



AMHERST COLLEGE
Department of Biology
New Science Center Building
Amherst, MA 01002-5000

May 11, 2022

Professor Catherine Epstein
Provost and Dean of the Faculty
Amherst College
Amherst, MA 01002

Dear Catherine,

On behalf of the Committee on Admission and Financial Aid (FCAFA), it is my pleasure to present a summary of activities for the 2021–22 academic year. The committee met virtually twelve times throughout the academic year.

FCAFA began with a review the committee's charge as well as activities from the prior academic year. Following this, the current year for FCAFA saw two main themes emerged as the centers of the committee's discussion. These themes were the use of race in the admission process and the impacts of COVID, particularly the potential for a reduced use of standard testing (SAT and ACT), on admissions and student placement. Also highlighting the year was the major combined announcement of the end of a legacy preference in admissions and a substantive investment in financial aid, which alongside its existing need-blind admission policy, positively distinguishes Amherst among peer institutions. Those announcements followed much discussion about the legacy policy by FCAFA in the previous year. The committee also had its regular, yearly opportunities to learn about the admissions process and to participate in the review of statistics about the admitted cohorts of students. Further details on efforts dedicated to these and other topics are provided below.

Entering and existing class sizes and understanding the admission process.

FCAFA reviewed the size of the entering first-year class of '25, particularly in relation to class sizes of recent years. Effects of the pandemic have resulting in a larger than usual amount of class size variation, and attention was given to scaling expectations for the current round of applicants to manage demands on the College's facilities and staffing. To enhance the ability of FCAFA members to see various steps in the admission process, the fall semester dedicated meeting time to undertake mock review of applications, learning about the holistic manner of evaluating the potential students secondary school performance, essays, and other aspects of submitted materials.

Properties of the student body at Amherst. In efforts to meet the College's aims for a diverse range of representation and perspectives on campus, FCAFA reviewed

statistics about the student body, as is done each year, with regard to various properties, including race, gender, socioeconomic status, and athletics. Quantitative information on the number of applications, admissions, and enrollments for students of different categories were evaluated. Amherst continues, year over year, to hold ground and/or make improvements across these various ways to evaluate the student body, with efforts toward further improvements a continuing necessity on which the admission process is focused.

Pending changes regarding the role of race in admissions. FCAFA was presented with information about possible judicial rulings on the role of race in admissions decisions. This pertains to U.S. Supreme Court cases concerning the use of race that may be resolved in the coming year. Depending on those outcomes, the admissions processes at Amherst may be substantially impacted with consequences for the student body. FCAFA has spent several meetings discussing the history of such policies in the U.S., and how other colleges and universities have responded to state laws which affect this aspect of admission. This issue will certainly continue to occupy the attention of FCAFA in the next academic year as much deliberation is needed to help ensure that the College develops policy and practice that are adequate to meeting the goals articulated in our Mission Statement.

Role of testing (SAT and ACT) in admissions and student placement. Amherst has now adopted an SAT/ACT test-optional policy, which includes ongoing review through at least the admitted class of 2028. FCAFA was presented with information on the history of testing requirements at the College, as well as the current status here and at peer institutions. Data are just becoming available on how enrolled students fared academically when submitting or not submitting test scores, and while no substantive differences were indicated, continued evaluation of this policy and whether a transition from test-optional to a 'no-test policy' will require work over the next few years. In addition, FCAFA was concerned whether the role that testing has played in student placements into introductory courses and STEM fields can be reasonably compensated for by other means.

Legacy preference in admission. FCAFA celebrated the College's announcement of the end for a role of legacy status in the admission process. Largely championed by the prior FCAFA chair and committees of 2020-21 and 2021-22 academic years, FCAFA's deliberations on legacy admissions considered the benefits and implications of ending this long-standing policy.

Major investment in financial aid. While combined with the announcement of the College's end of legacy preference in admissions, the substantial increase in aid, making Amherst affordable for a great number of families, was a very welcome surprise. This commitment by the College, especially at a time of pandemic-related financial stresses, will help to ensure a broader access to education at Amherst. Additionally, the COVID-related Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF) has impacted the current student body as the distribution of those federal funds have been targeted to students most in need of financial aid.

Early Writes. FCAFA again lent its support to the “Early-Write-O-Rama” program where faculty correspond directly with the most sought-after students in an effort to encourage their enrollment at the College. Combining with the generous contribution of over two dozen faculty who responded to the call for help, and organization by the Office of Admission, the early write effort was made easy on everyone.

Departing members! With many thanks for their efforts dedicated to serving on FCAFA, we give congratulations and best wishes for seniors Sage Innerarity and Aidan Park upon their graduation from the College.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Hood". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Michael" and last name "Hood" clearly distinguishable.

