

The fourth 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, October 16, 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 President Elliott discussing the college's efforts to support students in the aftermath of Hamas's brutal attack on Israel, the resultant loss of life of Israelis, and now the acute humanitarian crisis in Gaza and loss of Palestinian lives. He shared that the Student Affairs team, including members of the staff of religious life, has been working closely with student organizations across campus to provide resources that students need. Some students are experiencing anxiety, sadness, and fear at this challenging time. President Elliott informed the members that some students have expressed interest in organizing a vigil that would be open to the community, though plans remained uncertain at the time. He also acknowledged, as did the committee, that the same emotions affecting students are also affecting faculty and staff. The president noted that the college is also developing some programming to facilitate greater understanding of some of the factors that may lead to violence of this kind. The first speaker will be Ora Szekely, a professor at Clark University (it was later announced that her talk would be on November 2). Professor Szekely will speak on "Understanding the Current Conflict between Israel and Hamas: What We Know and What We Don't." In addition, Eric Ward, senior fellow with the Southern Poverty Law Center and Race Forward, will speak on November 8 on "How Antisemitism Animates White Nationalism." The college is considering additional programming to provide students, faculty, and staff with more information on the situation in the Middle East, the president said. Professor Gardner asked if plans call for these talks to be live-streamed so that the alumni community can attend them virtually. President Elliott said that the events will not be live-streamed so that the audience will feel as comfortable as possible asking questions. He noted that the current situation in the world has led to divided views on campus, and many students' hesitancy to express their views and to ask questions; this is a time of intense scrutiny, particularly for college students, the president commented. Eric Ward's talk will be recorded, Provost Epstein said.

On a related note, President Elliott informed the committee that Massachusetts Governor Maura Healey will speak on November 1 in Johnson Chapel as part of the commemorative events that the college will hold to mark the sixtieth anniversary of then-President John F. Kennedy's visit to Amherst to receive an honorary degree and participate in the groundbreaking of Frost Library. At that time, President Kennedy cited the proud history of public service performed by Amherst's graduates. President Elliott later sent [an email to the community about the upcoming events](#).

The president concluded his remarks by informing the members about the emergence of Fizz, a social media app where members of the Amherst community can post and share content anonymously. While some of this content fosters community and connection, posts can also be harmful—and even hateful. The president noted that Fizz is an app that is not affiliated with Amherst College, and that it is essential that users realize that the college has no oversight of the platform's content, which is moderated by students. Due to the anonymous nature of the content, it is always challenging and often impossible for the college to respond directly to specific concerns.

Conversation then turned to some matters related to the October 17 faculty meeting. Professor Follette conveyed some questions from another assistant professor, who had asked that she express concern over the possibility that some voices might dominate the upcoming discussion about athletics and admission. The colleague had inquired about the possibility of limiting speakers to three minutes, on calling on those who have not yet spoken before calling on those who have already spoken, and of allowing an individual to speak no more than two times during the meeting. Some members noted that, under *Robert's Rules of Order*, individual speakers are limited to ten minutes. Other members commented that last year's FEC had discussed whether to encourage faculty who plan to read a long statement at a faculty meeting to send it to the FEC ahead of time. The committee expressed hope that individual faculty would be mindful of how long and how often they speak at the meeting. The goal should be to have as many colleagues as possible engage in the discussion, it was

agreed. The members also suggested that questions be held until after Dean McGann's presentation, which is expected to last for about twenty minutes. The committee noted concerns that have been shared about finding ways to provide opportunities for everyone to speak at faculty meetings and agreed that the members should consider having a discussion about the norms and expectations around faculty meetings.

Under "Questions from Committee Members," Professor Gardner asked about the practice of compensating faculty in the humanities and humanistic social sciences to teach research tutorials as an overload, as this is something that STEM faculty also do regularly. Provost Epstein explained that the faculty members involved in this program do not receive any other compensation for working with students during the summer after the tutorial, a requirement for those teaching these research tutorials.

Continuing with questions, Professor Gardner asked about the use that is envisioned for Keefe Campus Center once the new student center and dining commons is completed. The president said that no final decisions have been made yet, since further study of the options is required.

Professor Call next inquired on behalf of a colleague whether there are plans to return to the college's earlier practice of sharing grade distributions with faculty. This would involve sending each faculty member the individual's own distribution, that of the faculty member's department, and that of the college in the aggregate. The provost noted that this is a timing-consuming project for the Office of Institutional Research, but that she could see if there is time to undertake this work, which might also include sharing the grade distributions of academic divisions in the aggregate. The members discussed whether having this information could put pressure on some assistant professors to raise their grades, intensifying grade inflation, or whether these data could have the effect of professors lowering grades.

