

**Committee of Six Minutes
of Monday, May 14, 2007**

The thirty-eighth 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, May 14, 2007. Present were Professors George, O'Hara, Parker, Schneider, Sinos, and Woglom, Dean Call, President Marx, and Assistant Dean Tobin, Recorder. The members approved the minutes of the meeting of May 7.

Under "Announcements from the Dean," Dean Call informed the members that the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) has approved Professor Bumiller's request that, upon successful completion of her course, titled *Regulating Citizenship*, credit be awarded to all students who are enrolled. Professor Bumiller teaches the course at a local correctional facility, and an equal number of Amherst students and residents of the facility are enrolled. The Dean explained that the students who are residents of the facility would not be able to use the credit toward an Amherst degree, since they have not been admitted to the College, but could transfer the credit to another institution if they desired. The Committee was supportive of the CEP's decision.

Professor Sinos next expressed some concern that, because the members had been asked to vote via email on the motion to approve the proposed mission statement, the Committee had not had the benefit of a discussion when considering how to vote on this issue. Professor Parker, noting that he had been the only member not to vote in favor of the motion, said that he had done so to register his concern that the language of the mission statement further emphasized the production of knowledge. He had voiced the view at both meetings of the Committee of Six and the Faculty that not all fields generate knowledge, but, rather strive to encourage learning. He feels that the language of the mission statement does not represent everyone's sense of what they do, he said. The Dean apologized to the Committee for the need to vote by email, which resulted from an oversight that originally placed on the agenda a report on, rather than a motion to approve, the mission statement.

The Committee turned to personnel matters.

Under "Questions from Committee Members," Professor Parker asked if the President and the Dean would discuss the changes in format that had been implemented at Senior Assembly. President Marx said that, as an experiment, efforts have been made to redistribute among other celebratory ceremonies the activities and presentations that have typically taken place at Senior Class Exercises during Class Day (the Saturday of Commencement Weekend). He noted that these changes were prompted by sparse attendance at Senior Class Exercises. The President then reviewed the adjustments.

Two student speakers, the runners-up for Student Commencement Speaker, spoke at Senior Assembly, rather than at Senior Class Exercises. The tradition of a student speaker at Commencement will continue, the President said. He noted that the Woods-Travis Prize, the chief academic award, would be given at Commencement this year, as would the Obed Finch Slingerland Memorial Prize, which is awarded to the senior who has "shown by his/her own determination and accomplishment the greatest appreciation of and desire for a college education." In addition, Phebe and Zephaniah Swift Moore Teaching Award recipients will be acknowledged at Commencement this year, rather than at Senior Class Exercises, the President said. The award recognizes secondary school teachers and counselors who have been important in the lives of Amherst students. The presentations of the Thomas H. Wyman 1951 Medal, the Howard Hill Mossman Trophy, and the Psi Upsilon Prize were shifted from Senior Class

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Exercises to Senior Assembly. President Marx noted that the announcement of honorary class members, a tradition that he said he particularly admires, was shifted from Senior Class Exercises to the Senior Dinner, which seemed to be much appreciated. The President said that the decision was also made that, at Senior Assembly, the Dean would announce the name of each award recipient and the name of the award, but that he would not read descriptions of the awards. In this way, time could be made for the presentation of additional awards and for the two student speakers.

Professor Parker suggested that reading some brief description about the prizes given at Senior Assembly would be appreciated. The Dean agreed that a happy medium should be found in this regard. Professor Schneider said that the brevity of Senior Assembly was appreciated by many. Professor Woglom noted that, while he is in favor of experimenting with different formats, he feels that students should not be singled out for special recognition through awards that are presented during Commencement. He commented that the College has made efforts to move away from special recognitions in favor of making Commencement a day during which everyone celebrates the achievement of earning an Amherst College degree.

Taking some issue with the characterization of the Woods-Travis Prize, Professor George noted that the award is strictly numerical (raw GPA), and he said that the winner is not necessarily the most accomplished or well-rounded student, academically. In discussing alternative times for presenting the award, the Committee noted that the prize could not be awarded at Senior Assembly because the Faculty votes on the winner at the Commencement Faculty Meeting, which does not take place until after Senior Assembly. The President commented that the Faculty has been concerned about the level of intellectual engagement among students, and that he had thought that celebrating the winner of the top academic prize in a more prominent way might focus more attention on academic achievement. He agreed that a purely numeric calculation of academic performance may not be the best measure of academic excellence and suggested that the Faculty might want to consider the criteria for the award in the future.

Continuing with “Questions from Committee Members,” Professor Parker asked if all faculty members who applied for a Senior Sabbatical Fellowship received one. The Dean said that, regrettably, there was insufficient funding available to make awards for all colleagues who applied.