Michael Hood
Professor of Biology
Chair, Committee on Admission and Financial Aid

Committee members: Liz Agosto (Chief Student Affairs Officer, ex officio), Loretta Alarcon '24, Sonya Clark, Mia Griffin '24 (Spring semester), Maria Heim, Michael Hood (chair), Gail Holt (Dean of Financial Aid, ex officio), Sage Innerarity '22, Yvette Kiptoo '23 (Fall semester), Matt McGann (Dean of Admission and Financial Aid, ex officio), Aidan Park '22, Amy Wagaman, Cate Zolkos (Dean of Admission, ex officio)



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May 27, 2021

Dean Catherine Epstein
Office of the Dean of the Faculty

Dear Catherine,

I write on behalf of the Committee on Admission and Financial Aid (FCAFA) to present a summary of our work for the abbreviated 2020–21 academic year. Despite the pandemic, we met virtually thirteen times throughout the year.

The Committee first reviewed the changes that had been made to admission procedures since the 2019–2020 academic year. These included:

- The advance tuition deposit was waived for all admitted students;
- The deferral request deadline was extended beyond the typical May 1 deadline;
- The SAT/ACT were made optional for the 2020–2021 admission cycle;
- All recruitment was shifted online;
- The deadline for early admission was changed to November 16, and going forward the decision deadlines will fall on days on which the admitted students will have access to their school counselors;
- The regular decision deadline was changed to the first non-holiday of January;
- The telementoring program was discontinued;
- Collaborative large-scale recruitment events were organized with Bowdoin, Carlton, Pomona, Swarthmore, and Williams, with the goal of building interest in the liberal arts;
- The academic reader rating evolved to a new scale;
- The Schupf scholar program was shifted to support student research funding, where any enrolled Amherst student will be able to apply for funding specifically targeted to the humanities, arts, and social sciences;
- Financial aid packages did not ask for a summer work or term-time contribution from students, where these contributions were replaced by grant money;
- The financial aid personal allowance was enhanced;
- An emergency fund was launched, with money from the CARES act; and
- The office ended the Dean's Day program for Amherst alumni and their children.

After this brief review, Dean McGann introduced an interesting exercise in which the faculty and student members of the Committee joined mock admission committees, each given a set of applicants and asked to admit a few, waitlist some, and reject others. The exercise provided considerable insight into the challenges faced by the admission officers.

Test-Optional Policy. Amherst has now adopted an SAT/ACT test-optional policy, to be reviewed frequently, lasting through at least the admitted class of 2028. For more details on this policy see the attached letter to the Committee of Six. Dean McGann met with Profs. D. Benedetto and Cartier to work through alternative placement methods in mathematics and chemistry.

Entering Cohort. The size of the entering first-year class is expected to be larger than usual as a result of deferred admission due to the pandemic. Shepherding these students through the first stages of their Amherst education will likely be somewhat more challenging than in a typical year, given the unusual circumstances of their admission and previous schooling due to the pandemic. We encourage all members of the college community to be patient and to do their best in helping everyone adjust to both the size of the class and the effects of the test-optional policy. More details on the entering class will be presented by Dean McGann in a separate report.

Committee of Six Exemption. In order to maintain continuity on the committee, and to bring the committee service in line with the other prominent college committees, we sent a proposal to amend the faculty handbook that would mirror the CEP eligibility requirements for FCAFA. Specifically, continuing members and immediately retired members would be ineligible to serve on the committee of six. This proposal met with little support from the committee of six, but it will apparently be reconsidered after the external review of the faculty governance structures is complete.

Legacy Admission. The committee spent time discussing possible changes to the legacy admission policy.

Early Writes. FCAFA discussed and once again supported the “Early-Write-O-Rama” program of contacting our most sought-after students in an effort to increase the yield in this highly regarded group. With the assistance of Michael Hawkins in the Office of Admission, approximately 30 faculty members participated in the program. We express our appreciation to these volunteers. The overall yield rate for the early-write cohort this year was approximately 11%.

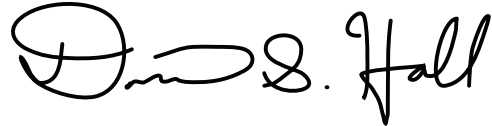
HEERF. Under the auspices of this unlikely acronym for the higher education emergency relief fund, the Office of Financial Aid reported the distribution of block grant funds based on student need. Money was also made available (through a separate fund?) for commencement travel for families of students with the highest need.

Farewells! As chair, I now bid adieu to the committee after three years of service. Professors Clark, Heim, and Hood will continue, as may some of the students with the notable exception of Obed Narcisse, who is a member of the graduating class of 2021. Congratulations, Obed!

In closing, we owe a debt of thanks to our recorders Jasmine Hardy and Aly Levinson, who faithfully reproduced our conversations with great care and nuance. You may find their work on the college committee website.

And we thank you very much for the opportunity to serve the College in this important endeavor.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David S. Hall". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped initial "D" and a distinct "S" and "H".

David S. Hall
Paula R. and David J. Avenius 1941 Professor of Physics
Chair, Committee on Admission and Financial Aid

Committee members: Sonya Clark, Ilyssa Forman '22, David Hall (chair), Maria Heim, Gail Holt (Dean of Financial Aid, *ex officio*), Michael Hood, Yvette Kiptoo '23, Karu Kozuma (Chief Student Affairs Officer, *ex officio*), Matt McGann (Dean of Admission and Financial Aid, *ex officio*), Obed Narcisse '21, Aidan Park '22, and Cate Zolkos (Dean of Admission, *ex officio*).



