

*Confidentiality. The minutes of the FEC are intended to provide Amherst College faculty and staff with a high-level summary of the committee's weekly discussions. They are not direct transcriptions. Those who receive the minutes should not share them or their attachments with others.*

The twenty-first 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, May 6, 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 expanding on his response to the question that Professor Karkazis had asked about at the April 26 faculty meeting about whether the college would rule out requesting support from police from off campus in response to activism on campus. Adding to what he had said at the faculty meeting, the president conveyed that he wants to make it clear that the college supports the right to protest, and that the police will not be asked to suppress peaceful free expression on Amherst's campus. At the same time, the college must protect the safety of faculty, staff, and students, including the protesters themselves, he said, and violence will not be tolerated. President Elliott explained that the administration has spent a great deal of time considering different scenarios that may emerge as a result of campus protests and developing strategies and preparations for addressing them. The primary goal is to support peaceful protest and to protect the safety of everyone on the campus. Noting that the world is unpredictable and that Amherst has a very porous campus, he said that the college relies on its community safety assistant (CSA)s and the Amherst College Police Department (ACPD) in the event that protests disrupt the peace. Police from off campus would be asked to provide support in the event of a large protest, perhaps that drew participants from off campus, in which the peace is being disrupted and it is not possible to protect the safety of individuals on campus by relying only on the CSAs and ACPD. The president also discussed a recent incident at the Be a Mammoth celebration, during which protesters entered Johnson Chapel and disrupted a class. After the students refused to listen to the instructions of a member of the administration, an ACPD officer de-escalated the situation by speaking to those who were participating and helping them to understand the gravity of what was transpiring and the possible repercussions. The protesters were in the process of leaving the building when he arrived to speak with them, President Elliott said.

Prompted by violations of trust and confidentiality that had taken place prior to the May 3 special faculty meeting and during the meeting itself, the members next discussed how the committee might further communicate expectations surrounding the ways in which faculty should engage with one another when working through difficult issues—including at faculty meetings, which should be a protected space. (A letter that Professor Douglas had sent to the FEC in which he had argued against the motion that proposed that the college divest from companies profiting from the war in Gaza was leaked to student-protesters, who in turn posted it online—along with derogatory comments and Professor Douglas's picture. In addition, one or more individuals attending the faculty meeting texted students during the meeting about the results of the vote on the divestment motion, a clear breach of the norms of confidentiality expected at faculty meetings, the members agreed.) The members worried that, for some faculty, these tactics created a chilling, intimidating atmosphere, leading colleagues to question whether in an age of social media they should speak out on fraught topics, given how vulnerable they might become as a result.

The committee expressed deep concern and disappointment about the leak of Professor Douglas's letter and the violation of the norms for conducting faculty business—including the ways in which faculty interact with one another—that this act represented. The committee was also appalled that the votes that took place during the meeting were being communicated to students during the meeting. Some members noted that communicating the results of the vote to students (who were not permitted to attend the faculty meeting) in this way had meant that some faculty had not had the opportunity to process their emotions before the results were shared with others—with some colleagues looking visibly upset. The members also commented that these actions had undermined the efforts of a dozen or more faculty, including the members of the FEC, to structure a faculty meeting so that it would

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offer a safe space for discussion, which represented a significant investment of thought and time. Professor Follette commented that, while the breach of confidence was appalling, it may be unrealistic to expect that any document that is attached to minutes that are accessible to all faculty and staff (more than fifteen hundred people) will remain confidential. She pointed out that there is not currently a disclaimer on the minutes themselves or on one of the pages where faculty and staff access the minutes, and wondered whether it was possible that the person who shared the letter was unaware of the expectation of confidentiality. Others felt that, if this is true, it is very unfortunate and could have a chilling effect on faculty governance at the college. (During the special faculty meeting, President Elliott had reminded those present that the *Faculty Handbook* requires faculty meetings to remain confidential in nature. Public announcements of decisions should be made solely by the provost and the president, he had noted, and minutes should not be distributed beyond the faculty and staff, he had said. The president had stressed on May 3 that faculty would need to be able to listen to each other's opinions in confidence at the meeting, and that this would require that all comments remain confidential.)

The committee agreed that additional effort should be made to communicate that minutes and documents linked from them should not be shared with anyone who is not officially entitled to receive them. This expectation is noted on the [faculty committee web page](#) and was later added to the [FEC minute web page](#).

Continuing the discussion, some members asked the president about the response to the vote on the non-binding divestment motion (it was approved by a vote of 123 to 69). The president said that the response from alumni and coverage in the media has been modest thus far, though he expects that the alumni response will grow with time. He noted that most alumni have learned about the results of the special faculty meeting on the web page of Amherst for Palestine. The president conveyed that this group and other groups in favor of divestment have been invited to meet with the chair of the board of trustees and two other members of the board.

Professor Call next shared the recommendation of next year's FEC that Professor Hanneke chair the committee. The committee then voted unanimously to ratify the election of Professor Hanneke as the chair of next year's FEC. He noted that the new members of the FEC are considering holding several informal lunches over the summer with past members of the FEC. The provost said that she, incoming provost Umphrey, and Associate Provost Tobin would discuss these plans with Professor Hanneke.

Turning to another topic, Professor Call reported that he had been one of a small number of faculty to attend a lunch that the Library Committee held on May 3 to discuss the [open access resolution](#) that the faculty had approved in 2013. The resolution requires faculty to provide a final version of each article they publish to the provost's office so that it can be made available in an open access repository. In support of this resolution, the library created the [Octagon repository](#). However, due to technical challenges prior to the pandemic, new submissions have not been accepted for over five years, according to the Library Committee. As a result, the Library Committee noted, "the college has not been able to fulfill the requirements of the current policy." The Library Committee is reviewing the open access policy and said that it will make recommendations for how to proceed in the near future. Professor Call noted that the prevailing view at the lunch was that the vast majority of the open access resolution continues to be of use, but that the Octagon repository is essentially no longer viable and should not be reinstated. