

The eleventh 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 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 (the provost was absent for the first forty-five minutes of the meeting); and Associate Provost Tobin, recorder.

The meeting began (without the provost present) with the members making recommendations of colleagues who might serve on the search committee for the next provost and dean of the faculty. The president thanked the FEC and said that he would be considering appointments to the search committee in the near term and that he valued the input of the FEC. President Elliott asked for further input about the search process. He reiterated that the process of interviewing candidates will be confidential, as he had stated in the discussion of the search with the committee that had taken place at the FEC’s December 11 meeting. The president said that it is still his expectation that the search committee will present him with a short list of two or three candidates, from which he will select the next provost and dean of the faculty. President Elliott said that he would like to appoint the search committee in January and for the search process to be under way in February. He stated that he would continue to communicate with the committee about the appointment of the search committee, using email in January if necessary.

The provost joined the meeting at 3:45 p.m. She informed the members that it has come to her attention that a faculty member who had died not long ago had earlier informed colleagues that the individual preferred not to have a memorial minute prepared or read following the faculty member’s death. The committee discussed the matter and agreed with the provost that memorial minutes are part of the record of the college, and that such minutes should be prepared and read for all faculty members who retire from Amherst upon each individual’s death. It was noted that not doing so in this case and in other cases like it could set a precedent and erode what is a valued tradition at the college.

Under “Questions from Committee Members,” Professor Polk asked if the provost has been able to learn more about the process that should be used to arrange for travel and related costs to be covered by the college ahead of making a trip, in particular for students. The provost said that she is still looking into this matter. (On December 20, Sarah Pettengill, the college’s procurement manager, emailed an [update on the transition to a new provider](#) that will manage the travel portal and with some contact information for the new company.)

Continuing with questions, Professor Katsaros said she has read about a bill that is being considered by the House of Representatives that would expand short-term Pell Grants so that students who are engaged in short-term career-training programs would be eligible for the grants, but that some other students could lose the ability to take out federal loans. She asked the president if he would explain more about this issue. President Elliott said that expanding eligibility for Pell grants would be a very positive outcome of the bill that is under consideration. At the same time, he noted, the envisioned bill poses a significant threat to colleges such as Amherst whom some lawmakers are targeting as elite institutions with robust endowments. If the bill were to pass, students who attend schools such as Amherst that are subject to a tax on their institutions’ endowments could lose the ability to take out federally subsidized loans. While Amherst doesn’t include loans as part of its financial-aid packages, many students choose to take out loans anyway. He noted that several schools that would be affected by this legislation are following this issue very closely and discussing with federal officials the negative impact that this legislation would have if it were to pass.

Professor Follette next asked if the college is experiencing a surge in COVID cases, as a number of her students have contracted the virus recently. Professor Gardner said that many of her students are ill as well, though not necessarily with COVID. President Elliott said that he is aware that many upper respiratory infections, including Influenza A, are circulating on Amherst's campus, but that he has not been told that there has been a spike in COVID cases.

Under her remarks, Provost Epstein asked the members if they would support the idea of having the FEC invite the faculty to lunch on the day that a faculty meeting will take place. The purpose would be for the members of the FEC, and/or other major committees (e.g., the Committee on Educational Policy) that might be bringing motions forward, to discuss the issues at hand. In this way, the faculty who have been most involved in developing motions on which faculty will be asked to vote can provide clarification and answer questions. Provost Epstein said that this idea emerged as an outgrowth of conversations with faculty during lunches that were held to discuss the results of the 2023 COACHE (Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education) Faculty Job Satisfaction Survey. She noted that she and Professor George, the faculty parliamentarian, hold a similar event before the first faculty meeting of the new academic year. The event has been well attended, and participants, who are largely faculty who are relatively new to Amherst, seem to welcome the opportunity to learn about faculty governance, the provost commented. Professor Follette noted that it might be difficult for members of committees to lead such discussions in an unbiased way, though she supports the idea in principle. Professor Call noted that these lunches should be informational, and not be seen as opportunities for colleagues to advocate for their positions. With that understanding, he would support the FEC hosting the lunches that have been proposed. The members expressed support for the idea of holding lunches for informational purposes, and it was agreed that the first lunch would take place on February 16, before the first afternoon faculty meeting.

The members next returned to the proposal to make a minor change (see below) to the charge of the First-Year Seminar Committee ([Faculty Handbook IV., S., 1., J.](#)) to align the membership with the current administrative structure of the Writing Center. There is no longer a faculty director of the Writing Center, it was noted. The committee had agreed on the revision earlier, but had asked the provost to check in with the First-Year Seminar Committee to ask for its members' views about the matter. The provost reported that the committee supports this minor change. The FEC then voted unanimously to make the change indicated in red and with strike-outs below.

j. The First-Year Seminar Committee The First-Year Seminar (FYS) Committee consists of three faculty members, among whom the committee selects its chair, and ~~a faculty member~~ **the director of the Writing Center or the director's representative** ~~from the Writing Center~~ (ex officio without vote). The committee is responsible for assisting faculty to develop and teach courses that advance the goals of the FYS Program as voted by the faculty. To that end, the committee solicits such course proposals and forwards them to the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) for approval by the faculty, participates in the planning of pedagogical workshops for the FYS Program, and encourages faculty collaboration and curricular innovation in the seminar offerings. In addition, the committee is responsible for assessing the program and reporting its findings to the faculty (voted by the faculty, May 2009).

Conversation turned to the need to revise the [Faculty Handbook language](#) (see the Romer-Hawkins Rule [IV., R., 7.]) about the timing of the dissemination of faculty meeting agendas, given the new Friday-afternoon meeting time. The members, agreeing that this was simply a housekeeping matter, voted unanimously to make the changes noted in red and with strike-outs below:

In October 1980, the faculty voted that:

Except in a grave emergency, the Committee of Six (changed to Faculty Executive Committee as of July 1, 2022), in setting the agenda for a faculty meeting, shall not include any motion on a constitutional matter or a matter of policy unless it has assured that the motion, and the reasoning considered by the committee for and against it, will reach faculty members in time to allow reflection and informal discussion (normally by the ~~Wednesday~~ **Friday** before the ~~Tuesday~~ **Friday** of the meeting). This is known in local parlance as the Romer-Hawkins rule.

The committee agreed that this change should be brought to the faculty's attention both via these minutes and at the first faculty meeting in the spring.

The meeting adjourned at 5:35 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein
Provost and Dean of the Faculty