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May 17, 2019

Dean Catherine Epstein
Office of the Dean of the Faculty

Dear Catherine,

I write on behalf of the Faculty Committee on Admission and Financial Aid (FCAFA) to present a summary of our work for the 2018–19 academic year. We met more than twenty times, including a meeting with the Committee of Six.

Our first order of business was to restart a committee that had not met for more than a year and had a majority of new members (Professors Hall and Manion; Chief Student Affairs Officer Kozuma; Dean of Admission and Financial Aid McGann; Students Babar '21, McNamara '19, Montoya '20, and Washington '22). We note that the faculty members of FCAFA for the 2017-2018 academic year were heavily involved with the Ad Hoc Committee on Athletics, which interfered with the normal operation of the Committee.

At the beginning of the semester, the Chair (Hall) met with the Dean of the Faculty and the Chairs of the College Council and the Committee on Education and Athletics to consider approaches to the report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Athletics. In that report, FCAFA was asked explicitly to consider the following:

- Reducing the total number of “Athletic Factor” admits;
- Making the integration of athletics and academics a priority for admissions;
- Improving data collection about the place of athletics in admissions;
- Introducing a humanities initiative into the admissions process; and
- Establishing a Faculty Admissions Liaison.

The Dean of the Faculty made it clear at this meeting that the last of these was unacceptable to the Administration. (The Committee proposes a different approach to improving the collaboration between the Faculty, Students, and the Offices of Admission and Financial Aid, as described below.)

In order to address these and other topics, we spent many meetings bringing the new members up to speed on admission and financial aid policies and determining how we would communicate with the faculty. With respect to the latter, we now publish the *Proceedings of the Faculty Committee on Admission and Financial Aid* on the committee minutes website.

We also reviewed the admission mission statement (appended) and committee charge (appended). In the course of our discussions, we came to realize that the role of FCAFA in the admission and financial aid process is somewhat ambiguous vis-a-vis the faculty in particular, and we set out to revise our charge to attempt to resolve these ambiguities. The result is a letter and draft revision of the committee charge (appended), which was submitted to the Committee of Six on February 5, 2019, and discussed with the Committee of Six on April 29, 2019. We come away from this meeting with some ideas for revision and hope to present some version of the proposal to the faculty early next autumn.

At Dean McGann's initiative, and with support of the entire Committee, the Office of Admission changed, for the purposes of the Admission Committee process, the categorization of non-US citizens who graduate from high schools in the US from "international" to "domestic." This allowed for greater parity in admission decisions as well as improving the prospects of undocumented students, as international students are admitted at much lower rates than are domestic students.

At Professor Manion's initiative, and with the support of the entire Committee, the Office of Admission will now solicit information about sexual orientation and gender identity at the time of application. The Committee met with Jesse Barba, Director of Institutional Research and Registrar Services, to discuss how this information might be used for institutional reporting purposes, and for outreach once students matriculate. Director Barba reflected that this information would be very helpful to his office. Dean McGann gathered models of best practices from other institutions, which the committee reviewed and discussed.

The faculty members of FCAFA attended the committee meetings at which the professional staff select applicants for admission. These meetings, occurring during both early and regular decision, provide additional insight into the admission process. Several faculty members intend to accept Dean McGann's invitation to attend and observe the annual retreat of the Admission Office, in which the coming year's admission strategy would be reviewed with the professional staff.

With the assistance of Michael Hawkins in the Office of Admission, FCAFA continued the long-standing "Early-Write-O-Rama" program of contacting our most talented admitted students in an effort to increase our yield in this highly regarded group. Approximately 25 faculty members participated in the program, to whom we express our deep appreciation. This year we yielded 18 (11.5%), up slightly from 15 (8.8%) last year. On the advice of Dean McGann, FCAFA will evaluate the overall efficacy of the program next year.

The Committee discussed at length the role of NESCAC and the implications of its regulations on admission. Highlights of these discussions include:

- A meeting with Athletic Director Don Faulstick and three coaches (Knerr, Serpone, and Thompson) to talk about the process and their experiences with recruiting talented student-athletes. The conversation began with a brief discussion of the Varsity Blues scandal, and

the internal auditing procedures that would prevent such abuse at Amherst. The coaches provided their perspective and expressed some frustrations about the regulations that put NESCAC schools in general at a recruiting disadvantage with respect to other leagues.

- A discussion of athletic factor (AF) admits more generally. The Committee noted that the NESCAC Directors (*i.e.*, the Presidents of the NESCAC institutions) had reduced the number of permitted AF admits across the board. This has the practical effect of reducing from 67 to 62 the maximum number of AF admits at Amherst. (The number of admitted AF students last year was 62, of whom 57 enrolled; and this year those numbers are 58 and 51, respectively.) Based on the committee's understanding of the New England Small College Athletic Conference (NESCAC) aspirational goals with respect to athletics, *viz.*, that athletic admits are those for whom admission would otherwise be unlikely if it were not for their athletic ability, some FCAFA members questioned whether the AF reduction is ultimately meaningful. In particular, they were concerned that there are currently many more than 62 student-athletes admitted per year who meet the NESCAC aspirational definition of an AF, but are not considered AF by common NESCAC practice. A wider embrace of the term "athletic factor," accompanied by an increase in the number of athletic factor admits, might instead be appropriate.

