women's and Gender Studies and its major to learn if the Faculty had voted on the sequence of courses that would be part of the major.

The Committee expressed overall support for establishing a major in environmental studies, but some members raised specific questions about the make-up of courses within the major. It was agreed that those members should contact Professor Dizard to discuss their concerns. Professor George raised a question about the prospect that students, particularly those majoring in Biology and Geology, might use the Environmental Studies major, as currently described, as a second major of convenience. Because many of the required courses would overlap among these majors, he worried that "double-counting" of courses toward two majors might occur. The Dean said that he would check with Mr. Mager, the Registrar, to learn if double-counting has been a problem and what the regulations are in regard to this practice and would report back.

In the brief time remaining, the Committee discussed the letter (appended to the minutes of April 26) from Professors Damon and Ratner, on behalf of the Ad Hoc Committee on Promotion, in which concerns were raised about the process that the Committee of Six had used in evaluating and framing the debate on their committee's report. The Committee expressed regret that they had not met with the ad hoc committee and noted that the Committee's actions did not represent any sort of negative intent. The members agreed that if, in the future, the

**Committee of Six Minutes  
of Monday, April 30, 2007**

Committee is forwarding a committee report to the Faculty without making changes, it might not be necessary to meet with the committee. However, if the Committee is going to suggest changes in substance via the motions it drafts, the members should meet with the committee to discuss their report.

Professor Schneider said that it might have been helpful to ask the ad hoc committee to frame motions. The members agreed, in hindsight, that discussing with the ad hoc committee the framing of motions based on the report would have been helpful. Some members commented that there are lessons for the Committee to learn from recent events about the dangers of focusing on meta-issues before substance, when bringing motions before the Faculty. Some members felt that getting a sense of the Faculty's views on issues before spending a great deal of time framing motions can be helpful to the Committee. Professor George suggested that a committee-of-the-whole approach might be a better way of structuring such discussion. The members agreed to draft a letter of response to Professors Ratner and Damon.

The meeting adjourned at 6:00 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Gregory S. Call  
Dean of the Faculty

**Implementing a Writing Attentive Curriculum:  
Suggestions for a Three Year Pilot Study  
Beginning AY 2008 - 09**

**I**

The members of the Ad Hoc Committee on Writing understand our charge to be the development of a proposal to implement Recommendation 18 of the *2006 Report of the Committee on Academic Priorities* (CAP), 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" (26). Cap's proposal of a writing requirement, moreover, reiterates the earlier recommendation made in the *2005 Report of the Working Group for Writing Instruction* (WGWI, appended), in which a majority of the WGWI recommended that "students be required to take one W [writing attentive] course by the end of the second year" (4).

In the course of the Ad Hoc Committee's consultations and discussions, however, we have encountered substantive faculty opposition to implementation of a college-wide writing requirement. The Committee, therefore, has decided not to recommend that writing become a college requirement at this time, despite our differing individual positions on the requirement's merits. We believe that writing instruction at the College is most likely to prosper under the aegis of an intellectually coherent program shaped, overseen, and ultimately evaluated by faculty. Before we shape our curriculum to emphasize writing - and certainly before we require writing courses of our students - we should establish a structure able to organize and support writing courses.

In order to fully integrate writing with existing disciplinary instruction, this report will suggest 1) a range of writing initiatives (we identify no single curricular site as the "right" place for increased attention to writing); 2) a time line for those initiatives (three years of implementation followed by outside evaluation); 3) a means of implementing them (intra-departmental as well as across the college); and 4) a set of incentives and resources for those initiatives. It is our hope to offer an array of approaches by which writing instruction can become an explicit and articulated part of classroom - and faculty - conversation.

To that end, one of conversation and community, we have tried to find a way by which all parts of the college might contribute to a writing curriculum. Because we want to take advantage of existing structures - the Writing Center and some part of the First Year Seminar Program - the committee's central focus is on our present curriculum. It is the role that departments would play in teaching writing, therefore, that would most fully enable Amherst College's attention to writing to become realized in instruction that continues throughout students' time here. We want to find a way by which departments can regularly make W courses part of their curricular



offerings at all levels. Such courses could be topical ones that would be of interest to majors but also might appeal to interested non-majors; they could be junior level seminars; they could be team taught; they could be cross-disciplinary - in short, they could be as creatively and energetically shaped as our imagination invites.