On another topic, Professor O’Hara expressed the view that departments should be informed as soon as possible that an unexpectedly large freshman class—approximately 470 students—is expected this fall. She commented that a class of this size would put strains on introductory courses and first-year seminars, in particular, and said that departments will need to make plans to accommodate larger numbers, if the educational experience of students is not to be compromised. She asked the Dean and the President whether the new first-year class has a tilt toward some disciplines, since she had heard that the Class of 2011 would include many strong science students. The President and the Dean said that the news that the class would be so large is very recent, and that they will consider ways to meet the needs that will emerge as a result. They explained that “summer melt” (when students make decisions during the summer to attend other schools) may only be about eight to twelve students, if past patterns hold true. The President commented that the unexpectedly large incoming class reflects that the yield has

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jumped from 36 percent last year to 40.4 percent this year, despite the fact that the acceptance rate (17.5 percent) was the lowest in decades. The Dean noted that seven students who have accepted Amherst's offer of admission into the Class of 2011 have been nominated to be Schupf Scholars. He thanked those faculty members who made such great efforts to speak with these exceptional students during the time that the students were making their college choices.

Professor Woglom noted that this had been a difficult year for him on the Committee of Six, because he cares about Amherst, yet he feels that so little appears to have been accomplished. He believes this is in part due to an Amherst culture that he sees as unwilling to gather information to inform discussions of important issues and which he feels too often asserts as true things that may or may not be true. Professor Woglom expressed the view that faculty at Amherst are in a very privileged position, but with that privilege comes the responsibility to be self-critical. The College is not meeting that responsibility, he contends. Professor Woglom expressed disappointment, for example, that a faculty committee would not develop a proposal for a writing requirement, while asserting—without any evidence to back up the assertion—that writing instruction has been improving over the past three years. He was also disheartened when the Committee of Six was unwilling to gather and share information on grade distributions to inform discussions about grade inflation. He noted that, when he asked at the Committee of Six meeting of May 7 for information on faculty salaries, he was dismayed that the administration's response was that it would work to gather such information over the summer. In Professor Woglom's view, this was an untimely delay, particularly given the Dean's characterizations of faculty salaries at the last meeting,

In response, the President said that he has greatly valued Professor Woglom's contributions and his service on the Committee of Six and noted that a number of administrators have spent a great deal of time responding to Professor Woglom's requests for data and providing him with information. The administration had worked hard, for example, to answer Professor Woglom's questions and to reassure the Faculty in the fall that admission standards were being maintained. Professor Sinos said that she has found it valuable when Professor Woglom has asked for information. Professor O'Hara commented that for one group of faculty members, in particular, data is the primary vehicle for understanding certain issues. In regard to the issue of grade inflation, she expressed hope that data could be collected that would be informative yet protected the identity of individual faculty members.

President Marx said that the administration has set out to be more forthcoming and more transparent than has been the tradition at Amherst. He also pointed to the hiring of a full-time Director of Institutional Research in 2004, early in his presidency, and noted that an Associate Director of Institutional Research was hired just two months ago to help meet the increasing demand for research to inform decision-making at the College. In terms of the salary information, he noted that he and the Dean had learned only very recently that the Faculty had been discussing the issue of merit pay and that further information might be required. The Dean said that he had not realized that Professor Woglom expected to have the salary information provided to him before the end of this academic year. He noted that he needed some time to consider how best to gather and organize this information and said that he would work on this project after Commencement. President Marx agreed that consideration should be given to what

**Committee of Six Minutes
of Monday, May 14, 2007**

information should be provided and in what form, so as to avoid potential divisiveness and damage to the community over the issue of faculty salaries.

The members next reviewed the theses and transcripts of students recommended by their departments for a *summa cum laude* degree and having an overall grade point average in the top 25 percent of the graduating class. After a discussion of the theses and the departmental statements, the members voted unanimously to forward most of them to the Faculty, while deciding to seek further information about two.

The members turned to Committee assignments. The President began the discussion by suggesting that one way of alleviating some of the burden on the Faculty, and of ensuring the efficiency and effectiveness of the work of College committees, might be to discontinue or combine some committees, to redistribute the work of some committees, and to consider changing the membership of some committees. The Committee, the President, and the Dean reviewed the list of standing and ad hoc committees and discussed possible changes. It was agreed that some pruning would be possible and helpful, and that any changes in the status or membership of standing committees would be brought before the Faculty for a vote. The members felt that changes to ad hoc committees should be made by the administration, in consultation with the Committee of Six. Professor O'Hara suggested consulting with the committees themselves. In response to the view expressed by several members regarding the significant burden placed on colleagues who serve on the Committee of Six, the Committee on Educational Policy, and the Committee on Priorities and Resources, the President said that he would be open to proposals to re-think how these committees function and/or their structure. Noting that certain professors seem to serve constantly on committees, Professor Parker sensed that committee assignments may not be shared equally among all members of the Faculty.

After a brief discussion, the members voted six in favor and zero opposed to approve the agenda for the Faculty Meeting of May 24.

The meeting adjourned at 6:30 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Gregory S. Call
Dean of the Faculty