The Committee agreed to return to these and other matters related to admission and athletics next year.

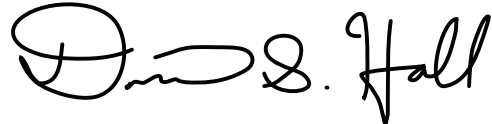
The College Committee on Admission and Financial Aid (CCAFA) met four times this year, approving the students admitted by the Office of Admission. CCAFA membership comprises the Faculty and Administrative members of FCAFA as well as the Dean of the Faculty. This year, Dean McGann provided CCAFA with data not only on the admitted group but also on the group that was wait-listed or whose applications were denied. Some of these sensitive data were also made available to FCAFA, which was greatly appreciated.

Finally, throughout the year the Committee monitored an admission-related lawsuit brought by Students for Fair Admissions involving Harvard, which may have some future implications for the College.

We now bid farewell to several of our current members (Professor Andrew Poe, and students Maeve McNamara '19 and Tim Offei-Addo '19). We will be joined next year by Professor David Schneider and at least two new students. Absent any other communication from the Committee of Six, Professor Hall will remain as Chair for the 2019-20 academic year.

We thank you very much for the opportunity to serve the College in this critically important endeavor.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David S. Hall". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped initial "D" and a distinct "S" and "H".

David S. Hall

Paula R. and David J. Avenius 1941 Professor of Physics
Chair, Faculty Committee on Admission and Financial Aid

Committee members: Waleed Babar '21, David S. Hall (chair), Gail Holt (Dean of Financial Aid, *ex officio*), Chris Kingston, Karu Kozuma (Chief Student Affairs Officer, *ex officio*), Jen Manion, Matt McGann (Dean of Admission and Financial Aid, *ex officio*), Maeve McNamara '19, Grace Montoya '20 (fall semester), Tim Offei-Addo '19 (spring semester), Andrew Poe, Aniah Washington '22, Cate Zolkos (Dean of Admission, *ex officio*).

Existing Committee Charge

(Faculty Handbook IV.S.1.d)

The Committee on Admission and Financial Aid consists of four members of the faculty appointed by the Committee of Six for three-year terms, four students serving two-year terms to be chosen as described below and, as members, ex officio, the dean of admission and financial aid (secretary of the committee), the dean of admission, the dean of financial aid, and the chief student affairs officer. One of the faculty members is appointed by the Committee of Six as chair, normally after a year of service. It is hoped that different areas of the curriculum will be represented by the faculty members on the committee. The president will meet with the committee either at its invitation or on his or her initiative.

A College Committee on Admission and Financial Aid will convene under the chairmanship of the dean of admission and financial aid at least four times in each academic year. It will consist of the dean of the faculty, ex officio, and eight voting members: the dean of admission and financial aid, the dean of admission, the dean of financial aid, the chief student affairs officer, and the four faculty members on the Committee on Admission and Financial Aid. At a meeting early in the fall of each year, the College Committee on Admission and Financial Aid will review the composition and diversity of the first-year class, paying attention to such issues as the distribution of students by curricular and extracurricular strengths. The committee will re-convene in advance of the release of notifications of admission to early decision candidates (normally in December) and prior to the release of notifications of admission to regular round candidates (normally in March) to consider such information as it deems necessary to insure that the college's stated policies are being implemented. At the end of each of these meetings the committee will vote on the admission actions recommended by the dean of admission and financial aid. The committee will hold a final meeting at the end of the academic year to review the outcome of the completed admission process (voted by the faculty, December, 1999).

Two students shall be elected by the student body for a two-year term to the Committee on Admission and Financial Aid. Following the election, the dean of admission and financial aid in consultation with the Committee on Admission and Financial Aid will appoint two additional student members for two-year terms. The four student positions are to be filled in staggered order, with one appointed and one elected position to be filled annually.

Because of Amherst College's commitment to equal opportunity and the role of the admission process in meeting an important part of this commitment, the presence on the committee of students from different minority and racial groups is especially valuable. In general, student members of the committee can provide particular advice on policy discussions about recruitment.

The primary function of the committee is to enhance communication between the faculty and appropriate administrative offices and in so doing to aid the faculty in carrying out its responsibility to formulate standards and policy for admission and financial aid. To these ends,

the committee should review on a regular basis, through observation and quantitative studies, how adequately policy and practice are meeting stated goals, should develop and maintain mechanisms for communicating faculty opinion on the quality of our students to the staff, and should report annually to the faculty on the committee's work. Members of the committee should be sufficiently engaged in the admission process to enable them to carry out their responsibilities effectively (voted by the faculty, September 1984).

