

The second meeting of the Faculty Executive Committee (FEC) for the academic year 2023–2024 was called to order by Professor Call, chair of the committee, in the president’s office on Monday, September 18, at 4:00 P.M. Present, in addition to Professor Call, were Professors Follette, Gardner, Katsaros, and Polk; President Elliott; Provost and Dean of the Faculty Epstein; and Associate Provost Tobin, recorder.

The meeting began with the president informing the members that the fall meetings of the board of trustees would be taking place September 21 through September 23. He noted that the board would be discussing many of the same issues that will be subjects of conversation on campus, including the implications of the Supreme Court’s decision about race conscious admission. President Elliott then distributed [a summary of some administrative priorities](#) on which he and the leadership team plan to focus for the next eighteen to twenty-four months. President Elliott explained that the list of priorities is not intended to be exhaustive, that some actions are already under way to advance some of the goals that have been articulated, and that he is encouraging and expecting the emergence of other priorities.

Continuing, the president highlighted some issues that will be considered under the rubrics of strengthening student belonging by cultivating a stronger sense of community among Amherst students; improving the working environment for faculty, staff, and students; and elevating and enhancing the contributions of the college to a greater good beyond Amherst’s campus. In reference to the priority focused on students, the president commented that addressing the relationship between student-athletes and non-athletes encompasses an array of college areas, touching on matters related to academics and student life, for example. When it comes to building community and encouraging a sense of belonging, he noted his enthusiasm for the new initiative that focused on the sophomore experience. He also commented on his work to raise funds for the new student center and dining commons project, which will be a transformative project when it comes to student life—and the social experience on campus more broadly. He also mentioned plans to develop an annual short “pulse” survey for Amherst students as part of an effort to gather more data about the student experience. President Elliott commented that, at present, the college administers the Consortium on Financing Higher Education (COFHE) Enrolled Student Survey during odd years and the Senior Survey during even years. The response rate is poor for these surveys, both of which are quite lengthy.

In regard to the working environment at Amherst, President Elliott noted that the results of the recent Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education (COACHE) Faculty Job Satisfaction Survey, in which the college participates every three years, should yield helpful information about the faculty experience. He looks forward to the discussion of the survey results, he said. The president commented that the results of the college’s recent staff survey, which is the third iteration of this instrument, were also informative. Staff identified their connection to the college’s mission, engagement in meaningful work, benefits, work/life balance including flexible work, and Amherst’s commitment to diversity and inclusion as some of the highest areas of satisfaction. Some concerns that emerged included the desire of some staff to have more opportunities to give input on major college decisions and dissatisfaction with communication, particularly transparency about the rationale with which decisions are made; the desire for more career development opportunities, dissatisfaction with performance management, and recognition and appreciation, as well as dissatisfaction with campus offices. The college will be considering possible ways to address these issues, he said. Noting that assigning space on campus is currently decentralized, the president noted that developing a process to allocate space on campus more efficiently is a priority.

President Elliott concluded his comments by discussing briefly the priority of elevating the college’s commitment to serving a greater good. He informed the members that, at dinners that he had hosted last May with small groups of faculty members, he had learned about a number of curricular endeavors that are already asking students what it means to be a member of a democratic society, to work with community partners, and to address the pressing challenges of our time. He said that he is eager to support and incentivize further experimentation among faculty that will yield new courses or alter existing courses toward this end. The president also noted that, in an effort tied to this priority, the Loeb Center for Career Exploration and Planning has developed programming to highlight the ways in which a liberal arts education can prepare students for a career in public service.

Under her remarks, Provost Epstein informed the members of plans to have Jesse Barba, director of institutional and registrar services, give a presentation on the results of the COACHE survey at the September 29 meeting of the department chairs, and later to the FEC, and to share the results with the faculty.

The provost next noted her intention to discuss with the members at an upcoming meeting the possibility of developing guidance on the presence of faculty on campus. She is aware that some faculty are coming to campus as little as once a week to teach.

