

**Admission to Amherst:
A Report to the Faculty and Administration**



Submitted by

The Faculty Committee on Admission and Financial Aid

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Introduction

This report responds to the charge given to the Faculty Committee on Admission and Financial Aid (FCAFA) by the Committee of Six at the beginning of the academic year 1998-99.

The charge to FCAFA reads as follows:

The Committee of Six charges the Committee on Admission and Financial aid to promote conversation within the College Community with the following questions in mind:

- 1) Would the faculty reaffirm the statement on admission endorsed in 1983?
- 2) Are we, as a community, fulfilling in practice, the admission statement now in the catalog?

Toward this end, the Committee of Six urges the Committee on Admission and Financial Aid to address with the community the several issues outlined in its 1998 Report. In particular, we ask that the Committee engage in detailed examination of questions relating to early decision, financial aid, and the current role of athletics in the admissions process.

A number of events prompted the Committee of Six to issue this charge. In January 1998, the Dean of Admission, Jane Reynolds, resigned. The College administration subsequently commissioned a visiting committee to review the Office of Admission before embarking on the search for a new Dean. The visiting committee examined all aspects of admission. Its members urged the College to consider a number of structural reforms in the organization of the Admission Office, to establish better communication between the Admission Office and the wider college community, and to pay greater attention to gathering data about admission trends and outcomes. During this period, FCAFA also was attempting to heighten general awareness of practices of concern to faculty and students in the admission process. FCAFA's report for 1997-98 laid out the issues that most troubled the constituencies it represented. Finally, the search for a new Dean of Admission precipitated broad public discussion about admission policy. When that search ended in June, 1998, without producing a suitable candidate willing to accept the position, it became clear that the consensus necessary to redefine admission policy and practice would be

achieved only if the issues raised by the visiting committee, the discontent felt within the Admission Office, and the criticisms voiced by FCAFA were addressed.

Under the leadership of the Interim Dean of Admission, Katie Fretwell, in 1998, and the Interim Dean of Admission and Financial Aid, Joe Paul Case, in 1999, the Office of Admission embarked on reforms that address the internal problems of organization noted by the visiting committee. It also refined the rating scale by means of which applicants to Amherst are evaluated and devised a new system that provides coaches with incentives to pursue the strongest student athletes who apply to Amherst, even when the chances of enrolling those particular students are very slim. The Administration also responded, creating a single executive position of Dean of Admission and Financial Aid, reporting to the President and supported by a Director of Admission and a Director of Financial Aid. The administrative reorganization acknowledged the key role of the Dean of Admission and Financial Aid within the College's administrative structure and made it possible for the reopened search for a new Dean to attract more experienced applicants. It has been left to FCAFA to examine, with the College community, wider issues of admission policy and practice as they affect the goals of the institution and the composition of incoming classes.

The statement on admission policy to which our charge refers reads as follows:

Amherst College looks, above all, for men and women of intellectual promise who have demonstrated qualities of mind and character that will enable them to take full advantage of the College's curriculum. The College seeks qualified applicants from different races, classes, and ethnic groups, students whose several perspectives might contribute significantly to a process of mutual education within and outside the curriculum. Admission decisions aim to select from among the many qualified applicants those possessing the intellectual talent, mental discipline, and imagination that will allow them most fully to benefit from the curriculum and to contribute to the life of the College and of society. Grades, standardized test scores, essays, recommendations, independent work, the quality of the individual's 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.

The text of this statement was crafted as part of a major FCAFA report on admission submitted to the faculty and administration in 1983. That committee's task was not dissimilar from our own. It examined the organization of the admission process and considered the effect of special preferences given to specific groups (legacies, students of color, athletes, etc.) on the composition of incoming classes. It also attempted to define the most dependable predictors of academic success among students who matriculated at the College.

The recommendations in the 1983 report established the broad outlines of the admission process with which we now work. The report recommended computerizing the admission process, expanding the admission staff, and giving a greater role to faculty and admission officers besides the Dean in final admission decisions. It upheld the College's commitment to recruiting students of color and supported giving special attention to qualified applicants who were the children of alumni. Although its research suggested that SAT scores were one of the most accurate predictors of academic success in the classroom, the Committee declined to endorse an admission policy that emphasized standardized test scores. Some of the report's more specific recommendations were not implemented, including a proposal that each admission folder be read by a faculty member, and that faculty serve on FCAFA for at least three years.

The 1983 report has been particularly useful to our Committee because it includes an informative history of admission to Amherst. We do not intend to rehearse this history here, but we encourage others to consult copies of that report (placed on reserve at Frost Library) as they read our own. Seventeen years ago, when that committee began its work, some of the members of our next first year class were not yet born. The process of admission to Amherst has changed in important ways in the intervening years. The number of applicants has doubled, as more than 5,000 students a year compete for the 420 places in the first year class, enhancing the College's status as one of the most selective undergraduate institutions in the country. Co-education has

been fully established at the College, with approximately equal numbers of male and female students competing for admission each year. Racial and ethnic diversity also has been achieved to a degree few could have anticipated in 1983, although many of us would like to see further progress.

Changes within the College have been matched by changes beyond the College. The pressure on students to outperform their cohort on standardized tests and in extra-curricular activities in order to gain admission to selective schools has mounted steadily, as has the pressure on colleges to expand their recruiting efforts. Legal and cultural shifts have altered the way in which all colleges handle financial aid. Today, Amherst not only must compete for its most economically disadvantaged students against those liberal arts colleges and Ivy League schools whose aid programs, like ours, aim to meet full financial need; it also competes for its middle income students against private colleges and honors colleges within public institutions that offer their most desirable admitted students generous scholarships as matriculation incentives. All these pressures have been exacerbated by revolutions in the field of information technology. It has become routine for high school students of the caliber Amherst wishes to attract to receive as many as 100 mailings from colleges in their junior year in high school, and to utilize the Common Application to apply simultaneously to as many as 10 colleges apiece in their senior year.

Given the pressures on the admission process at every level, Amherst has done surprisingly well at maintaining its standards and its reputation. This is due in no small part to the diligence of our somewhat understaffed Admission Office. Most of Amherst's senior admission officers have worked here for a relatively long time, so that the deans who train the "Green Deans" and who take Amherst's message on the road are a knowledgeable, experienced group. But the stresses on the system are beginning to show, specifically in the three areas identified in

our charge from the Committee of Six: the recruitment of athletes, the distribution of financial aid, and the use of the Early Decision (ED) option as a way of stabilizing matriculation rates.

Our Committee first approached its charge by attempting to examine all three of these issues, but our report has narrowed its focus to the role of athletics in admission. There are various reasons for the adjustment. For a start, we ascertained that Amherst makes slightly less use of ED than most of its competitors. Amherst usually admits about 33% of its entering class ED. By contrast, the Early Action programs at Harvard and Brown admitted 60% and 39% respectively of their class of 2002. Among the institutions in our cohort with ED programs, the percentages of their classes matriculated through ED in 1999 are: Princeton, 47%; Dartmouth, 38%; Swarthmore, 37%; Williams, 36%; and Yale, 35%. (For a glossary of acronyms and admission terminology, see Appendix II.)