Revised FCAFA Charge
(paragraphs also reordered for clarity)

The Committee on Admission and Financial Aid consists of four members of the faculty, EACH SERVING A THREE-YEAR TERM; ~~appointed by the Committee of Six for three-year terms~~; four students serving two-year terms to be chosen as described below; and, as members, ex officio, the dean of admission and financial aid (secretary of the committee), the dean of admission, the dean of financial aid, and the chief student affairs officer. ~~One of the faculty members is appointed by the Committee of Six as chair~~; EACH YEAR THE COMMITTEE CHOOSES ITS OWN CHAIR FROM AMONG ITS FOUR FACULTY MEMBERS, normally after a year of service. It is ~~hoped~~ EXPECTED that different areas of the curriculum will be represented by the faculty members on the committee. The president will meet with the committee either at its invitation or on THE PRESIDENT'S ~~his or her~~ initiative.

NOMINATIONS OF THE FACULTY MEMBERS FOR THE FACULTY COMMITTEE ON ADMISSION AND FINANCIAL AID 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. ADDITIONAL NOMINATIONS MAY BE MADE FROM THE FLOOR AT THE MEETING. CANDIDATES MUST RECEIVE THE APPROVAL OF A MAJORITY OF THE ELIGIBLE VOTING MEMBERS OF THE FACULTY PRESENT AT THE MEETING IN ORDER TO BE ELECTED. IDEALLY, ONE MEMBER OF THE FACULTY COMMITTEE ON ADMISSION AND FINANCIAL AID SHOULD BE ELECTED IN TWO OUT OF THREE YEARS, AND TWO MEMBERS ELECTED IN THE THIRD. IN THIS WAY, OVERLAPPING TERMS WILL CREATE A CONTINUITY OF MEMBERSHIP.

Two students shall be elected by the student body for a two-year term to the Committee on Admission and Financial Aid. Following the election, the dean of admission and financial aid in consultation with the Committee on Admission and Financial Aid will appoint two additional student members for two-year terms. The four student positions are to be filled in staggered order, with one appointed and one elected position to be filled annually.

Because of Amherst College's commitment to ~~equal opportunity~~ DIVERSITY and the role of the admission process in meeting an important part of this commitment, the presence on the committee of students from ~~different minority and racial groups~~ A WIDE VARIETY OF BACKGROUNDS, SPANNING DIFFERENT CLASS YEARS AND ACADEMIC INTERESTS, is especially valuable. ~~In general, student members of the committee can provide particular advice on policy discussions about recruitment.~~

THE COMMITTEE SHALL FULFILL, IN CONSULTATION WITH THE FACULTY, THE FACULTY'S ~~The primary function of the committee is to enhance communication between the faculty and appropriate administrative offices and in so doing to aid the faculty in carrying out its~~ responsibility to formulate standards and policy for admission and financial aid. IT MUST REPORT ANNUALLY TO THE FACULTY ON ITS WORK. ~~To these ends, the committee~~ IT should review on a regular basis, through observation and quantitative studies, how adequately policy and practice are meeting ~~stated~~ THE goals; EXPRESSED IN THE ADMISSION MISSION STATEMENT. IT should ALSO develop and maintain mechanisms for communicating faculty opinion on the quality of our students to the admission and financial aid staff. ~~and should report~~

~~annually to the faculty on the committee's work.~~ THE COMMITTEE IS EXPECTED TO CONSIDER SUGGESTIONS AND CONCERNS FROM ALL MEMBERS OF THE COLLEGE COMMUNITY WITH RESPECT TO ADMISSION AND FINANCIAL AID POLICY. Members of the committee should be sufficiently engaged in the admission process to enable them to carry out their responsibilities effectively.

A College Committee on Admission and Financial Aid CHAIRED BY THE DEAN OF ADMISSION AND FINANCIAL AID will convene ~~under the chairmanship of the dean of admission and financial aid~~ at least four times in each academic year. It will consist of the dean of the faculty, ex officio, and eight voting members: the dean of admission and financial aid, the dean of admission, the dean of financial aid, the chief student affairs officer, and the four faculty members on the Committee on Admission and Financial Aid. At a meeting early in the fall of each year, the College Committee on Admission and Financial Aid will review the composition and diversity of the first-year class, paying attention to such issues as the distribution of students by curricular and extracurricular strengths. The committee will reconvene in advance of the release of notifications of admission to early decision candidates (normally in December) and prior to the release of notifications of admission to regular round candidates (normally in March) to consider such information as it deems necessary to ~~insure~~ ENSURE that the college's stated policies are being implemented. At the end of each of these meetings the committee will vote on the admission actions recommended by the dean of admission and financial aid. The committee will hold a final meeting at the end of the academic year to review the outcome of the completed admission process.

Admission Mission Statement

From the College Catalog, Voted by the Faculty in 1983

Amherst College looks, above all, for students of intellectual promise who have demonstrated qualities of mind and character that will enable them to take full advantage of our curriculum. We seek qualified applicants from different racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds students whose several perspectives might contribute significantly to a process of mutual education within and beyond the curriculum.

We aim to select from among the many qualified applicants those possessing the intellectual talent, discipline and imagination that will allow them most fully to benefit from our curriculum and contribute to the life of the college and society. Grades, standardized test scores, essays, recommendations, independent work, the quality of the secondary school program, and achievements outside the classroom are among the factors used to evaluate this promise, but no one of these measures is considered determinative.