Turning to another topic, President Elliott discussed with the committee the *Serving the Greater Good Initiative*, through which he hopes the college can encourage experimentation and innovation that will enhance the focus on the greater good within Amherst's curriculum. This initiative is centered on course development (developing a new course or substantially modifying an existing one), and the expectation is that the courses that are created will be taught either in 2024–2025 or 2025–2026, he said. When developing proposals, faculty (tenure-line faculty and senior lecturers are eligible to participate) will be encouraged to think capaciously and collaboratively, the president noted. Proposals will be welcome from small groups of colleagues from the same discipline or across fields who come together to develop courses around a theme, and from individuals who wish to propose their own community-based learning course, he explained. The president noted that Amherst's ongoing *Thinking Democratically Initiative* offers an excellent model for a group endeavor that could be supported through this new initiative. Faculty who take part in *Thinking Democratically*, which is coordinated by Professor Sarat, meet each month to discuss recent scholarship that is focused on democratic practices and theory from across the globe. Participants also agree to develop at least one new course related to this topic; nine faculty members have either offered such courses or plan to do so in the next two years. Previously funded by the Mellon Foundation, *Thinking Democratically* will now be supported by the *Serving the Greater Good Initiative* and welcomes new members, the president said. President Elliott said that decisions about funding proposals would be made in consultation with the FEC. After some discussion, it was agreed that proposals should be due by January 15, 2024. It was decided that there would be no need for FEC members to recuse themselves from consideration, but that, if a member is part of a proposal, that person would not participate in the consideration of the proposals. Professor Gardner asked how the initiative will be funded. The president responded that funding will be available through his office to support proposals from the faculty that contribute to this effort. President Elliott said that he would be sending out more information about the initiative soon. The members expressed enthusiasm for the initiative.

At 5:00 p.m., Jesse Barba, director of institutional research and registrar services joined the meeting. The committee reviewed with him [a proposal for a three-year calendar for academic years 2024–2025, 2025–2026, and 2026–2027](#) that was forwarded by the Committee on Educational Policy. Professor Gardner said that she had one question about the proposal for 2026–2027. She wondered why, if classes need to start before Labor Day (September 7 that year) the first day could not be on Monday, August 31, instead of Tuesday, September 1,

so that classes would not be held on Labor Day. Provost Epstein said that this would create a three-day weekend early in the semester that would create some disruption after classes had just begun. The second week of classes is the first substantive week for lab sections, for example, and having whole weeks of class is preferable to having partial weeks. Professor Katsaros noted that the prospective calendars allocate little time between the end of exams and commencement; for example, in 2026–2027, exams would end on May 14 and commencement would be held on May 24. This tight schedule would place increased pressure on faculty to submit final grades and on the registrar's office to process students' records and make final verifications. Professor Gardner also inquired as to whether there might be ways not to have as tight a turnaround for submitting grades. She wondered if classes with high enrollments might have their exams scheduled at the beginning of the exam period, for example. J. Barba noted that courses with large enrollments often do not have exams. It is a problem when faculty don't meet the grade deadline, he said, but the majority do. With the new honors system (once grandfathering for those who came in under the old system is over), since the median grade may be established early on, it will be easier to calculate honors earlier in the process in the spring, J. Barba added. The members then voted unanimously in favor of the substance of the proposal and to forward the calendars to the faculty for consideration at the faculty meeting that follows the October meeting.

J. Barba then reviewed 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. Amherst last participated in 2020, he noted, within days of students being sent home due to the pandemic. Ahead of the meeting, the committee was provided with [two summary documents from COACHE](#) and [a memo from J. Barba](#). J. Barba discussed areas of strength and concern in job satisfaction that are indicated by the faculty's response to the survey, relative to Amherst's peers and all COACHE participants. He noted that, according to the results, Amherst's areas of strength are collaboration, governance adaptability, a shared sense of purpose in governance, trust in governance, health and retirement benefits, satisfaction with senior leadership, and satisfaction with research. Areas of concern that were indicated are departmental collegiality, departmental engagement, department leadership, service work, and the clarity of tenure expectations. Professor Katsaros observed that some tenure-track and tenured colleagues also identified childcare policies, service assignments, and quality of facilities, as sources of dissatisfaction. J. Barba noted that these areas of strength and weakness are relatively unchanged from 2020. He commented that it is important to note that these areas do not necessarily represent an absolute high or low score, but rather an evaluation relative to other COACHE schools. As an example, the benchmark for departmental collegiality is a four (satisfied), but that still leaves Amherst in the bottom 30 percent of COACHE participants. J. Barba noted that the results indicate that the perception among tenure-track (assistant) professors that there is a lack of clarity about tenure expectations and policies seems to have intensified since the last survey administration, which is particularly concerning in light of efforts to address this issue. He also noted that, as a group, tenure-track assistant professors who are in their fourth, fifth, or sixth year express a good deal of dissatisfaction with their departmental cultures. The members discussed the possibility that arriving at the college during the pandemic and a period of remote learning could be at the root of some of these faculty members' views. Professor Polk asked whether shifting proportions of faculty at different ranks since the last administration of the survey could have had an impact on the survey results this time. J. Barba said that this is possible, as the number of assistant professors has increased from 23 percent to 31 percent, and that the number of associate professors has increased between 2011 and 2022. By far, this group seems to have the most anxiety and dissatisfaction, based on the survey results, J. Barba noted. It was also noted that some departments have particularly high numbers of tenure-track faculty members and relatively few tenured colleagues. Some members commented that the kind of close departmental mentoring that would be most useful is not always possible within departments with this demography. The members then thanked J. Barba for this informative discussion. Provost Epstein informed the members that plans call for J.

Barba to discuss the survey results at separate lunch sessions that will be held for tenure-track faculty, tenured faculty, and all faculty. She noted that they had already discussed the results at a meeting for department chairs earlier in the semester.

The meeting adjourned at 5:48 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein  
Provost and Dean of the Faculty