It remains true that a smaller percentage of students in need of financial aid apply ED than is the case in the regular admission round and that ED applicants tend to require, on average, smaller financial aid awards than students admitted during the regular round. This is due, in part, to the counsel most admission offices give to students who need substantial financial aid not to limit their aid options by applying early. In addition, the average SAT score for students applying ED is lower than that for the regular pool. However, the average SAT score of ED admits ends up being higher than that of matriculants in the regular pool. One reason for this may be that ED applicants have an obligation to come to Amherst if accepted, whereas the students with the highest SAT scores in the regular pool often have other attractive options. Another reason may be that the greater socioeconomic diversity among matriculants in the regular pool is reflected in a broader range of SAT scores.

Other problems affecting the selection of students from the ED pool do not differ substantively from the problems affecting admission decisions within the regular pool.

Consequently, our Committee chose not to focus on the issue of ED at this time. Once the recommendations put forward in this report have been translated into practice, it will be up to members of a future FCAFA to revisit the issue of ED and to ascertain whether the College should be making less (or more) use of this practice in yielding a class.

The issue of financial aid was set aside for different reasons. For a start, there was little desire among members of most of the constituencies with whom we spoke (alumni being a notable exception) to take it up. Moreover, the Committee discovered that the College had undertaken no systematic analysis of longitudinal data comparing Amherst's success or lack thereof in competition for admitted students against schools that have shifted their financial aid policies in recent years. Without professional analysis of such data, we have no way to assess the influence our competitors' new financial aid policies have had on our yield. We anticipate that the new Dean of Admission and Financial Aid will make such a study one of his priorities, and our recommendations concerning institutional research in the conclusion to this report are meant in part to support this priority.

By far the most pressing concern among all the constituencies with whom we spoke was the role of athletics in admission to Amherst. We encountered a wide range of opinion on the issue within the College community. Indeed, it is fair to say that the range of opinion *within* each group of faculty, alumni, coaches, students, trustees, staff, and athletes with whom we spoke was much more significant than the difference of opinion *between* the separate groups. (For a full list of the groups we consulted, see Appendix I.) The body of our report is devoted to a description and analysis of the athletic recruiting process, its challenges, and outcomes, as we have come to understand them in the course of our discussions with the Admission Office and with the wider College community. We wish to stress, however, that, while athletics was clearly the flash point for many of the concerns expressed by those we consulted, our Committee has come to view the

issue of athletic recruitment as interrelated with a variety of broader issues facing the College. We have concluded our recommendations with a list of concerns about athletics that we heard frequently in our discussions with all the groups we consulted. These broader issues go well beyond the purview of our Committee, although changes in such areas might well have an effect on admission outcomes.

The challenges involved in matriculating strong students who are also exceptional athletes are not all that different from the challenges Amherst faces in recruiting stellar academic students, or talented students of color, or well-prepared students from working class backgrounds. Students in all these groups are highly sought after. Each group is small by comparison with the pool of applicants as a whole. The strongest students within any of these cohorts have many options besides Amherst. We hope that you will read what follows within the broader context of the kinds of difficulties facing admission offices in the present educational climate as they compete for specific groups of students whose desirability, for whatever reason, makes them a scarce commodity in the academic marketplace.

Athletics and Admission at Amherst

The Rationale for College Athletics

Amherst has long been known for having a vigorous athletic program and is widely admired among its peer institutions for balancing athletic and academic excellence. A member of the NCAA and NESCAC, Amherst supports twenty-seven intercollegiate sports (e.g., football and women's hockey), several "club" teams (e.g., men and women's rugby), intramural and instructional programs. All of these activities are supervised by the Department of Physical Education and Athletics, which consists at present of four tenured faculty members and thirteen coaches working on a contract basis. Over 80% of our students enrolled in one or another activity of the Athletics Department last year; one in three Amherst students participated in intercollegiate competition.

Amherst's extensive commitment to athletics serves the institution in several ways. Athletics offers many of our students and some of our faculty a valued pastime and an opportunity to cultivate friendships that may last lifetimes. Participation in sports fosters "physical intelligence" and can teach lessons of enduring importance: how to cooperate with others, benefit from criticism, and handle success and adversity. Physical education *is* a form of education.

While even the casual intramuralist may learn important lessons and skills from play, the student who competes at the intercollegiate level often finds in athletics an organizing principle for life. Players typically give fifteen to twenty hours a week to their sport during the season and fewer, but still significant, hours to off-season conditioning. These demands lead some students to seek shortcuts in class work but more often breed beneficial forms of discipline. Our Committee was struck by the number of intercollegiate athletes who said that they were better

students in season than out, a pattern that finds support in the observations of class deans and some faculty members. Hours spent on the practice field and on team buses often lead to close and enduring friendships among players and coaches, and we have heard vivid testimony from students about the benefits they have derived from these associations. Teams are natural affinity groups which help many students make the transition to college and which can provide support and assistance to members who experience difficulty during their time at Amherst. Relationships formed on the field often endure for decades, as do the loyalties of former student athletes to their teams and College. After graduation some alumni continue to act as mentors to new members of their former teams. They also take an active role in promoting the College among students of high school age. We have been told repeatedly by advancement officers that there is no demonstrable relationship between the success of our athletic teams and fund-raising.

Nevertheless, we have heard strong anecdotal evidence indicating that intercollegiate athletics helps bind alumni to the College, even as it breeds cohesiveness among current players.

Intercollegiate sports can yield benefits to both participants and the institution, and it is for these reasons that Amherst has, for many years, accorded some weight to athletic accomplishments and potential among applicants for admission. Amherst's policy on admission, endorsed by faculty vote in 1983, assigns first priority to intellectual promise, but describes "intellectual promise" in broad terms, stating that Amherst seeks applicants "possessing the intellectual talent, mental discipline, and imagination that will allow them most fully to benefit from the curriculum and to contribute to the life of the College and of society" and specifying that "achievements outside the classroom are among the factors used to evaluate this promise." These phrases are sufficiently inclusive to provide admission officers the latitude to consider extracurricular activities, including sports, as potentially significant assets in an applicant's folder. Participation in high school athletics may be a marker for mental discipline, leadership

qualities, or a capacity for teamwork. At the very least, a long-term commitment to athletics, combined with strong academic performance, bespeaks the sort of energy and vitality that is the *sine qua non* of high achievement in other pursuits. Our Committee possesses no systematic data by which to judge the validity of such correlations, but we are disposed to accept the argument that athletic commitment, when combined with other forms of evidence, is an indicator of academic promise, much as are other forms of sustained extracurricular engagement. Such a conclusion is consistent with our own best experiences with student athletes in the classroom, with reports we have received from other members of the faculty, and with the notable achievements of alumni who played intercollegiate sports while at Amherst.

Athletics as an Institutional Commitment

Admission officers are concerned above all with populating Amherst with students who will be interesting, engaged, and vital members of an intellectual community. Their primary focus is, in other words, on individuals. Yet, while seeking to find and enroll the best possible students, admission officers must also take account of institutional considerations. An orchestra cannot work without violinists, nor can a mathematics department thrive without mathematics majors. Many outstanding students enroll at Amherst in part because it affords rich opportunities for athletic challenge. A team that is hamstrung for lack of a competent player in a key position is a source of frustration to students who have made athletic competition an integral part of their lives and to the faculty and staff hired to coach them. A commitment to intercollegiate athletics carries with it an obligation to make good faith efforts to maintain a reasonable level of competitiveness.