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Department of Physics & Astronomy

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February 5, 2019

The Committee of Six
c/o Dean Catherine A. Epstein, Secretary

Dear Colleagues,

I write on behalf of the Faculty Committee on Admission and Financial Aid (FCAFA) to seek advice on a set of proposed revisions to our committee's charge (Faculty Handbook IV.S.1.d). The most substantial of these changes elevates the profile of the Committee and delegates to it the Faculty's responsibilities for admission and financial aid. Several additional aspects of the proposal ensure that the Committee is, in turn, directly responsible to the Faculty and receptive to the wider concerns of the college community.

Our proposal arises from consideration of several overlapping and serious concerns which have led to intermittent periods of frustration between the Faculty and the Offices of Admission and Financial Aid. There are also some new concerns arising from the recent report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Athletics (2018) that make this a propitious moment to revisit the FCAFA charge and the ways in which the Faculty meet their constitutional responsibilities in the context of shared governance.

With structural difficulties making it difficult — if not nearly impossible — for the Faculty to discuss sensitive matters of admission policy, and absent any formal authority of its own, FCAFA struggles with its role in the admission process. The results include the continuing, intergenerational inability of the Faculty to meet its responsibilities with respect to admission and financial aid, and an alternating cycle of intense policy interest and disregard and that fails to serve the College well. The latter is of particular concern in the wake of the recent report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Athletics.

As with every aspect of the workings of the College, admission policy ultimately resides with the Board of Trustees. This responsibility has been delegated to the Faculty, along with the authority over the curriculum, and the awarding of degrees:

2. Subject to the reserved power of control by the Trustees and the provisions of the Statutes, the Faculty shall have the power and the duty: (a) To fix the requirements of admission, the course of study, and the conditions of graduation. (Statutes for the regulation of the Faculty, 1898.)

This ensemble of powers and duties grants the Faculty a high degree of autonomy, in principle, to answer questions such as: What do we teach? How do we teach? And, Who do we teach? Viewed in this way, efforts to strengthen the faculty voice in the admission process can be understood as

attempts to embrace more fully one of its central instructional responsibilities.

An excellent summary of the history of admission at Amherst College may be found in the 1982 report on admission (appended). We will not rehearse the entirety of this history here. However, there are two important points worth noting: (1) That the ambitious agenda of the College in enrolling students from a national (as opposed to regional) pool in the years following World War II contributed to the professionalization of the Office of Admission, which then expanded to include staff and administrators dedicated exclusively to the implementation of admission and financial aid policy; and (2) that the Faculty have not always fully assumed their institutional responsibilities with respect to admission in particular.

Admission Officers are guided today by the Faculty's 1983 admission mission statement:

Amherst College looks, above all, for students of intellectual promise who have demonstrated qualities of mind and character that will enable them to take full advantage of our curriculum. We seek qualified applicants from different racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds students whose several perspectives might contribute significantly to a process of mutual education within and beyond the curriculum. We aim to select from among the many qualified applicants those possessing the intellectual talent, discipline and imagination that will allow them most fully to benefit from our curriculum and contribute to the life of the college and society. Grades, standardized test scores, essays, recommendations, independent work, the quality of the secondary school program, and achievements outside the classroom are among the factors used to evaluate this promise, but no one of these measures is considered determinative. (Admission Mission Statement, voted by the Faculty in 1983)

As the Faculty's statement of policy, this admission mission statement is as vague as it is now venerable, affording admission officers considerable latitude to practice their craft within its broad contours.

The Offices of Admission and Financial Aid has, on the whole, been remarkably successful in unifying both policy and practice over many years — years that have seen remarkable changes both within the college and in the greater society. Yet its relationship with the Faculty has often been tense. From a faculty perspective a sense of frustration surrounds the many constraints that conspire to prevent examination of more fine-grained interpretations, and thus implementations, of the mission statement. Chief among these impediments is the increasing need for confidentiality regarding admission policy priorities, in matters such as student diversity and athletics; but neither have conversations about admission been particularly encouraged on certain topics, even in general terms.

The Faculty Committee on Admission and Financial Aid, as such, was established in 1983 to main-

tain a channel of communication between the Faculty and the Offices of Admission and Financial Aid. Its activity has waxed and waned with faculty interest in admission, but fundamentally it struggles with its ambiguously defined institutional role. As succinctly chronicled by the 1982 admission report,

The [Admission] Committee has no specified power either to set policy or to participate in the admission process. [...] Apart from energetic chairs the Committee has depended on the Dean of Admission having the time to keep its members informed and involved to some extent in admission process and policy. But the Dean's good will could hardly substitute for, or supply, the kind of independent review of and direct responsibility for these matters the [1971] Long Range Planning Committee had expected the faculty to assume. (1982 report, II-35 et seq.)

Although these words were written about FCAFA's predecessor, similar frustrations were recently expressed in an extraordinary letter to the Committee of Six by the faculty members of FCAFA in the Spring of 2018 (appended).