As we consider incorporating a new emphasis on writing into our curriculum, it seems worth noting that many courses already require several written assignments, and that many courses currently ask for at least fifteen to twenty pages of writing and some for twice that amount. It also seems important to point out that some departments have always made their classes write almost weekly essays which they then discuss in class. Many of us spend a great deal of time in our offices looking at rough drafts and outlines, answering questions, encouraging good ideas, discouraging moves sure to get a writer in trouble. The need to implement a more prominent emphasis on writing is certainly not due to faculty sloth. Our students come to us untrained - whatever their previous schooling; none have a language, a common vocabulary, with which to discuss arguments in general and their papers. They have no names for the very strategies and structures - theses; evidence and its evaluation; transitions; the subordination and co-ordination of ideas; kinds of definitions - that we most want them to master. And we, too, may lack a vocabulary for the work we are being asked to do. The new emphasis on writing is designed to address our students' difficulties - and whatever our own might be.

Nor do we want to downplay the burden that an emphasis on writing poses. It is hard to teach writing, not simply because it takes longer to read and respond to papers when writing is an important part of what is being commented upon, but because, until we get the hang of it, we may sometimes feel that we are not teaching the very thing that we love to teach and feel the most expert at. At least initially, our own confidence may feel shaky.

And finally, we recognize that not all departments can or even should regularly offer writing instruction. For example, small departments may well decide that they cannot stretch themselves any thinner than they already are, as they try to meet the needs of their major curriculum and keep up their enrollment numbers. All departments - and small ones, in particular - feel the need to protect their core. When they fear the loss of either instruction in their own curriculum or in FTEs because of college demands, they will resist moving into interdisciplinary fields. But we also expect that the college will continue to go out of its way to enable departments to teach writing courses without cost to their existing curriculum.

Here, then, is our implementation plan:

## II

### 1. **Create a named, rotating Professorship, devoted to writing.**

The success of a new emphasis on writing in the College's curriculum depends upon the intellectual investment of all of us in its implementation. Although an organized approach is certainly called for during the initial stages of implementation, and may prove useful past the first three years, the committee recommends designating a central figure to undertake responsibility

for articulating a rationale and structuring its implementation. That figure needs to be a member of the faculty - not a compositionist - of sufficient seniority and stature to integrate a new set of instructional interests with Amherst's existing academic commitments. Implementation calls for someone whose judgments and plans both faculty and administration can support.

## **2. Create a standing faculty committee whose charge is to oversee all parts of the pilot program.**

While no one on the Ad Hoc Committee craves bureaucracy, creation of a formalized structure, chaired by whoever holds the rotating professorship, could assist in training for writing instruction and in organizing both a writing curriculum and its evaluation at the end of three years.

- a. allocate an implementation budget for the committee;
- b. provide for an outside evaluation team.

## **3. Reward instructors and departments who take on the task of writing instruction.**

We urge that departments, rather than individuals, take on the responsibility for offering two W classes during the three year pilot program. Because a writing responsibility will pose difficulties for many departments who already feel the strain of meeting their current curricular needs, the college will need to find a means by which new responsibilities can be met.

- a. provide visiting 3 year appointments to departments that agree to develop and then offer two W classes within their curriculum;
- b. provide FTEs to departments that would make such classes a major requirement;
- c. train faculty who want to teach W courses, and remunerate them for taking up such training.

## **4. Make a percentage of all FYS offerings Writing Attentive (FYS W)**

The FYS Program seems to be a site where writing instruction could be easily plugged in; however, given the complicated and competing demands already placed on FYS classes, we do not think it is appropriate to expect that FYS take on the major role in writing instruction.

- a. control enrollments so that these classes would be smaller than the usual FYS enrollment;
- b. ask instructors to commit to teach an FYS W for two years.

## **5. Enlarge the Writing Center**

The Writing Center has been consistently effective in mentoring students' writing. We want to help it keep doing what it does well already.

- a. increase professional staff by one full position, with ESL as a permanent part of that position;
- b. find larger quarters for the Center while still keeping it centrally sited on campus;
- c. increase the number of peer tutors.

We have been broad rather than specific in describing what needs to be set in place before the college's curriculum can programmatically include writing as both a topic and a requirement. We believe that the details - where we know that numerous devils reside - might be best determined in the field rather than on paper. In other words, we have tried to provide sufficient detail to be practical, but insufficient particulars to bog us down. We have left unspecified two areas that are most devilish: 1) training for instructors; and 2) the disposition of FTEs. And note, also, that we have spent no time at all discussing how we will get students into writing courses if they are not required. We are optimistic that when the development of writing and argument are central to conversations among and about ourselves, our students will want to be part of that center.

Michele Aina Barale, Chair  
Anston Bosman  
Ute Brandes  
Rick A. Lopez  
George S. Greenstein

24 April, 2007