In the interest of maintaining competitiveness within our conference, admission officers sometimes assume risk by accepting students who, while deemed capable of graduating, are demonstrably weaker than other admitted students in academic performance or preparation. These decisions are made easier by the fact that all judgments about candidates entail some risk. Our methods of predicting the performance of high school seniors are far from perfect, and all members of our community can probably think of at least a few cases of students whose performance at college falls lamentably short of their records in high school. The admission of a modest number of comparatively risky student athletes is further eased by the belief that such admissions can facilitate recruitment of student athletes with very strong academic credentials. Consequently, as the statistics we shall present below suggest, sometimes students who appear academically powerful are denied admission in favor of students with weaker academic records but considerable athletic prowess. It is beyond the scope of our Committee's charge to pass judgment on the costs and benefits of Amherst's program in intercollegiate sports. We believe, however, that as long as the College seeks to maintain the current intercollegiate athletic program in its present form and at its present level of competition, athletics will need to figure significantly in some admission decisions.

The Changing Profile of Student Athletes

The tension between the goal of admitting the very best students and the goal of maintaining competitive teams was not as pronounced twenty years ago as it is today, and this is perhaps the reason athletics received only passing attention in FCAFA's 1983 report. The College then, as now, had a strong and broad athletic program. Amherst's teams competed against many of the same rivals as they do today. The Admission Office took account of the

athletic ability of applicants and the needs of teams. However, unlike today, coaches made only modest and sporadic efforts to recruit high school athletes. Many teams depended on "walk-ons" to fill their rosters, and it was not uncommon to find students who participated in two or even three intercollegiate sports. The physical profiles of student athletes were much like those of other students. Football players were generally smaller than they are today; basketball players were typically shorter.

Over the past two decades, the "walk-on" has all but disappeared on some teams, most notably football and men's hockey, and is increasingly rare on many others. Some of our students still compete on two intercollegiate squads. In fact, the possibility of competing in two sports constitutes part of the appeal of NCAA Division III athletic programs to multi-talented high school students. Nevertheless, the pressure to specialize is strong. Students with pronounced athletic ability are often encouraged to focus their efforts on one sport, and often on one position, in high school. Off-season conditioning has become increasingly important, and the skills that make for success in one game may be of limited value in another. Consequently, the all-around athlete, capable of excelling in one sport and contributing in another, is becoming unusual, although not as unusual as the student who takes up competitive athletics only after arriving at the College.

The gender profile among Amherst student athletes also has changed over the last twenty years. Women were first admitted to Amherst in 1976, and the representation of women in our entering classes has gradually risen to the current level of nearly 50%. The College expanded at the time it became coeducational, but only modestly—from 1,200 students to the current level of about 1,600. A program of male intercollegiate sports that had evolved in a college with an entering class of 300 men is now filling male team rosters from an entering class with about 200 men. Since 1976, Amherst has also worked vigorously to develop women's intercollegiate sports

and is, in fact, obligated under federal statute to provide equal opportunities in intercollegiate competition for men and women. As a consequence, the total number of intercollegiate teams has increased, as has the pressure to find students capable of making and keeping those teams competitive.

As the preparation and physical requirements necessary for competitive athletics have become more demanding, the pool of admissible students capable of playing some intercollegiate sports, even at the Division III level, has contracted. It is one thing to find outstanding students among male high school seniors who weigh 190 pounds and have respectable reflexes. It is another to find the same number of academically superb prospects within the much smaller pool of male high school seniors weighing over 250 pounds and having unusual speed and agility. The contraction of the pool of stellar athletes has exacerbated the trends already set in motion by the shifts in gender participation in sports, making it difficult for the College to provide all teams with a full complement of strong student athletes.

The "Recruiting" Process

Growing specialization and the expansion of our program in intercollegiate athletics have had implications for coaches and admission officers. Coaches, who face pressures from alumni and students to maintain competitive teams and who quite naturally seek to win for professional reasons, have grown increasingly aggressive in seeking out student athletes capable of both contributing to the sports program and meeting academic standards for admission. Senior members of the Athletics Department inform us that systematic efforts to identify and recruit student athletes began in the late 1970s. Regulations of NCAA Division III and NESCAC prohibit many of the practices that the word "recruiting" is likely to bring to mind. Amherst

cannot, and does not, offer athletic scholarships. Our coaches do not visit potential students in their high schools or their homes. We do not shower "recruits" with gifts, nor do we give student athletes special living quarters, meal allowances, or other perks. Coaches cannot offer prized athletes instant admission, nor do they have the influence to accelerate or alter the regular admission process. Some of the schools against which we compete for students, including Ivy League institutions (NCAA Division I schools), enjoy greater latitude in recruiting and make aggressive use of some of these practices in securing top-echelon student athletes.

Nevertheless, our coaches do make strenuous efforts to encourage applications from promising student athletes, within the constraints imposed by the NCAA and NESCAC rules. Coaches are allowed to solicit or accept video recordings of a student's performance on the field and, depending on the sport, each coach will review between 200 and 600 such tapes a year. Some coaches organize or participate in summer camps for high school players. All make use of networks of high school coaches and alumni in the effort to identify and attract talented student athletes. The Athletics Department invites applicants with marked athletic ability to visit campus, at the students' expense, for tours and overnight stays. Coaches also maintain contact with prospects by telephone, and often invest long hours in cultivating students whom they believe to be both academically admissible and athletically outstanding.

In the late 1980s, the Athletics Department and the Admission Office developed a systematic method of rating the athletic promise of applicants and the special needs of teams that is still in use. Working through a committee composed of senior coaches, the Athletics Department assigns prospective student athletes, identified either by their own efforts or through the regular admission process, two ratings: one an assessment of the candidate's athletic ability and the other an assessment of the College's need for a competitor in the student's sport and position. Applicants judged to have sufficient athletic ability to flourish in Division III play are

typically assigned an "ability" rating of 1 or 2 on a scale of 1 to 5. At Amherst, as at other colleges in NESCAC, competitiveness at the intercollegiate level depends on a steady supply of such "highly rated athletes." Recruiting them has become a major concern of coaches over the past two decades, in both male and female sports.

The Admission Process

The Office of Admission does not make applicant files available to coaches, although coaches are often able to make preliminary judgments about the admissibility of candidates on the basis of what they learn from the candidates themselves, prior experience, and consultation with a designated liaison in Admission. Coaches use these judgments in focusing their efforts on recruiting students who will ultimately have some reasonable prospect of admission. The Admission Office is conscious of the value of maintaining contact with the Athletics Department (and other College departments), but it is also sensitive to the dangers of ceding authority to others or giving the appearance that it is doing so.

Formal contacts between the staff in Athletics and Admission occur in three ways. An Athletic Liaison Committee brings together three senior coaches, representing the views of the Athletics Department, and two senior members of the Admission Office. It is in this committee that the coaches make a case at the beginning of the admission cycle for a target number of "highly rated athletes" and informs the Admission Office of special needs—a pitcher, a quarterback, a stronger defensive line. A tentative "target number" and a list of priorities emerge from discussion in this committee. The "target number" is not a formal quota, but rather a shared judgment regarding the number of talented student athletes necessary to maintain competitive

teams and build up weak squads. It may be met or not, depending on the strength and depth of the applicant pool.