We write to the Committee of Six now to initiate a major intervention intended to disambiguate the lines of institutional authority and bring the Faculty and the Offices of Admission and Financial Aid together in a newly empowered FCAFA. As our guide, we begin with the following recommendation from the 1982 admission report:

The primary responsibility of the [Faculty Admission] Committee should be to set, in consultation with the full faculty, standards for admission. [...] It should be emphasized, however, that admission decisions should be the sole responsibility of the Dean of Admission and the staff. (1982 report, III-16 et seq.)

In keeping with the spirit and letter of this faculty report, we propose a further delegation of the power and duty, from the Faculty to its own Faculty Committee on Admission and Financial Aid. We anticipate that this shift will enable the following:

- To be responsive to the Faculty and to serve as a bridge to the College as a whole;
- To be immersed in policy;
- To act expeditiously as circumstances warrant; and
- To preserve confidentiality surrounding sensitive issues.

Given that the committee will be entrusted with significant responsibilities, we feel that it is important to make several other changes to its charge.

(A) First, the members should be voted on by the full Faculty, rather than appointed by the

Committee of Six. The Committee would thus be populated in the manner of the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) and the Committee on Priorities and Resources (CPR), both of which are already invested with considerable institutional responsibility, and which play largely autonomous roles with respect to confidential matters of policy arising in their respective realms. It is worth noting that this change in the manner of appointments was endorsed in the 1999 admission report, even without the expansion of FCAFA's policy role.

The business of admission is central to the College and FCAFA appointments should be treated in the same way as appointments to the Committee on Educational Policy and the Committee on Priorities and Resources. (1999 Report, p.30)

(B) The expansion of the Committee's duties requires that the committee, in turn, keep the Faculty apprised of its work, so as to be as responsive as possible within the constraints of confidentiality and sensitivity.

(C) Finally, we also feel that it is very important to place explicitly in the charge an expectation that the Committee hear from all members of the college community. We imagine that this might include both informal and formal conversations; for example, an annual conversation with the Trustees, and regular conversations with the President. The Committee's policy guidance must be at once aspirational and realistic, which is to say, cognizant of and responsive to institutional needs beyond those expressed by the Faculty.

In our view, these changes will strengthen the Faculty and the College. It will provide the Faculty with direct voice that will be heard by the principal representatives of the Offices of Admission and Financial Aid. It will resolve some of the ambiguities in the current structuring of admission policy by bringing the principals, or their representatives — the Dean of Admission and Financial Aid, the current students, and the Faculty — together regularly for serious and empowered discussions about the issues that we do, and will, face.

Some may worry that this will create imbalance in existing institutional structures. We believe these concerns, while not groundless, are already safely addressed by long-standing conventions, procedures, and policies. The newly envisioned FCAFA will be responsible to the Faculty, and is intended to act "in consultation" with that assembly. Every policy change adopted by the Faculty (or its designate) is subject to veto by the President of the College; and these vetoes may, in turn, be overridden by the full Faculty. In the end, being the wellspring of all institutional authority, the Trustees have their own power and duty to approve any change in policy. These layers serve as precisely the kinds of strict procedural barriers against rash, impetuous, and ill-advised actions. But these downstream institutional checks should not be used upstream in such fashion as to block or inhibit faculty creativity with respect to policy, or to implement policies without faculty approval.

Another potential concern revolves around the role of the faculty in policy surrounding financial

aid, for which the responsibility has not been delegated. As with admission policy, we make here no new claim on the existing lines of authority. We note, however, that admission and financial aid policies inform each other, and that the committee will inevitably make recommendations to the Trustees on matters of financial aid from time to time.

We now turn to the exact language of the proposal itself, which modifies the existing committee charge (as expressed in the Faculty Handbook, IV.S.1.d) in the following fashion.

The Committee on Admission and Financial Aid consists of four members of the faculty, EACH SERVING A THREE-YEAR TERM; ~~appointed by the Committee of Six for three-year terms~~, four students serving two-year terms to be chosen as described below; and, as members, ex officio, the dean of admission and financial aid (secretary of the committee), the dean of admission, the dean of financial aid, and the chief student affairs officer. ~~One of the faculty members is appointed by the Committee of Six as chair~~, EACH YEAR THE COMMITTEE CHOOSES ITS OWN CHAIR FROM AMONG ITS FOUR FACULTY MEMBERS, normally after a year of service. It is ~~hoped~~ EXPECTED that different areas of the curriculum will be represented by the faculty members on the committee. The president will meet with the committee either at its invitation or on THE PRESIDENT'S ~~his or her~~ initiative.

NOMINATIONS OF THE FACULTY MEMBERS FOR THE FACULTY COMMITTEE ON ADMISSION AND FINANCIAL AID 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. ADDITIONAL NOMINATIONS MAY BE MADE FROM THE FLOOR AT THE MEETING. CANDIDATES MUST RECEIVE THE APPROVAL OF A MAJORITY OF THE ELIGIBLE VOTING MEMBERS OF THE FACULTY PRESENT AT THE MEETING IN ORDER TO BE ELECTED. IDEALLY, ONE MEMBER OF THE FACULTY COMMITTEE ON ADMISSION AND FINANCIAL AID SHOULD BE ELECTED IN TWO OUT OF THREE YEARS, AND TWO MEMBERS ELECTED IN THE THIRD. IN THIS WAY, OVERLAPPING TERMS WILL CREATE A CONTINUITY OF MEMBERSHIP.

