

The seventh 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, November 13, at 4:15 P.M. Present, in addition to Professor Call, were Professors Follette, Gardner, and Katsaros; President Elliott; Provost and Dean of the Faculty Epstein; and Associate Provost Tobin, recorder. Professor Polk was absent.

The meeting began with President Elliott commenting that he and the senior staff are continuing to think carefully about ways to support the campus during this very difficult time. He said that he is looking forward to the community coming together for the vigil to mourn lives lost in the Middle East, which will be held on November 15.

Turning to another topic, President Elliott commented that Homecoming Weekend had gone very well, and he expressed appreciation to the faculty for allowing alumni to attend their classes—and for doing the same during Family Weekend—and for participating in panels and other events as part of Homecoming. He noted that the panels about affirmative action that had been held over the weekend had been very well-received. Professor Call said he had heard very good feedback about the panels; he also said that he had appreciated the event held on the Friday of Homecoming Weekend in which a lounge in Seeley Mudd had been named in honor of John Williams, Jr. ’75 to recognize his generous support for the college, his dedicated service as a trustee, and his commitment to Amherst and its Black community.

The members next finalized the proposed membership of the Memorial Minute Committee for Peter Czap, Winkley Professor of History, Emeritus, who had died on October 24, 2023.

Under “Questions from Committee Members,” Professor Call discussed some changes that the administration is planning to make to the Summer Bridge Program and his concerns about them. He began his remarks by noting his own long association, which has spanned three decades of teaching students in the program, including the last twenty-three years consecutively, and his two years of directing the program as dean of new students, and his disappointment that he and others who have taught in the Summer Bridge program were not consulted about the proposed changes. (The provost noted that Professor Vigil, dean of new students, had consulted with Jennifer Innes, director of the Summer Bridge Program, and had surveyed faculty members in the course of developing the proposed changes.) Professor Call then expressed his thanks to Provost Epstein and Professor Vigil for putting the program on a firm financial footing. He then noted that he and two other colleagues who have taught in the Summer Bridge Program for many years had met recently with Professor Vigil, who shared the proposed revisions to the program with them for the first time. He and his colleagues expressed their concern about the proposal to move the start time so that the program begins later in the summer and extends up until the week before orientation begins in advance of the fall semester. Professor Call commented that this model had been tried years ago and had proven to be unsuccessful because it meant that students could not go home in between participating in the program and starting the fall semester, and thus many had to stay on campus from the beginning of August to the end of the fall term. Consequently, it had been discontinued in favor of the current schedule. Provost Epstein responded that a shift to the new format is being tried because many students whom the college wishes to attract to the program do not want to lose the opportunity of extra weeks of working during the summer in order to participate in the Summer Bridge Program. She also commented that the profile of the students who are now being served by the program changed a number of years ago. All participants are now first-generation low-income students who benefit from support to navigate educational and other opportunities at the college; in the past, some students who were invited to participate in the program might have been less successful academically, but came from backgrounds that did not put them at risk when making the transition to college life.

Continuing, the provost said that the program is being revamped so that the schedule more closely resembles a normal four-class load that students will take in the fall, thus easing their transition to a regular course load in the fall. In addition, the program has been very expensive, and this model will reduce costs (reducing the number of faculty members needed to teach in the quantitative and humanities tracks, for example), Provost Epstein noted. The provost said that the new model will be evaluated at the conclusion of this summer and next summer to garner student feedback. Professor Call noted that, in the past, students in the math and science track have taken three intensive courses in science and math and a writing course. They receive a great deal of support from faculty and a

great deal of time in class (taking what amounts to a double course in mathematics, in particular) that has been proven to build their confidence, including making them feel comfortable with reaching out to their instructors in office hours for additional support. If they are in the humanities track, they take a combination of humanities and social science courses and a writing course, Professor Call said. Under the proposed model, he understands that students in the science and math track would take one math or statistics and one science course, a writing course, and a course that would introduce them to the liberal arts campus as a learning lab. Students in the humanities and social sciences track would also take that course and the writing course, as well as one social science and one humanities course. Professor Call also expressed concern that only one-quarter of the students in the proposed program would take mathematics, whereas 60 percent of the students last summer opted to take math (and even more expressed a desire to do so). If the goal of the revised program is to model the fall experience of first-year students—approximately two-thirds of whom take a mathematics course in the fall—Professor Call expressed the hope that the new program would include sufficiently many spaces for a comparable proportion of students to take mathematics. In particular, he hoped the college would continue to offer a course schedule that would enable students who come to Amherst wanting to be pre-med to be exposed to an intensive math and science experience during the Summer Bridge Program. If nothing else, they should have a choice, in his view. Professor Katsaros pointed out that introducing students to college-level writing in the humanities and social sciences fulfills an important purpose of the program. Provost Epstein said that the hope is that the proposed course schedule will encourage greater interaction among students in the two tracks. Professor Call suggested that having more conversations about the program would be helpful.

