

The ninth 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, December 4, at 4:30 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 noting that two events with a focus on the situation in the Middle East that were held on campus on November 29 had generated robust discussion and had been well attended. There was a panel titled "Broadening Perspectives on Israel-Palestine," featuring Ahmad Samih Khalidi of the Geneva Center for Security Policy, Hampshire College Professor Omar Dahi, and Chris Dole, associate professor of anthropology at Amherst. The same evening, Bret Stephens, opinion columnist for the *New York Times*, had discussed the topic of "Israel, Antisemitism, and the United States" with Amherst Professor of Law, Jurisprudence, and Social Thought Lawrence Douglas. President Elliott informed the members that his office was about to announce that Tahirah Amatul-Wadud, executive director and chief legal officer at the Massachusetts branch of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, would deliver a talk titled "[Responding to Islamophobia in the College Community](#)" on December 12. The college is continuing to invite speakers with a range of perspectives to campus to discuss the situation in the Middle East, the president noted.

The president next shared that he had recently received a letter signed by more than fifty faculty members asking that the college divest any investments that Amherst holds in corporations that are profiting from the war in the Middle East. The president said that the letter was thoughtful, and that he would discuss this request with the trustees. It was noted that the board had just held meetings on campus as part of its regular schedule and that he had discussed the campus climate with the trustees, who were very interested in this topic.

The members turned to considering possible members of the memorial minute committee for Alan Babb, Willem Schupf Professor of Asian Languages and Civilizations and Professor of Anthropology, Emeritus, who died on November 21. The provost agreed to invite the proposed members to serve.

At 4:45 p.m., Jesse Barba, director of institutional research and registrar services and a member of the Textbook Task Force, joined the meeting to answer questions from FEC members about the new textbook program. Professor Polk began by noting that it is his understanding that, while the task force did a fine job of consulting with departments and programs, it seems that the implications of the change in submission deadlines that would be required had not registered with many colleagues. Some faculty also feel that there should have been greater consultation with the faculty as a whole, given the view that the program presents a number of trade-offs. While recognizing that there will indeed be some trade-offs, other members expressed the view that making the transition to the new program (including adopting the new deadlines for submitting the citations for reading lists for courses) doesn't appear to them to be a matter of faculty autonomy. Some faculty may simply be worried about the substantially earlier deadlines for the submission of course reading lists, some members commented, and may be less knowledgeable about the benefits of the program, particularly the significant benefits for students.

In regard to trade-offs, J. Barba emphasized that there will be benefits for students and faculty, and less change and rigidity in the program than faculty appear to be expecting. Many may not be aware, it was noted, that some faculty requested that a textbook program of this kind be developed out of concern for students and the lack of equity under the current system. As requested, under the new program, there will no longer be a need to choose courses based on whether the costs of books and other course materials are affordable, as some students have been doing. Students will also have the benefit of knowing about the reading list when they choose a course and having the course materials ready by the first day of class. In addition, within financial limits, faculty will be able to choose books and other course materials without considering costs that would be passed on to students. It is expected that costs will go up, but the college wants faculty to be using the materials that they feel are the most pedagogically appropriate for students' educational experience. At the same time, J. Barba noted, cost containment is

everyone's responsibility, and if costs balloon, they will be passed on to students in the end, he said. Expanding access by eliminating financial and other impediments is a major goal of the program. J. Barba also noted that the federal government requires that the college assign a cash value to course materials and allow students to do comparison shopping.

In regard to the submission deadlines, J. Barba stressed that the deadlines provided by Follett are important in order to meet the college's obligation to comply with the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) and to contain the costs of the textbook program, but that there will still be a good deal of room for flexibility for faculty. The college wants to maintain curricular flexibility and recognizes that revisions to course materials sometimes are needed very late in the process of assembling reading lists. It is recognized that some proportion of faculty will not meet the deadlines, though it is hoped that everyone will make their best effort to do so (Under HEOA, reading lists must be made available to students by pre-registration.) The members said that knowing this should be reassuring to the faculty and relieve the anxiety of some colleagues. J. Barba noted that deadlines probably present less of a problem for those who need textbooks, as this process is more straightforward in regard to procurement and does not typically involve copyright clearance. Faculty will have to convey, roughly, how many copies of books they will need for a class, however. Some other materials, for example for readers, may require additional time for copyright clearance and thus need more lead time. President Elliott asked how most students procure their books now. J. Barba said that there is no standard or official way for students to obtain books. Some students may get books through Amherst Books, many students buy books on Amazon or other e-commerce websites, and some likely pursue other approaches that may violate copyright rules. The college has no way of knowing for sure. J. Barba commented that Follett and the college are committed to securing everything that faculty need; securing copyright clearance, as needed; and not passing additional costs along to students. J. Barba commented that some academic department coordinators, particularly in departments in which faculty use a large number of materials that require copyright clearance, spend a great deal of time securing clearance. J. Barba learned, after meeting with the academic department coordinators recently to learn more about their work, that many are excited to be relieved of this burden. It is recognized that some proportion of faculty will not meet the deadlines, though it is hoped that everyone will make their best effort to do so.