Later in the admission cycle, the Athletics Department sends "rating sheets" on individual applicants to the Office of Admission. These sheets assess an applicant's ability and a team's need for that ability and supply such other information as coaches believe may be useful in making an admission decision. The Department also may communicate with the Admission Office through a designated officer during the course of the admission cycle, both to keep informed about the status of students in whom it is especially interested and to keep the Admission Office apprised of its evolving priorities.

The academic strengths of applicants with high athletic ratings are evaluated in the same way as those of other applicants during the weeks when folders are read. Each application is reviewed by two members of the Admission staff assigned on the basis of the candidate's geographical origin. A third officer is responsible for reading all applications from highly rated athletes and does so in order to make comparative judgments about the qualifications of students within this group, much as readers assigned by geographical area make comparative evaluations within their region. Readers assign two numerical scores to each application, one gauging the academic strength of the applicant and the other his or her non-academic qualifications; they also write a brief statement summarizing their views on the candidate's strengths and weaknesses. Participation in high school sports is a factor in the "non-academic" reader rating but is not considered in assignment of an "academic" reader rating. Applicants whose academic reader rating falls below a certain minimum are not considered for admission regardless of their athletic achievements or potential. Those candidates deemed admissible on academic grounds are then referred to broader committee meetings at which admission decisions are made. It is in these meetings that athletic ability and the needs of teams become factors, much as do considerations

of racial diversity, disadvantaged background, familial connection to Amherst, and special artistic ability. In principle, therefore, unusual athletic ability is but one among many factors affecting admission decisions.

The Weight of Athletics in the Admission Process

In practice, however, the sheer numbers of students involved in athletics and the constant anxiety on the part of teams and coaches to ensure the viability of their sports generate pressure within the admission process to give priority to athletic ability in a disproportionate number of individual admission decisions. Just how pronounced this priority has become in the last ten years is borne out by the figures our Committee distributed to the faculty for discussion in the spring of 1999, some of which we reproduce below. Table I shows roughly the weight given to athletic talent in the admission decision. Although the figures show that highly rated athletes were represented at all levels in the academic reader rating categories used by the Admission Office, the large disparity between the odds of admission for applicants with high athletic ratings and the odds of admission for "other" applicants indicates that a very significant weight has been assigned to athletic talent in the admission decision over the past ten years.

Table I. Percentage of *all applicants* who were *admitted* (1989-1998).

Academic Reader Rating	Apps w/ High Athletic Ratings	"Other" Applicants
1	100%	95.99%
2	71.04%	41.03%
3	48.21%	9.65%
4	33.01%	4.96%

The weight assigned to athletic talent in the admission process also can be gauged by comparing the ratio of applicants to admits across rating groups. Significant numbers of applicants with high athletic ratings have been admitted in place of applicants with higher academic ratings without similar athletic talent. There are many circumstances in which special qualifications might warrant the admission of applicants who will face greater academic challenges at Amherst than those who have been rejected. However, it seems clear from Table I that, in a significant number of cases, athletic talent has prevailed over all other considerations. In specific sports, the odds of admission for applicants with high athletic ratings and an academic reader rating of 4 sometimes exceed the odds of admission of an applicant in the academic reader rating category 2 who is not an athlete. In these contexts, athletic prowess would appear to have played a determinative role in the admission decision.

The weight assigned to athletic prowess in the admission decision has changed over time. Table II shows the yearly breakdown of the rates of admission for applicants who have an academic reader rating of 4 and a high athletic rating:

Table II. Percentage of *all academic reader rating 4 applicants with high athletic ratings* who were *admitted* by year. (Historical breakdown of the 33.01% found in the bottom row of "Apps w/ High Athletic Ratings" in Table I above.)

Action	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
<i>Admit</i>	13.51%	13.38%	28.16%	39.02%	32.37%	58.47%	52.59%	35.11%	48.84%	27.21%
<i>W-List</i>	1.35%	2.55%	1.94%	9.76%	1.44%	4.24%	6.03%	4.58%	1.16%	1.36%
<i>Reject</i>	85.14%	84.08%	69.90%	51.22%	66.19%	37.29%	41.38%	60.31%	50.00%	71.43%

Since Amherst's computer database could provide data only after 1989, it was impossible for FCAFA to determine exactly what Amherst's admission rates for athletes were prior to that year. Nevertheless, Table II suggests that the priority given to applicants with high athletic ratings and

academic reader ratings in the category 4 rose in the early 1990s and was particularly elevated during the mid-1990s. During the same period, there was no corresponding trend in the admission rates for applicants given an academic reader rating of 4 who did not show athletic talent.

The different groups with whom we spoke have offered us a variety of explanations of these changes over time. The most widely acknowledged of these is that the need to strengthen the football team in the mid-1990s, after three years in which it won a total of 1 game, lost 22 and tied 1, and the need to establish several new women's sports created an upsurge in the recruitment and acceptance of very strong athletes, even though many of these students carried a higher academic risk than typically had been the case. Short-term admission strategies to address the needs of specific teams deemed especially vulnerable are not unusual at schools at our level of competition. However, several coaches also claimed that this "lurch" in the admission of athletes was exacerbated by the neglect of the needs of their teams in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when a more timely response to losing trends might have forestalled the need to rebuild their squads completely and would not have necessitated significant shifts in the number and caliber of student athletes recruited. Of most concern to our Committee, however, was the fact that neither the decision to neglect (if such was the case) nor the decision to emphasize the needs of athletic teams was taken in consultation with the Faculty or their representatives on FCAFA.

Shifts Over Time in the Distribution of Athletes in the Admission Ratings

Table III compares the 405 highly rated athletes, who had an academic reader rating of 4 and who were admitted, to the total number of highly rated athletes admitted in each class between 1989 and 1998.

Table III. Total numbers of highly rated athletes who were *admitted*; total numbers of highly rated athletes with *academic reader rating 4* who were *admitted*; and percentage of admitted highly rated athletes who had academic reader rating 4.

	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
HRA's	184	147	160	107	138	186	177	154	151	180
HRA's = ARR4's	20	21	29	32	45	69	61	47	42	40
% HRA's = ARR4	10.8%	14.3%	18.1%	29.9%	32.6%	37.1%	34.4%	30.5%	27.8%	22.2%

As seen in row 1 of Table III, the total number of highly rated athletes in all academic reader rating categories has fluctuated over time, and there does not appear to have been a significant effort to expand the total numbers of highly rated athletes among our admits, although the total number of highly rated athletes admitted after 1994 does exceed the number admitted during the five previous years. What has changed over time is Amherst's willingness to admit highly rated athletes with academic reader ratings in the category 4.