The next two paragraphs update some of the language to emphasize diversity amongst the student members of the committee:

Two students shall be elected by the student body for a two-year term to the Committee on Admission and Financial Aid. Following the election, the dean of admission and financial aid in consultation with the Committee on Admission and Financial Aid will appoint two additional student members for two-year terms. The four student positions are to be filled in staggered order, with one appointed and one elected position to be filled annually.

Because of Amherst College's commitment to ~~equal opportunity~~ DIVERSITY and the role of the admission process in meeting an important part of this commitment, the presence on the committee of students from ~~different minority and racial groups~~ A WIDE VARIETY OF BACKGROUNDS, SPANNING DIFFERENT CLASS YEARS AND ACADEMIC INTERESTS, is especially valuable. ~~In general, student members of the committee can provide particular advice on policy discussions about recruitment.~~

The major revisions to the committee charge are found in the following paragraph. As outlined above, it (1) delegates the faculty authority to formulate standards and policy from the faculty to the committee; (2) requires an annual report to the faculty; (3) makes the admission mission statement a stated rather than implicit goal; and (4) broadens the responsiveness of the committee to the entire community.

THE COMMITTEE SHALL FULFILL, IN CONSULTATION WITH THE FACULTY, THE FACULTY'S ~~The primary function of the committee is to enhance communication between the faculty and appropriate administrative offices and in so doing to aid the faculty in carrying out its~~ responsibility to formulate standards and policy for admission and financial aid. IT MUST REPORT ANNUALLY TO THE FACULTY ON ITS WORK. ~~To these ends, the committee~~ IT should review on a regular basis, through observation and quantitative studies, how adequately policy and practice are meeting ~~stated~~ THE goals, EXPRESSED IN THE ADMISSION MISSION STATEMENT. IT should ALSO develop and maintain mechanisms for communicating faculty opinion on the quality of our students to the admission and financial aid staff. ~~and should report annually to the faculty on the committee's work.~~ THE COMMITTEE IS EXPECTED TO CONSIDER SUGGESTIONS AND CONCERNS FROM ALL MEMBERS OF THE COLLEGE COMMUNITY WITH RESPECT TO ADMISSION AND FINANCIAL AID POLICY. Members of the committee should be sufficiently engaged in the admission process to enable them to carry out their responsibilities effectively.

Note that the first sentence makes no change to the language pertaining to the Faculty's current responsibilities. The new charge delegates only existing responsibilities.

The final paragraph introduces the College Committee on Admission and Financial Aid (CCAFA) and makes a pair of minor stylistic changes. We debated whether or not CCAFA would be required with the revision to FCAFA, but we felt in the end that voting on the accepted cohort is a moment of symbolic significance that should not be summarily dismissed.

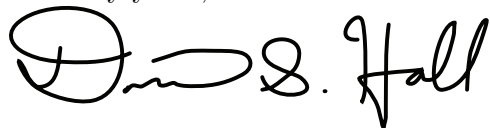
A College Committee on Admission and Financial Aid CHAIRED BY THE DEAN OF ADMISSION AND FINANCIAL AID will convene ~~under the chairmanship of the dean of admission and financial aid~~ at least four times in each academic year. It will

consist of the dean of the faculty, *ex officio*, and eight voting members: the dean of admission and financial aid, the dean of admission, the dean of financial aid, the chief student affairs officer, and the four faculty members on the Committee on Admission and Financial Aid. At a meeting early in the fall of each year, the College Committee on Admission and Financial Aid will review the composition and diversity of the first-year class, paying attention to such issues as the distribution of students by curricular and extracurricular strengths. The committee will reconvene in advance of the release of notifications of admission to early decision candidates (normally in December) and prior to the release of notifications of admission to regular round candidates (normally in March) to consider such information as it deems necessary to ~~insure~~ ENSURE that the college's stated policies are being implemented. At the end of each of these meetings the committee will vote on the admission actions recommended by the dean of admission and financial aid. The committee will hold a final meeting at the end of the academic year to review the outcome of the completed admission process.

Our hope is that some revision of the committee charge can come before the faculty for discussion and comment (perhaps in a Committee of the Whole) and a vote before the end of this academic year. Should we move forward with these initial steps, our committee would very much like to widen the conversation to include the Trustees at as early a stage as is practicable.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David S. Hall". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "D" and "H".

David S. Hall
Paula R. and David J. Avenius 1941 Professor of Physics
Chair, Faculty Committee on Admission and Financial Aid

Committee Members:

Waleed Babar '21, David S. Hall, Gail Holt (*ex officio*), Chris Kingston, Karu Kozuma (*ex officio*), Jen Manion, Matt McGann (*ex officio*), Maeve McNamara '19, Grace Montoya '20 (first semester), Tim Offei-Addo '19 (second semester), Andrew Poe, Aniah Washington '22, Cate Zolkos (*ex officio*).

Appendices