Continuing, J. Barba noted that faculty will not have to submit a full list of all that they need for a course when they submit a reading list. He said that it would be helpful to have even a partial list as early as possible. This helps with cost containment and eases the burden on staff in the library. In addition, he noted that faculty will still be able to add articles to their course's Moodle page during the semester, as they do now. J. Barba then discussed the task force's current thinking about e-reserves. He noted that the task force is working with Follett and Frost Library to finalize the method that faculty will use to select e-reserve materials, but that it is likely that the library will remain the first point of contact for faculty. Most faculty will likely see little change from the ways that they get materials now. He noted that Follett has a partner, [Lad Academic Publishing](#), that specializes in sourcing and delivering digital materials and seeking copyright clearance and creating digital course packs, including putting PDFs in OCR format (that are retained for future use) that they can send to students. This change will relieve some ADCs of some work that places a significant burden on them. It is expected that Lad will be a tremendous resource, as the company specializes in sourcing and getting clearance for out-of-print books and other materials for example, with a nearly 100 percent success rate. Still under consideration is whether Campus Print and Mail may still wish to print and deliver course packs to students. J. Barba said that Lad will not print course packs until all material is in hand. He added that, ultimately, if a faculty member teaches a course regularly, requesting and assembling materials will become a "maintenance project" requiring that one or two articles be swapped out, for example. For new courses, the process will involve more time.

In answer to a question posed by Professor Katsaros at the November 27 meeting of the FEC about whether it would be possible to make course materials that are posted online available in print as well, J. Barba noted that the significant costs to which the provost had alluded would be due to paying double

copyright for distribution in both formats (print and electronic). There could also be double labor if ADCs do the course pack and faculty ask the library to do e-reserves for the same material. Since students are able to print for free throughout campus, they can print individual readings themselves with no additional cost. The electronic delivery of the readings also makes them more accessible than print course packs, he noted. The college would, however, pay copyright clearance fees twice if a student needs assistive technology to read the material. Professor Katsaros also asked how Amherst students who are studying away will be served by the program. J. Barba responded that the college will provide those students with funds to purchase books themselves. The college will not pay for the books of Five College interchange students enrolled in Amherst courses, but J. Barba noted that UMass Amherst has a relationship with a vendor that will coordinate with Follett, it is anticipated. Five-College students may obtain their books through Follett, if they wish, but at their own cost, he said. J. Barba noted that the cost of books for students in the Inside-Out Program and high school students taking Amherst College courses will be covered under the program; the costs of those auditing Amherst courses will not be covered.

J. Barba noted that the members of the task force have signed up to test the program in their departments, and that the hope is that the CEP will as well, which will be important before “scaling up.” J. Barba noted that “growing pains” are expected, and that changes will need to be made based on what is learned. President Elliott commented that it is important to remember that some of these growing pains would occur if Amherst began to have a formal relationship with any bookstore, which has not been the case in the past to his knowledge. J. Barba resumed by stating that the hope is to get integrations done by January so that training in the use of the program can be under way in January. He shared with the members that the Follett “discovery tool” that is used to search for books and other materials will soon be operational and can be tested by anyone. Users can search by title, ISBN, or author, for example.

Responding to questions about whether there will be a person to whom faculty can turn if they have questions or need help, J. Barba reported that Follett has introduced the task force to the Follett and Lad staff, including the person who will be the manager of the retail store, who will be the point-person for the faculty for both textbooks and copyrighted materials such as journal articles and out-of-print texts. He noted that the task force thinks that it would be beneficial to hold open meetings for faculty and ADCs to answer questions and introduce the community to the key Follett staff early in the spring semester. The members agreed that such meetings would be welcome.

Discussion turned very briefly to the proposal from Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) that the criteria for awarding the Woods-Travis Prize be broadened (see the FEC minutes of November 27, 2023). The members asked J. Barba if he would be willing to engage in an exercise in which he would apply the proposed criteria under consideration for making the award to the records of graduating students at the top of the class by class year for the past three years, using the new GPA and honors standards that are now in place. In this way, a sense of the number of ties among the students could be ascertained. J. Barba said he would be happy to do so.

The meeting adjourned at 5:45 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein
Provost and Dean of the Faculty