Several faculty have suggested that the primary motive for this shift in practice is the single-minded pursuit of winning. By this reasoning, Amherst's increased willingness to admit highly rated athletes with weaker academic credentials can be explained primarily by the fact that in specific sports it has become difficult to attract enough student athletes to fill a winning team from among students with stronger academic backgrounds. Rather than risk losing, the College brought in more strong players who constituted an academic risk. In essence, Amherst chose at a specific moment to trade off a certain level of excellence in the academic records of some admits in exchange for the promise of enhanced performance of Amherst's intercollegiate squads. Amherst's rising fortunes on the playing fields since the mid-1990s may offer support for this claim.

The coaches on the Athletic Liaison Committee offered us a slightly different interpretation of these trends. They pointed out that the recruiting of student athletes in the riskiest academic categories is inversely related to the overall target number for student athletes. When the overall target figure is low, coaches often focus their efforts more narrowly on those students most likely to accept an offer of admission. These are generally students with relatively weaker academic credentials. There is some support for this claim in the figures. With the exception of 1994 and 1995, the percentages of highly rated athletes in the academic reader rating category 4—and in some cases the actual numbers of such students—tend to be lowest when the total number of highly rated athletes admitted is highest. However, whatever interpretation of these data one adopts, our Committee's response is to note, once more, that the discussion of considerations of this kind did not occur in FCAFA.

Academic and Social Consequences of Matriculation Outcomes

The shift in admission practice described above has had a notable impact on the academic profile of the highly rated athletes who matriculate at Amherst. Table IV shows that, although the majority of highly rated athletes who matriculate still are to be found within the top three academic reader rating categories, after 1991 a remarkably larger percentage of all highly rated athletes ranked among those matriculants who received academic reader ratings of 4 during the admission process.

Table IV. Percentage of *matriculating* highly rated athletes in each academic reader rating by cohort. Actual numbers of matriculating highly rated athletes are noted in parentheses.

ARR	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
1	.99% (1)	1.32% (1)	2.41% (2)	0% (0)	1.05% (1)	0% (0)	.81% (1)	1.01% (1)	2.04% (2)	.84% (1)
2	20.79% (22)	19.74% (15)	19.28% (16)	26.03% (19)	23.16% (22)	9.17% (11)	18.7% (23)	13.13% (13)	16.33% (16)	19.33% (23)
3	67.33% (70)	63.16% (49)	56.63% (48)	42.47% (31)	48.42% (47)	45.83% (55)	47.97% (59)	50.51% (50)	52.04% (51)	56.30% (67)
4	10.89% (11)	15.79% (12)	21.69% (18)	31.51% (23)	27.37% (27)	45% (54)	32.52% (40)	35.35% (35)	29.59% (29)	23.53% (28)
Total	(104)	(77)	(84)	(73)	(97)	(120)	(123)	(99)	(98)	(119)

In some cases, the increase in actual numbers of matriculating, highly rated athletes in the academic reader rating category "4" is relatively small. But Amherst's entering class is also relatively small. At a College in which many departments have fewer than twenty majors and many classes have fewer than twenty students, even a small rise in the total number of students whose academic preparedness differs significantly from that of their cohort is quickly discernible, especially when those levels are sustained over four or five years. The change is regrettable for several reasons. Whereas most of our non-athletic matriculants tend to be drawn from among those applicants who receive academic reader ratings of 1 and 2, a significant percentage of our matriculants who are highly rated athletes, especially among males, now come from academic reader rating categories 3 and 4. The downward shift in academic preparedness among highly rated athletes that occurred after 1991 may have contributed to a polarization within the student body that has had consequences in both the social and academic arenas.

Students do not have access to admission data. Nevertheless, many claim to be aware of some polarization between athletes and non-athletes, both inside and outside of the classroom. At

any rate the issue was the subject of much controversy among the students who chose to attend the public conversations we hosted. Such polarization lends ammunition to those students who would seek to perpetuate the stereotype of the "dumb jock." This stereotype, in conjunction with a tendency among members of many athletic teams to socialize together, may be contributing to divisions within the campus community that diminish the social education of all of Amherst's students. The ideal situation would be, of course, to have Amherst's talented athletes fully integrated into the campus community both socially and academically.

Given the spotty, anecdotal nature of FCAFA's information about student social interactions, the extent of social polarization among athletes and non-athletes has been difficult for our Committee to gauge. Less nebulous are the academic consequences of the shift in admission practice toward matriculating larger numbers of students with weaker academic credentials than the rest of their cohort. Faculty in a wide variety of academic disciplines bore witness to a palpable shift in the quality of the classroom experience at Amherst during the 1990s. Many professors have observed a regrettable intellectual disengagement that seems in some cases to be concentrated among athletes who had relatively weak academic profiles before coming to Amherst. This perception of the classroom experience is supported by the figures on the relationship between GPA and academic reader ratings, which show that, between 1989-98, 67% of highly rated athletes who entered the College with an academic reader rating of 4 achieved a GPA of "B" or lower, placing them in the lowest quartile of their class.

Academic Reader Ratings, Selectivity and "Success"

FCAFA believes that the levels of admission of highly rated athletes with lower academic ratings seen during the mid-1990s were inappropriate for Amherst. Academic performance and

potential should be the overriding consideration in making admission decisions. Our institution concentrates on the education of students who possess the talent and other prerequisites needed for demanding study. We expect not only competence but excellence and originality in our students. We seek, through our graduates, to exert a beneficial influence on society and its institutions, on scholarship, and on the professions. We seek students who are able to take advantage of the exceptional opportunities offered by the College. When we increase significantly the number of students we admit for primarily athletic reasons from the lowest category deemed qualified to attend Amherst and disregard other applicants who show greater intellectual promise, we risk compromising this ideal.

Academic achievement and potential should be at the heart of any admission decision, but we must be careful not to overestimate our ability to assess these qualities reliably. We know very little about the ultimate success of our students once they leave the College. We have never attempted to correlate such success with admission predictors of students' intellectual promise, nor is there any consensus about what "success" might be—especially in relation to students whose intellectual development in the short run seems to lag behind that of their peers.

It bears reiterating that practically all the students admitted by Amherst would be considered academically strong within the national pool of college-bound high school students. Such information as the Admission Office receives from the 40% of highly rated athletes in the academic reader rating category 4 whom we admit but fail to matriculate indicates that many have offers of admission from schools of equal or greater prestige. This is also true of many of the highly rated athletes whom Amherst rejects. The academic reader rating system used by the Admission Office only seeks to calibrate previous achievement against the rigorous demands of our academic curriculum and to assess the level of risk the College assumes in proposing to educate that student once he or she matriculates. It provides us with useful indications of a

student's capacity to master new information, but on its own it may not offer us much information to judge qualities of mind that are no less important to success in scholarship or life: curiosity, perseverance, energy, versatility, and leadership.

Admission officers need flexibility to find exceptional students whose excellence may be obscured by traditional measures of achievement and promise. Amherst College aspires to cultivate a learning environment, the racial and socioeconomic diversity of which reflects that of the society at large. In pursuit of this goal, admission officers need the latitude to be responsive to applicants who have had access to fewer resources than our best-prepared applicants and whose test scores and levels of preparation may be relatively unreliable indicators of their academic promise. They also need flexibility to honor obligations that the College has assumed. Those who have been generous to Amherst, and this includes faculty and staff as well as alumni, deserve some consideration for their contributions. This does not and should not mean that their children ought to have a free pass into the College. In fact, they do not. But Amherst, like other colleges, will assume somewhat higher risk when considering applicants who are sons or daughters of active alumni or employees.

