

The nineteenth 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 22, 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 informing the members that Martha Umphrey, Bertrand H. Snell 1894 Professor in American Government in the Department of Law Jurisprudence and Social Thought, would succeed Provost Epstein as Amherst’s provost and dean of the faculty. The new provost will begin this appointment on July 1, 2024, the president said. He asked the committee to keep this information confidential until the next day, when [the campus-wide announcement](#) would be sent. In regard to the search process, the president shared that there were excellent candidates for the position, which he viewed as testimony to the strength of faculty leadership at the college. President Elliott also expressed gratitude to the search committee, which Professor Cobham-Sander had chaired. The members expressed great enthusiasm for the selection of Professor Umphrey and offered their congratulations to her.

Conversation turned to the topic of escalating student activism surrounding the situation in Gaza that is taking place on some college and university campuses, most prominently at this moment at Columbia, Yale, and NYU, where arrests have been made. President Elliott said that protests at Amherst have not been confrontational and have not disrupted college operations, though a protest that had taken place at an event for accepted students the previous week had come close; protesters had entered Johnson Chapel and disturbed a class that was taking place. The president said that he had spoken with the protesters, who were respectful and had left peacefully. He informed the members that continued activism is expected, including, possibly, a protest timed to take place during the May 3 special faculty meeting. Some members wondered how the college would respond to such a protest. President Elliott said that he is still considering the measures that should be taken, while noting that ensuring the safety of all will be prioritized. Professor Katsaros asked if the norms that students are expected to abide by will be communicated ahead of the meeting. President Elliott said that this is his intention, while commenting that there has been no response from the student group Amherst for Palestine when members of the administration have reached out to communicate with the group.

Turning to another topic, Professor Call noted the receipt of a report from Emily Griffen, Lewis-Sebring Executive Director of the Loeb Center for Career Exploration and Planning, about the Sophomore Summit. The summit was launched as a pilot in January 2024 as a part of the college’s broader efforts to improve and support the sophomore experience at the college. The members agreed to discuss the report at one of their upcoming meetings.

Under “Questions from Committee Members,” Professor Gardner asked, on behalf of a colleague, whether the college would consider shifting the venue of faculty meetings from Cole Assembly Room to Stirn Auditorium. The colleague had expressed the view that the larger seating capacity of Stirn (180 people) was larger than Cole (135 people and about 165 people when folding chairs are added) could help alleviate some of the overcrowding that is currently posing a problem. President Elliott responded that a proposal to convert Stirn to a classroom with eighty seats is under consideration at this time, as there is a pressing need for such space. The president said that he wants to take time to consider the proposal regarding the conversion of Stirn and has asked Mike Thomas, chief financial and administrative officer, to study the implications of this project over the next six months. President Elliott informed the members that Stirn would be available for faculty meetings in the next academic year and left the decision about where to hold faculty meetings to the FEC. Provost Epstein noted that the seating style in Stirn is not as conducive to discussion as the theater-style arrangement in Cole Assembly Room. The committee decided that next year’s FEC should consider this matter.

Conversation turned briefly to the faculty meeting planned for April 26, at which there would be a committee-of-the-whole discussion about the College Council’s proposal to revise the Honor Code. Professor Polk noted that he had found a related discussion about academic integrity that had taken place at the April 5 meeting of the chairs of academic departments and programs to be informative. Professor Katsaros, who had also attended the meeting, agreed. She noted that Corey Michalos, director of community standards, had

described the ways in which he and others in the Office of Student Affairs engage in conversation with faculty members surrounding cases of academic integrity and the support and guidance that is offered. The presentation by the director of community standards and the Q&A session that followed highlighted the full range of options available to faculty, and the level of involvement that they can decide to have in the resolution of these incidents, Professor Katsaros noted. Professor Polk said that he was reassured to learn that, under the College Council's proposal for revising the Honor Code, the following four foundational statements will continue to underlie the code: the *Statement of Intellectual Responsibility*, the *Statement of Respect for Persons*, the *Statement of Freedom of Expression and Dissent*, and the *Statement of Student Rights*.

