

The eighteenth 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, April 1, 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 a protest by students working in the Office of Identity and Cultural Resources at a reception that was held the previous week. The president informed the committee that a rumor has been circulating on campus that a student was “forced” by the college to take a medical leave for expressing political views, and he stated that this rumor was untrue.

The committee then spent the majority of the meeting discussing [a request from a group of faculty](#) that a faculty meeting be held at which the following motion would be moved for discussion and vote:

Motion

Whereas this Faculty affirms that Israel, while it has a duty to defend its citizens, also has an obligation to do so within the constraints of international law and human decency;

Whereas this Faculty deems that Israel’s actions in Gaza have predictably led to the deaths of tens of thousands of Palestinians and to the wounding of many more, most of whom are innocent non-combatants, including many children; to catastrophic levels of disease and hunger, as well as imminent famine; and to the demolition of Gazan civil society, including the obliteration of Gaza’s health and education systems, religious buildings, as well as historical and cultural patrimony; and

Whereas this Faculty asserts that the commission of these atrocities is inconsistent with the ethical values of Amherst College and that Amherst College should not profit from investments in corporations that supply the material means for their commission; therefore, be it

Resolved, that this Faculty requests that the Board of Trustees of Amherst College identify and divest from corporations that supply military equipment used in the present campaign in Gaza.

It was noted that, under the procedure outlined in the [Faculty Handbook \(IV., R., 4.\)](#), “A special meeting of the faculty is held when in the opinion of the president or of the Faculty Executive Committee there is necessary business to be transacted. A special meeting may also be held at the request of eight or more members of the faculty.” The committee discussed possible dates for the special meeting, an exercise that proved challenging due to various scheduling conflicts and other considerations—among them, the meeting of the chairs of academic departments and programs that is already scheduled for the first available Friday for a faculty meeting; another Friday date immediately prior to April break, which was thought not to be ideal in regard to attendance; and several very important lectures that have been scheduled for other possible dates—as well as the president’s travel schedule. The committee considered other upcoming days of the week for the meeting, but couldn’t find a workable one. The members concluded that it would be best not to hold the meeting at a non-standard time, in any case. The committee discussed the possibility of using the April 26 faculty meeting slot or setting the meeting for Friday, May 3. After the members decided that it would be very helpful to have Letitia Johnson, the college’s chief investment officer, present at the meeting, and learned that she would be available on May 3 and not on April 26, the committee decided that the special meeting would be held on May 3. The members agreed that, in addition to faculty, staff who normally attend faculty meetings should be invited to the special meeting. The committee considered whether student-editors should be allowed to attend, due to the potential chilling effect that their presence might have on the discussion, and ultimately decided that the student-editors should

be invited to the meeting. Some members of the committee noted the tension between the goal of getting pressing faculty business done before the end of the semester and responding to the request for a special faculty meeting in the closing months of the semester.

Continuing with the discussion and turning to the meeting itself, the members agreed that L. Johnson should be asked to attend the meeting to answer questions regarding the college's management of the endowment. In response to a question, President Elliott briefly described Amherst's approach to working with a small number of fund managers with whom the college has long-term relationships. He noted that Amherst does not generally choose companies for direct investment, and instead considers the distribution of the kinds of investments it is making—such as the mix of public and private companies—and also must consider liquidity requirements. Professor Call asked if the college were to request that a manager divest from what are likely modest holdings in regard to the corporations under discussion, would it essentially mean that Amherst would have to cease working with the manager all together. The president said that he believes that this could be the case, depending on the specifics of the divestment request, but that this question could be answered more definitively by L. Johnson. He noted that she is well positioned to discuss these matters, but also made clear that L. Johnson herself could not authorize a divestment action of this kind, which would need to be authorized by the board of trustees.

The members next discussed a memo about the work of the Civil Rights Review Team (CRRT) and the Bias Education and Response Team (BERT), which Sheree Ohen, chief equity and inclusion officer, had prepared for the committee. The members reviewed the document, offered some suggestions, and posed some questions. The committee also asked Provost Epstein about how she responds when she is made aware of a report by a student about a faculty member's alleged behavior. The provost said that, in these circumstances, she has a conversation with the colleague about the student's concern. Examples that might have led to the report include the tone that the faculty member may have taken, how the professor addressed the student, or how material was presented in the course. No reports have led to sanctions against a faculty member, she informed the members. In regard to reporting about students, President Elliott noted that the rise in the anonymous social networking app Fizz has contributed to increased reporting about student behavior. The committee surmised that, based on the data presented in the memo, it seems that faculty members are not using the reporting processes that are described therein. The members conjectured that faculty must be using other channels to address incidents that they experience.

It was agreed that Provost Epstein would share the committee's comments and questions with S. Ohen. After the members have heard back from her about its questions and then review any revisions that she makes to the memo in response, it was agreed that the memo should be attached to the FEC minutes. Professor Call suggested that Provost Epstein also send the memo to the community via email.

In the time remaining, the members discussed the Tenure and Promotion Committee's proposal that the individual confidential letters from the tenured members of departments at the time of the tenure review become optional. Under the proposal, if a letter is not submitted by the deadline, it would be assumed that the faculty member has chosen not to submit a letter.

The provost explained that, at present, all tenured members of a candidate's department are required to submit an individual letter directly to the Tenure and Promotion Committee at the time that the departmental recommendation is due. At the outset of the conversation, Provost Epstein noted that, by faculty vote (see *Faculty Handbook III., 4., a., 2.*), the substance of reservations expressed in these required individual letters should be reflected in the department's recommendation. She informed the members that, each year, for each tenure case, her office reviews all individual letters against the related departmental recommendations to ensure that this guidance is being followed. If there are reservations expressed that are not included in the departmental recommendation, an associate provost reaches out to the colleague who wrote the letter and asks that the letter either be revised to eliminate the reservation, or that the content in question be shared with the tenured members of the department so that the reservation can be added to the departmental recommendation. The provost explained that many tenured colleagues write letters in which they simply indicate that they concur with the departmental recommendation. No additional information is provided.

The members expressed support for bringing a proposal to the faculty that the procedures be changed, since many tenured colleagues are spending time simply writing that they concur and submitting letters. In addition, the provost noted, her office spends a good deal of time tracking down faculty who don't submit the letters, including those who are on leave. Professor Call noted that, though he favors the proposal, he strongly supports keeping the option for tenured colleagues to write confidential individual letters, since he has found the additional information and context these letters can provide to be valuable on numerous occasions. The committee then voted five in favor and zero opposed to forward a motion to the faculty to make the confidential letters optional and agreed to review the motion itself as it will appear on the agenda for the faculty meeting at which it will be considered.

The meeting adjourned at 5:37 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein
Provost and Dean of the Faculty