The College has also assumed obligations by committing itself to providing certain kinds of opportunities to students. We describe ourselves as an institution that offers students a rich variety of academic and extracurricular activities. All of our applicants know that Amherst offers an outstanding liberal arts education. Some also think of it as "the singing college," or as a school where poetry is taken seriously, or as a wonderful place to study biology. Many of our applicants know it as a college at which they can test themselves physically as well as intellectually. Amherst has, over generations, acquired a reputation for excellence in each of these areas, and in others as well. It has invested resources in maintaining these strengths and it has benefitted from them. As a consequence, students come here with expectations about what

they will find. The College has some responsibility to try to satisfy those expectations. In practice, this means that the College must sometimes admit students with comparatively high academic risk for institutional reasons. We therefore hold that it would be an error to exclude categorically applicants who receive academic reader ratings of 4 in the admission process.

Recommendations

The charge of the Committee of Six to FCAFA to engage in detailed examination of questions relating to the current role of athletics in the admissions process has encouraged FCAFA to refine and reform certain aspects of the admission process. We are confident that our recommendations will contribute to a solution of current problems involving athletics in the admission process, but athletics is only one of a number of fundamental issues that Amherst will face in the near future. Changes in financial aid policies at other institutions and recent court rulings on affirmative action may well have an effect on our continued ability to recruit students from a wide range of social and economic backgrounds. We anticipate that these changes will entail new challenges for the College. Our recommendations rest on the notion that faculty need to become more directly involved in the admission process as a whole in order to understand and support the Admission Office as it confronts these challenges.

Two features of the admission procedure have contributed significantly to the erratic and, at times, unacceptable weight given to athletics in the admission process. The first has to do with how goals for an entering class are determined. It is essential that admission officers understand the institution they represent, and it is equally vital for those charged with administering college programs such as athletics to be able to communicate their needs to the Admission Office. To its credit, the Admission Office has evolved over time a variety of methods, the Athletic Liaison Committee among them, for consulting with the various parts of the Amherst community. In 1998, the Admission Office introduced a three-tier "banding" system that provides an incentive for coaches to pursue their most academically talented and therefore most elusive recruits: students with high athletic ratings are no longer counted against the target numbers for admitted athletes if they are given the highest academic reader ratings by the Admission Office. Conversely, a strict cap has been placed on the number of highly rated athletes admitted from the

lowest band, so that coaches are not tempted to compensate for cuts in the overall target numbers by stacking their ratings in favor of the students most likely to matriculate. One year offers us little experience of how well the new system works, but it appears to go some way toward eliminating the perceived abuses of the old system.

What remains troubling about existing procedures, however, is that an overall picture of what the entering class should look like emerges piecemeal through largely bilateral conversations between Admission officers and interested constituencies. What percentage of our incoming class ought to have special aptitude in math, music, or foreign languages? Is the College enrolling sufficient students interested in expository writing to keep The Student afloat? Are some athletic teams starved for competent players? How should the needs of extracurricular programs, which constitute an important part of an Amherst education and of Amherst's appeal, be weighed against the essential goal of finding students of outstanding intellectual promise? By default, the Admission Office has assumed much of the responsibility for answering questions such as these. It does so with great seriousness, intelligence, and integrity. But we believe it is a mistake to leave questions so important to the life of the College entirely to the Admission Office, no matter how capable its staff. The director and staff of this office also have expressed to the Committee their discomfort with their role as sole arbiters of these issues.

A second troublesome feature of current admission practice is that decisions regarding high risk candidates currently are made with only occasional involvement of faculty. Our Committee recognizes that there are several legitimate reasons to admit students with a range of academic preparation. We share the view, expressed by several of our colleagues, that Amherst would be a far less interesting place were we to accept students solely on the basis of their academic performance in high school and scores on standardized tests. However, the Admission Office should have at its disposal a more systematic means of consulting with faculty when it

considers admitting applicants of comparatively high risk in order to meet institutional goals. Broader consultation may improve the quality of such decisions; it will surely enhance faculty confidence in the process by which they are reached.

We have full confidence in the professional ability of the dean, director, and staff of the Amherst Admission Office. Admission has become a highly specialized field, and faculty do not wish to (and should not presume that they can) assume the complicated and time-consuming task of admission work themselves. Nevertheless, the constantly changing professional demands placed on the Admission Office have contributed to its isolation from the faculty: most of us lack general knowledge of that office's actual practices, built-in limitations, and achievements. Given the complex and sometimes conflicting demands of the various constituencies who deserve consideration for admission to Amherst, the Admission Office has asked for, and the faculty members of FCAFA have sought, increased opportunities for more substantive faculty involvement in shaping the relationship between admission policy and practice.

Our Committee's four recommendations address the work and structure of FCAFA in ways that will expand faculty involvement in the admission process and faculty liaison with admission staff, strengthen the role of institutional research in Amherst's understanding of its applicant pools and matriculation outcomes, and involve faculty more widely in the recruiting process. Finally we urge the Admission Office to reconsider some of its present outreach practices.

1. The Committees

FCAFA would continue to fulfill its current function as described in the Faculty Handbook:

...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. (excerpt from the Faculty Handbook, pp. 72-73)

In order to do so, faculty new to FCAFA should expect to educate themselves about the complexities of the process of admission by reading historical reports and statistics, by examining applicant folders, and by sitting in on admission decisions at various stages in the process. The College also should amplify the mission of FCAFA, as defined in the Faculty Handbook. 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. Faculty members should be expected to serve for three years. Members who cannot serve a full term should have previous experience on FCAFA to ensure a high level of continuity and familiarity with admission matters. FCAFA also should maintain regular contact with the Trustees, to enable direct and frank discussion about admission issues of mutual concern.

FCAFA should retain its current balance of four faculty (appointed by the Committee of Six) and four students (two elected, two appointed by the Office of Admission), and add the new Dean of Admission and Financial Aid (*ex officio*), so that administrators number four (the Director of Admission, the Director of Financial Aid, and the Dean of Students, all are currently *ex officio*). In addition, the provision within FCAFA's present constitution for an *ex officio* member responsible for questions of institutional research must be honored. This position has not been filled since 1992. FCAFA should not have to depend upon the serendipitous statistical skills of its administrative and faculty members for long-term planning and projection.

Apart from FCAFA's regular deliberations, a subcommittee of FCAFA should convene at least once in each admission cycle to decide upon high-risk admission cases brought to the subcommittee by the Dean of Admission and Financial Aid. This subcommittee should consist of the four sitting faculty members of FCAFA, the Dean of Admission and Financial Aid, the Director of Admission, and the Dean of Students. If desired, on a case-by-case basis, the admission officer most familiar with the case under review would be invited to join the discussion in a non-voting capacity. The subcommittee would review the complete application of each high-risk case brought forward by the Dean. In cases in which a consensus cannot be achieved about the admission of a specific applicant, the seven members of the subcommittee would take a vote. The support of a majority of five out of seven members of the subcommittee would be required for admission.