Prompted by [a note from Professor Douglas](#) and concerns raised by other faculty about the special faculty meeting scheduled for May 3, the committee discussed how best to move forward with the meeting in regard to format, addressing concerns that have been raised and new information that has been shared, and possible consequences of having conversation in this venue about [the motion that has been forwarded by the twenty-five faculty members](#) who requested that the meeting be held. Professor Douglas, in his note, expressed hope the FEC would consider recommending that the motion be tabled. The committee shared many of the concerns that Professor Douglas articulated, while being mindful of the members' role as an executive committee, which is to focus on process. The committee expressed some concern that a vote taken on the motion might not reflect the will of the faculty, due to low attendance. Some members wondered if the quorum (110 attendees who are eligible to vote) for transacting business would be met.

Continuing the discussion, Professor Call said that he has been in conversation with Professor George, who has been meeting with some of the signatories who requested the meeting. Professor George has discussed with Professor Call possible [parliamentary rules and customs](#) that a faculty member might employ. The members noted that, while the procedures allow a small number of faculty members (as few as eight) to call a special faculty meeting, they are concerned that the purpose of this particular meeting is to enter into a discussion of a complex geopolitical matter. Professor Call said that, during his time at the college, he does not recall a special faculty meeting being held under the procedure now being used. Professor Polk said that he wonders whether student-editors from the *Amherst Student* would be in attendance. He expressed particular concern about vulnerable members of the community who might face doxxing and other consequences if the views that they express at the meeting become public. Other members concurred. Some committee members questioned whether students should be allowed to speak at the meeting. The committee felt that it might be best to have a committee-of-the-whole discussion about the motion and to ask student-editors to leave the meeting during this portion of the meeting and during any vote that might take place afterward.

Discussion turned to the issue of sharing more information at the faculty meeting about the ways in which the college manages its endowment, given that the faculty signatories had asked that there be a vote to "request 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 a group of faculty made [this same request on December 6, 2023](#). The president suggested that [the board's response to this request](#), sent on December 20, 2023, be linked within these minutes, and the members agreed that doing so would be informative. The committee then discussed specifics around the role of Letitia Johnson, the college's chief investment officer, at the faculty meeting. The members concurred that she should be asked to answer questions regarding the college's management of the endowment. In the course of doing so, she can describe Amherst's approach of longstanding, which, as noted previously, is to work with a small number of fund managers with whom the college has long-term relationships.

Continuing the conversation, Professor Follette suggested that it would be helpful to provide more information about the step-by-step process that led to the college's [decisions around investments related to fossil fuel](#) as a case study. President Elliott responded that L. Johnson could certainly discuss this topic, while commenting that the final decision was to make no new investments in public or private equity fossil fuel investment funds and to phase out the college's remaining investments in directly held, long-term fossil fuel funds over time.

The members then turned briefly to some responses that the committee had received from Sheree Ohen, chief equity and inclusion officer, to the members' questions and suggestions regarding a memo that she had forwarded about the work of the Civil Rights Review Team (CRRT) and the Bias Education and Response Team (BERT). S. Ohen had also asked some questions about how to respond to some of the committee's inquiries, given the data available and the need to protect the confidentiality of those involved in individual reports. It was agreed that Professor Gardner would contact S. Ohen to offer clarification and make suggestions.

The committee then reviewed nominations for the [Jeffrey B. Ferguson Memorial Teaching Prize](#) and selected this year's winner, who will be announced at the commencement faculty meeting. Professors Follette and Gardner noted that, as Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) Faculty Fellows, they have been engaged in CTL discussions surrounding the prize, including the development of additional ways to celebrate the recipient and that faculty member's teaching. Provost Epstein said that she had only recently received a proposal from the CTL and had asked Associate Provost Tobin to make sure that this topic is on the agenda of the FEC next year.

The meeting adjourned at 5:30 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein  
Provost and Dean of the Faculty