Professor Follette next raised a question on behalf of a colleague who had informed her that the college's travel portal is no longer working, which had led to a deeper conversation about the need for more guidance and support about how to arrange travel to conferences for students without requiring them (or the faculty member) to purchase flights, hotels, etc., themselves. It was agreed that it is desirable to find ways to arrange for travel so that students do not have to pay costs up front and be reimbursed. The provost later consulted with Ralph Johnson, executive director of campus operations, about this issue. R. Johnson had informed her that the college's travel portal website is, in fact, operational. Using this tool, faculty and academic department coordinators and other staff can book travel for students, as well as for job candidates and speakers, for example. Doing so makes it possible for travelers not to pay for their transportation costs up front. R. Johnson had noted that there were a few months in the spring of 2023 during which the portal was taken offline so that improvements could be made, but that the functionality had been restored during the summer. Travel bookings can always be made via phone, R. Johnson had also explained. In addition, fellowships for student research awarded through the provost's office include funds for travel, so students have the funds for their travel in hand when they receive their awards.

Discussion turned to a proposal forwarded by the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) to revise the comprehensive requirement language in the *Amherst College Catalog*. The CEP noted that, under the policy in this section, which is not strictly followed currently, students are required to complete a "comprehensive evaluation" by the seventh week of the final semester of their senior year. Departments and programs vary widely in their interpretation of the comprehensive requirement, and for several, this requirement is satisfied simply by taking the courses needed for the major, the CEP noted. For some students, the requirement is satisfied by completing a thesis. In either case, the requirement is not met by the specified deadline. The CEP noted that the current catalog language of "evaluation" feels outdated and does not reflect actual practice (in general, all students ultimately "pass"). The CEP also feels that it is valuable to have some way of marking out students' achievement and entry into a community of knowledge. The revision proposed by the CEP seeks to codify a requirement that would be academically meaningful and substantive, and that would also place greater emphasis on celebrating students' academic achievements and giving them an experience to mark their successful completion of the major. The policy has also been developed to be flexible enough to allow departments and programs to accomplish this goal in a wide variety of ways—before the end of the academic year. Under the proposed policy, the experience could not simply be part of commencement or purely celebratory. The members expressed support for the proposal, while

suggesting some small revisions at the level of wordsmithing. The members asked the provost to share these edits with the CEP this week. She agreed to do so.

The committee next took up the question of whether to hold a faculty meeting on December 5. The members agreed that there should be a meeting and to finalize the agenda at their November 27 meeting. It was decided that, once finalized, the proposal to revise the comprehensive-requirement language should be on the agenda, in addition to the proposal that the CEP had forwarded to revise the college's current policies regarding half courses and eligibility for a reduced course load. (See [the FEC minutes of November 6, 2023](#), for more about this proposal.) The committee also felt that it would be informative to have Mike Thomas, chief financial and administrative officer, give a presentation, if his schedule permits.

Discussion turned briefly to a draft memo from M. Thomas that included a link to a new policy and process for the allocation and utilization of space on campus ([the final memo](#) was sent to supervisors and the chairs of academic departments and programs on November 27). The members noted that a Space Planning Committee has been working to "establish policies and processes that ensure that decisions about space are made institutionally." Professor Katsaros asked if this is a permanent committee and if its membership is being defined on an ex officio basis. President Elliott said that the following colleagues are indeed serving on the committee by virtue of their positions at the college: Jesse Barba, director of institutional research and registrar services; Professor Anthony Bishop, associate provost and associate dean of the faculty; Professor Jack Cheney, senior advisor to the provost; Tom Davies, executive director of planning, design, and construction; Jodie Foley, director of accessibility strategy and resources; Dean Gendron, senior associate dean of students; Fred Kass, associate chief information officer; Angie Tissi-Gassoway, chief student affairs officer and dean of students; Lisa Rutherford, general counsel and senior advisor to the president; Kate Salop, chief strategy officer; Ashley Travis, director of financial planning; and Seth Wilschutz, assistant director of planning, design, and construction. The members agreed that the composition of the committee is reasonable, though Professor Call noted that some departments have two representatives on the committee. Professor Call said that he views the establishment of the committee and the new allocation and utilization of space policy as a positive change, commenting that having a more systematic process for reviewing requests and making decisions will be helpful, given the challenges and constraints surrounding space on campus. It was noted that, under the new process, allocating and/or modifying major space (as defined in the policy) will be aligned with the capital budget process, while requests to allocate and/or modify minor space (as defined under the policy) can be submitted at any time. President Elliott said that another positive feature of the process will be taking accessibility concerns into account to a greater degree than in the past when allocating and renovating space. Professor Gardner asked how often space is reallocated. Provost Epstein noted that it is very common to do so within divisions, but less common across divisions. The question of whether the new policy will govern the allocation of faculty offices was raised, and the provost said that the provost's office will continue to oversee this process. If the question of converting a classroom into office space arises, the question would come before the space committee, Provost Epstein said. Professor Katsaros asked if requests to obtain new classroom furniture would be considered by the space committee. The provost noted that, if the costs were to exceed \$10,000, such a request would go through the capital budget process. Professor Follette asked if the same would be true for major repairs and renovations to academic spaces. The provost replied in the affirmative. At the same time, the president noted, the college will be exploring ways to shift resources so as to bolster the budget for deferred maintenance, as the amount that is set aside currently is insufficient, given the needs of the campus. On this point, Professor Gardner commented that, a couple of weeks ago, a window had broken in the science center, the most recent of four such incidents. She wonders what is being done to address this problem, she said. The provost, first noting that it was fortunate that nobody had been hurt when the window had broken, asked if Professor Gardner and others in the science center had received a memo about this incident from Tom Davies and Ralph Johnson, executive director of campus operations. Professor Gardner said that she had received the memo. The provost said that she understands that the college has hired a third-party building envelope engineering firm to review this matter, and that T. Davies and R. Johnson are working with Facilities Operations to support the replacement work,