At the beginning and end of the academic year, a College Committee on Admission and Financial Aid (CCAFA) should be convened under the chairmanship of the Dean of Admission and Financial Aid. The twice-yearly meetings of this committee will serve to mark the moment in the admission process at which faculty perspectives on admissions are formally integrated into the shaping of specific institutional goals. The fall session of CCAFA would be dedicated to establishing a model for the incoming class and setting the numerical goals for the admission of highly rated athletes and other specifically targeted groups. The spring session would be dedicated to a full review of the outcome of the completed admission process. CCAFA would consist of eight voting members: the Dean of Admission and Financial Aid, the Director of Admission, the Director of Financial Aid, the Dean of Students and four faculty members. The Dean of Faculty would be invited to attend these meetings in an *ex officio* capacity. The faculty members of CCAFA should consist, in the first instance, of those sitting faculty members who have already served on FCAFA for one year. If these do not number four, the Committee of Six

should appoint from among the previous chairs of FCAFA enough faculty members to fill the empty faculty seats on CCAFA for that academic year.

The Committee anticipates that this regular consultative approach to establishing a model for each class would enable the Admission Office to be fully informed of faculty concerns prior to each admission cycle and would allow the faculty to be fully apprised of the contingencies that impinge upon the decision making process. It would also provide a forum for coordinated, long-term planning that might limit abrupt shifts in the academic and extra-curricular distribution of our student population.

2. Institutional Research

None of the goals outlined can be realized without more systematic institutional research. We urge the College to devote more resources to this task, which already is considered central to the operations of many admission offices at comparable institutions. We strongly recommend the appointment of an officer with statistical expertise and specific responsibility for compiling and maintaining data on our applicant pool and on our students after they matriculate. The appointment could be made either in the Office of Institutional Research or in the Admission Office. We expect that the new Dean, in consultation with the administration, will have his own sense of how best to approach this issue. But we wish to stress that without continuous access to such data, the work of FCAFA and of the Admission Office is made inefficient, inaccurate, and unnecessarily onerous.

3. The Faculty

The reforms of the committee structure put forward above will give members of FCAFA a greater role in administering admission policy, but the faculty in general should expect to find themselves called upon by the Admission Office more often in the years ahead. Admission staff need the faculty's assistance to help recruit outstanding students, including outstanding student athletes. They also need faculty to be consistently forthcoming with information about their departments and about the performance of first year students in their classes, so as to better match applicant interests with faculty priorities. We do not want to pre-empt the new Dean by recommending specific programs for faculty involvement, but the faculty should be prepared to take a more active role in those aspects of admission which most intimately affect the life of the classroom.

4. The Office of Admission

Although it receives no discussion in the body of our report, one recommendation that we heard from every constituency—except the Admission Office—was that Amherst should reinstate applicant interviews. One reason the yield on highly rated athletes in all reader rating categories remains as high as it does is that student athletes are in contact with the College much earlier in the recruiting cycle, and at a much more personal level, than other admits. Results of the recent faculty phonathons to outstanding academic admits also indicate that the students who are most receptive to our calls tend to be those who availed themselves of the opportunity to visit the campus before they applied. Non-evaluative individual interviews would give all applicants an opportunity to obtain information about Amherst specific to their interests and aptitude early in the application process.

The admission staff maintain that even non-evaluative interviews would create an enormous amount of busy work. They also assert that such interviews would disproportionately service a segment of the student population that is already over-represented and advantaged in the applicant pool. We appreciate this argument but do not necessarily accept its conclusion that no individual interviewing be done. Interviews help to demonstrate to teenagers swamped with mass admission mailings that a college cares about the intellectual interests of individual students. This message is the cornerstone of the appeal of an education at a small liberal arts college such as ours.

The decision to reintroduce interviews ultimately rests with the Admission Office, and it cannot be taken lightly. The present admission staff cannot be expected to add a heavy interviewing schedule to its duties without the addition of new personnel. Even if they do not conduct the interviews themselves, admission officers would have to supervise others who do so and to monitor the process closely. At this point, we recommend only that the Admission Office, in consultation with next year's FCAFA, give serious attention to the advisability and feasibility of reintroducing interviews.

Athletics Beyond Admission

In the course of our conversations with different groups within the Amherst College community, we were apprised of a number of problems relating to athletics, the solutions to which do not fall exclusively within the purview of our Committee, although they do affect the work of admission. We have no specific recommendations to make on these matters but we wish to pass on the information we received, and we request that the Committee of Six consider ways of addressing these issues through more appropriate faculty committees.

Amherst's Commitment to Varsity Sports

Many members of the community have suggested that the number of varsity teams for which we attempt to recruit players is disproportionately high, given the small size of the total student population. It is clear from our discussions this year that severely cutting back the number of highly rated athletes we admit would lead to significantly less competitive varsity teams. Some coaches claim that we already have fallen below the admission levels we need to maintain in order to matriculate the minimum number of student athletes our varsity programs require. The College may wish to reassess the extent of its commitment to varsity sports. Two proposed solutions we heard were to reduce the number of varsity teams, or to increase the size of the College so that the proportion of varsity athletes to other students is brought into line with that at other colleges. Both proposals have significant implications for the College, however, and would require broader investigation if they were to be given serious consideration. A third proposal was that Amherst College exercise its influence in NESCAC to reduce the size of football teams, since football accounts for a significantly larger group of highly rated athletes than does any other team. None of these issues can be adequately addressed by FCAFA.

Amherst's Commitment to Highly Rated Athletes

Our deliberations have convinced us that, given the increasing specialization in sports, even in Division III, there will always be a core of highly rated athletes with lower academic ratings upon whom certain teams depend for success, provided we continue to maintain the current size and competitiveness of our athletic programs. The College must decide if we value athletics sufficiently as a part of the collegiate experience to countenance admitting higher-risk students in large part for athletic ability at the expense of other students. If we intend to maintain this commitment, we also must commit ourselves to providing academic support to these students, whom we recruit so avidly, once they matriculate and to ensuring that no student is stigmatized in the classroom due to his or her participation in a varsity sport.

Athletics in the Amherst Community

We heard repeatedly that there is a polarization of athletes and non-athletes on campus. Some students complained bitterly about the domination of student social life by athletes. Many faculty members were vocal about the disruption of their classes by athletic schedules. Individual student athletes recounted instances of negative stereotyping both in and outside the classroom. Coaches complained of isolation from the college community as a whole and some even expressed diffidence about approaching faculty for help in recruiting their most academically attractive athletic prospects. FCAFA cannot address this problem, nor can the Admission Office. It is up to the community to come to terms with these tensions. One proposed solution we heard was that coaches be more fully integrated into the College by returning them to the faculty. Another suggestion was that the College explore ways for faculty to interact more regularly with coaches and their teams.

Conclusion

In closing, we return to the initial question posed to the faculty by the charge of the Committee of Six: "Would the Faculty reaffirm the statement on Admission endorsed in 1983?" We offer in response a qualified "yes." Individual members of the faculty, in our conversations with them, had reservations about specific words or phrases in the statement. In general, however, they agreed that it was suitably inclusive and "appropriately ambiguous," and that a more precise wording might create more problems than it would solve. By the same token, they were not prepared to emphasize, any more explicitly than is the case at present, the value placed on qualities associated with athletics in the list of intellectual and civic attributes Amherst seeks in its applicants. If anything, our conversations with all of the groups with a stake in admission made it clear just how pervasive the tension between academic and extra-curricular considerations is throughout the admission process. For this reason, we feel confident that our structural recommendations—rather than any rewording of the admission policy—represent the best possible approach to the problems this report describes.