Turning to a related topic, the provost noted plans for the FEC to discuss a proposal from the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) to add to the teaching and advising section of the *Faculty Handbook* (IV.,B.) language surrounding the teaching of courses. Provost Epstein informed the FEC that it was brought to the CEP's attention last year that some faculty members had ended some of their courses several days before the end of the semester. The provost explained that the CEP approved language in February 2023 in response to this information, but had neglected to forward the proposal to the FEC. Professor Benedetto, last year's chair of the CEP, apologized for the delay in forwarding the proposal. The proposed new language is as follows:

Faculty are expected to hold all scheduled classes. If faculty members are unable to teach class in person, they may reschedule the class, teach remotely, or communicate material asynchronously (for example, via recorded lectures) for no more than the equivalent of two weeks of classes during the semester. Alternatively, they may arrange for a colleague to teach in their place. In the event that faculty need to teach more than the equivalent of two weeks remotely, they should be in touch with the chair of their department to make other arrangements for the teaching of their classes.

The provost suggested that what is perhaps needed is an FEC discussion on the responsibilities of the faculty. The committee agreed to discuss these matters at an upcoming meeting.

Under "Questions from Committee Members," Professor Polk said that some faculty and staff colleagues have shared with him concerns about the decision to eliminate "to-go" containers at Valentine Dining Hall. He explained that some faculty have to walk long distances from where they live or teach and tend to get food at Val to eat in their offices. Others, including himself, teach during lunch so need to get food to bring to their offices before teaching, so as to have time to eat lunch afterward. As a workplace issue, he wonders if the policy of not providing to-go containers could be reconsidered, perhaps allowing only faculty and staff, and not students, to use the containers. President Elliott responded that it would be challenging to implement a two-tiered system. He noted, as well, that students could make similar arguments about the necessity of the "to-go" containers. The containers were introduced during the pandemic and were never meant to be a permanent option, the president said. It seemed clear that some students, faculty, and staff ate meals at Val and that also brought food out of Val in the containers, often resulting in waste. Provost Epstein noted that there is a "grab-and-go" option that could serve similar needs. President Elliott said that he would discuss this matter again with the leadership team, with the possibility of considering alternatives to the "to-go" containers.

Continuing with questions, Professor Gardner said that she learned from some students that there were not COVID testing kits available recently. She suggested that efforts be made to ensure that the tests are being provided on campus.

Following up on this issue, Professor Follette asked about the rate of transmission of the virus at this time and suggested that it would be helpful for faculty to receive a reminder about current college COVID-19 policies related to teaching and learning. The provost sent [an email message to faculty and staff in her division on September 20](#), providing these policies. (The Office of Human Resources also sent a message to all staff.) Provost Epstein also noted that there was only anecdotal information about faculty and staff who had tested positive for the virus, while the college was aware that, as of September 20, seventy students had tested positive in the previous ten days. At the time that the message was sent, reported cases had declined, and many of the students who had reported positive tests were out of isolation. She informed the members that

the college had distributed more than three thousand tests since the beginning of the semester, an indication that some students are testing.

At 4:15 p.m., Matt McGann, dean of admission and financial aid, and Jesse Barba, director of institutional research and registrar services, joined the meeting. In anticipation of the committee-of-the-whole discussion that will take place at the October 17 faculty meeting, Dean McGann was asked to prepare a presentation about the admission process, including Amherst's practices surrounding the recruitment and other admission policies for student-athletes. During the FEC meeting, Dean McGann presented a draft of the presentation, which included both narrative content and related data. He responded to the members' questions and thanked them for their suggestions, most of which were offered with the goal of improving the structure of the presentation and the clarity of some of the information, as well as streamlining the presentation, which was quite lengthy. Due to the complexity of the subject and the volume of information that would be presented in the short time allotted, the members agreed to discuss at their next meeting what the most effective approach to structuring the faculty meeting would be.

Dean McGann began his presentation by referencing Amherst's history of prioritizing transparency in regard to information about admission policy and practice. He referenced [the admission reports that have been disseminated since 1999](#) and noted that enhanced data related to admission and athletics that has been shared with the College Committee on Admission and Financial Aid (CCAFA) since 2018, and the discussions about athletics and admissions that have taken place with governance bodies (CCAFA, the Faculty Committee on Admission and Financial Aid [FCAFA], and the FEC) about this topic between 2019 and the present. The dean then explained the make-up of the CCAFA and the role that the committee plays in the admission process, noting that the FCAFA and the CCAFA, which have overlapping membership among the faculty members who serve (the provost also serves ex officio on the CCAFA), help to enhance communication about admission policies and practices and provide additional oversight over the admission process.