which will be a number of months out. (The [attached document](#), which was sent to colleagues in the science center on November 27, provided an update on this situation.)

The members next discussed a [letter that Professor George had sent to the committee](#) in August about the [open access resolution](#) that the faculty had approved in 2013. He noted in his communication that many faculty members are probably not aware of the resolution, that it seems that the college no longer wants to “place additional resources behind the Octagon repository,” and that the FEC should think about this matter. Provost Epstein noted that the Octagon, which essentially is a digital archive, is not being used, perhaps because many faculty look to their disciplines when it comes to open-access publishing. The Octagon, which may have outlived its usefulness in her view, requires staff time to maintain that perhaps could be better used for other projects. The committee discussed the challenges of journals passing along the costs of publishing scholarly and creative work in an open-access format, which are expensive. Provost Epstein suggested that the FEC ask the Library Committee to consider this matter and consult with Martin Garnar, director of the library and a member of the committee, to develop a new open-access policy. The provost also noted that the library is happy to help faculty identify open-access venues through which they can publish their work. Professor Katsaros commented that some sites require premium subscriptions that are expensive in order to disseminate work in an open-access format. The members asked if the provost’s office provides funding to faculty for this purpose. The provost responded that faculty members may apply for [open-access publication grants](#) through the library, but that funding is limited. Specifically, she noted, the library makes up to \$20,000 available each year from its materials budget to support open-access publishing. Faculty publishing in peer-reviewed, open-access publications may request up to \$2,000 in assistance from the library to pay article processing charges (APC)s or book processing charges (BPC)s. Any funds not allocated by April 30 will return to the library’s materials budget. Fees charged by non-open-access journals/books to make individual articles/chapters freely available are not eligible for this grant, she explained. Faculty with co-authors at other institutions that offer APC/BPC support should coordinate funding requests across institutions to split costs when possible. The members agreed to forward Professor George’s note to the Library Committee and to share their views with the FEC, including a proposal for a new open-access policy.

The committee then noted plans to discuss at an upcoming meeting matters related to shared governance as part of a continuing project that began in 2021, with support from consultant Susan Pierce. The provost’s office provided this year’s FEC with numerous historical documents to inform the conversation. Professor Call noted that the FEC had developed a survey that was sent to committee chairs in spring 2023 and to a small number of staff members who support these bodies. He asked that it be provided to the FEC before its discussion. Associate Provost Tobin said that she would share this document with the committee. Professor Gardner said that she is interested in learning more about what each committee does, i.e., what business committees undertake.

Turning to another topic, the members, in response to a proposal from the CEP to revise the *Faculty Handbook* language surrounding expectations for holding scheduled classes, decided to refine further its early draft of language about the expectations for holding scheduled classes (see the committee’s previous discussion of this topic in the November 6 FEC minutes). After doing so, the members agreed to share the draft below with the CEP, as well as with the chairs of departments and programs, to get both groups’ feedback. The committee decided that, ultimately, it would like to bring a motion to the faculty to replace the *Faculty Handbook* line [here](#) (“Members of the faculty are expected, barring emergencies, to meet all scheduled classes.”) with the language below.

### **Expectations for Holding Scheduled Classes**

Faculty are expected to hold all scheduled classes, barring one-time emergencies. If a faculty member is unable to teach class in person due to a short-term planned absence, the individual must make alternative arrangements for students to engage with the course, such as rescheduling the class, teaching remotely, communicating materials asynchronously, or arranging for a colleague to teach in their place. Such alternative arrangements may not exceed the equivalent of two weeks of classes. If a faculty member cancels more than the equivalent of one week of in-person class meetings without making alternative arrangements for student engagement, the individual should inform the department

chair and the provost and dean of the faculty. All courses must be taught for an equivalent of eleven weeks in person; in the event that a faculty member cannot meet this requirement, the individual should inform the department chair and the provost and dean of the faculty to arrange for another faculty member(s) to take over the teaching of the colleague's course. The faculty member who takes over a course in such circumstances may be eligible for additional compensation.

The meeting adjourned at 5:30 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein  
Provost and Dean of the Faculty