Respectfully submitted,

Members of the Faculty Committee on Admission and Financial Aid

Faculty	Students	<i>Ex Officio</i>
Rhonda Cobham-Sander (Chair)	Rebecca Epstein '99	Joe Paul Case, Interim Dean of Admission and Financial Aid
Nicola Courtright	Brennan Griffin '99	Katie Fretwell, Director of Admission
Paul Rockwell	Melissa Lorenzo '99	Ben Lieber, Dean of Students
John Servos	Michael Ward '00	

Appendix I: The Process

All members of the FCAFA participated in all levels of discussion. In particular, the student members of the Committee were privy to all the statistics on students that we analyzed and discussed. We are extremely grateful to them for the maturity and discretion they exhibited in the course of our deliberations. We would also like to thank the Office of Admission, the Dean of Students Office and the Office of the Registrar for their generous assistance, and Flora Josephs and Nancy Board for their secretarial support.

During the course of the year the Committee gathered information from the following documentary sources and through meetings with the following groups:

Documentary Sources

- Past reports to the faculty on admission
- Various surveys of student and faculty attitudes to athletics conducted at Amherst and elsewhere.
- Statistical data on academic reader ratings, rates of admission, and matriculation and grade point averages for all applicants to the college between 1989 and 1998, sorted by athletic rating, race, gender, familial relationship to the college, and athletic team.

Groups

- The staff of the Office of Admission
- The staff of the Dean of Students Office and the Office of Career Counseling
- Area co-ordinators for student housing
- The Faculty (two sets of three meetings were held; one set to share information and the other to discuss our charge and statistical data related to admission)
- The student body (two open meetings were held)
- The Department of Athletics and Physical Education
- The Athletic Liaison Committee
- Captains of all varsity sports teams
- A focus group of representative alumni drawn from classes between 1960 and 1989.
- The Trustees of Amherst College

Individual Committee members also held extended discussions with former chairs of FCAFA and other faculty and alumni, as well as with the President, the Acting President, the Acting Dean of Faculty, and the Director of Alumni Development. In addition, we received many detailed memos from students, staff, and faculty laying out specific viewpoints and suggesting possible actions that the Committee might consider recommending. Our report attempts to reflect this breadth of interaction, although we have not included all the suggestions for specific reforms that we heard from various quarters.

Appendix II: Acronyms and Admission Terminology

Academic Reader Rating (ARR)

The number, assigned to each applicant by each admission staff member who reads a given application. It indicates in general terms the assessment of an applicant's academic credentials. Please see also Appendix III which contains a description of the rating system referred to in this report. A new rating system was introduced for the class entering in Fall of 1999.

Highly Rated Athlete (HRA)

Those applicants who are identified by Athletic Department personnel as being very talented in athletics. For FCAFA's purposes, an athletic rating of 1 or 2 qualified an applicant to be designated a Highly Rated Athlete.

Please keep in mind that there are distinctions among three separate groups in the admission process:

Applicants

All those prospective students who filed an application for admission

Admits

All applicants who are offered admission

Matriculants

All admits who accept an offer of admission

The percentage of admits who actually matriculate is known as a *yield* percentage. Yield percentages tend to increase as academic reader ratings increase. (In general, an admit who has an academic reader rating of 4 is more likely to matriculate than an admit who has an academic reader rating of 1.)

Early Decision (ED)

Under the College Board-approved Early Decision plan, candidates for admission apply early and receive notice of admission, rejection, or deferral into the regular pool in mid-December. Financial aid awards normally are announced in full detail at the same time as the admission decisions. Early Decision applicants make a prior commitment to matriculate if accepted. An applicant receiving admission and an adequate financial award will be required to accept that offer of admission and withdraw all applications to other Colleges and Universities.

Early Action (EA)

This plan is offered only by Harvard and Brown among the Ivies. It does not require a commitment to matriculate and students may apply to other colleges at any time. Normally, however, a student may apply as an Early Action candidate to only one institution. Early Action applicants are also notified of the status of their candidacy in mid-December.

NESCAC

The New England Small College Athletic Conference. Its 11 members are Amherst, Bates, Bowdoin, Colby, Connecticut, Hamilton, Middlebury, Trinity, Tufts, Wesleyan and Williams. "NESCAC members believe that intercollegiate athletic programs should operate in harmony with the educational mission of each institution and that athletic teams should be representative of the entire student body. Admission and financial aid policies within NESCAC are consistent with NCAA Division III and prohibit athletic scholarships. NESCAC encourages athletes to participate in more than one varsity sport and athletic schedules are drawn accordingly." (From the Williams College website)

NCAA Division III

The National College Athletic Association has three divisions which are distinguished from each other on the basis of the minimum number of games teams in each division must play, the minimum and maximum number of team members, the minimum and maximum size of the stadiums in which the games are played and the criteria for financial aid and/or athletic scholarships at the school. Division III schools field the smallest teams and play in the smallest stadiums. They are not allowed to award financial aid on the basis of athletic ability. All NESCAC schools fall within NCAA Division III.

Reader Rating Summary

Rating	Academic	Rating	Non-Academic
1	<p>Within top 5 of Class An "A" record Most demanding program Passionate interest in a particular discipline Evidence of deep intellectual curiosity V = 790-800; M = 760-800 Combined score of roughly 1550+</p>	1	<p>Strong, passionate involvement in school or community; unusual leadership; ecstatic school support; top rating in music, art, theater, athletics; integrity, character & energy of the highest order; great potential for significant contribution to AC campus life</p>
2	<p>Around top 5% of Class Better than average program Mostly "A" grades Many AP and honors courses Better than average essays Significant intellectual curiosity V = 710-790; M = 650-760 Combined score of roughly 1400+</p>	2	<p>At least one major extracurricular area of contribution; considerable depth of involvement; unusually strong support; rated for music, art, athletics, theater; solid character; some potential for contribution at AC</p>
3	<p>Around top 10% of Class An "A" and "B" record Some AP and honors courses Good essays Academically competent More than intellectually curious Average program for our pool V = 670-710; M = 600-690 Combined score of roughly 1300+</p>	3	<p>Average involvement in school or community; some evidence of leadership; some experience in athletics, art, music but no ratings; strong school support but not outstanding; no weaknesses but nothing to indicate unusual contribution at AC</p>
4	<p>Around top 20% of Class Mostly "B" record Modest essays Below average program V = 550-670; M = 560-650 Combined scores of roughly 1150+</p>	4	<p>No major accomplishments or areas of contribution to school or community; below average school support or personal qualities; little involvement</p>
5	<p>Below top 20% of Class "B-" record or below Weak essays Modest to poor program Considerable evidence to cause concern re. AC success V = below 550; M = below 560 Combined score below 1100</p>	5	<p>Perfunctory or negative support; some evidence for concern about maturity necessary for Amherst campus; poor attitude as portrayed throughout application</p>