The dean then reviewed the role of the New England Small College Athletic Conference (NESCAC), the athletic conference in which Amherst competes. He explained that the presidents of the NESCAC colleges govern the conference, and that the NESCAC has the strictest rules about recruiting of any conference, going far beyond the restrictions of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). As an example, he explained that the NESCAC does not allow "on-the-road" recruiting (high school visits, home visits, dinners). Dean McGann also informed the members that the NESCAC maintains highly structured common guidelines for the admission process; this includes policies that restrict athletic admission to better ensure what the NESCAC calls "academic representativeness." The NESCAC schools must report detailed admission data, and the NESCAC deans are charged with holding each other accountable. The NESCAC is the only NCAA Division III conference that does this, Dean McGann noted.

Dean McGann next briefly discussed ratcheting-up trends in youth athletics in relation to the recruitment of student-athletes, with an emphasis on the transition from high school varsity teams as the locus of activity, to year-round club sports that are organized on a regional and national level. The commitment of time and money that is required, and the competitive nature of youth athletics, is extraordinary, Dean McGann noted. An example is the need for families to support the attendance of young athletes at camps and showcases in order for the students to be successful in the admission process for some schools. Professor Polk commented that these processes are at the root of the critique of the recruitment of student-athletes, but are also fascinating. He understands, based on what had been discussed, that Amherst is still competing for students who can choose to go to NCAA Division 1 schools, and that the restrictive policies of the NESCAC affect the college's ability to recruit some of the students that Amherst may want, including some who come from diverse backgrounds. He said that he anticipates that having a clearer understanding of the racial composition of athletes at Amherst will enhance the October 17 conversation and complicate the suggestion that recruited student-athletes are predominantly white men. The committee was pleased to learn that the recruitment of student-athletes has helped to diversify Amherst's student body, particularly since the time of the 2016 Diver II report.

The dean next reported on how Amherst is doing in regard to the racial and ethnic diversity of its recruited student-athletes. He explained that the college's student-athletes lag behind non-recruits in racial and ethnic diversity. Amherst has, however, made significant progress since 2016. In fact, the dean noted, most of the increase in the proportion of students of color during that time period at Amherst is the result of increases in the recruited student-athlete population. Most of the college's teams are much more diverse than the NCAA Division III average, the dean noted. Dean McGann also shared that the college's recruited student-athlete population is much more diverse than all of the rest of the NESCAC. The members were impressed with the progress that Amherst has made and its leadership role, as evidenced by the current data on the diversity of student-athletes that Dean McGann shared.

The dean also discussed processes around recruiting student-athletes in relation to diversity, noting that elements such as "athletic factors" and non "athletic factors," which are regulated by the NESCAC, and the latter of which has been an important tool for diversifying the student body. The impact in this realm of the recent Supreme Court decision on race conscious admission is being reviewed by the college and its legal counsel and will likely be significant, Dean McGann explained. The conference and the NESCAC presidents are also having conversations about the system that is currently in place, with an eye toward changes that will likely be necessary. Dean McGann also reviewed the current pre-read process and admission timeline for recruited student-athletes, which is governed by the NESCAC. Elements of this process have changed in light of the court's decision, he noted.

The dean next discussed how Amherst is doing in regard to the socioeconomic diversity of recruited student-athletes. He noted that these athletes lag behind non-recruits in socioeconomic diversity. Dean McGann explained that less progress has been made in this realm than in the area of racial and ethnic diversity. Within the NESCAC, Amherst is in the average to above-average range in regard to the socioeconomic diversity of recruits, the dean said.

Concluding his presentation, Dean McGann also discussed how the college is doing when it comes to the academic representativeness of Amherst's recruited student-athletes. J. Barba noted that their retention and graduation rates are very high. The dean explained that Amherst is mostly considering applicants in the top 2 percent of students in the U.S. for admission, and therefore must make fine distinctions when rating their academic strengths. The dean presented data showing how recruited student-athletes have received academic ratings distributed across the full range of academic credentials for admitted students, though their average rating has been lower than that of other students. Their credentials, however, comply with NESCAC rules governing admission and academic representativeness. The dean noted that NESCAC admission rules have become stricter since the release of the 2016 Diver II report and the 2018 Ad Hoc Faculty Committee on Athletics report. Still, within the NESCAC, the credentials of Amherst's recruited student-athletes are among the highest of the member schools.

The members expressed appreciation to Dean McGann for the informative presentation he had developed and noted how much they had learned. He thanked the members for their feedback, which he said he plans to incorporate into his final presentation.

The meeting adjourned at 6:00 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein  
Provost and Dean of the Faculty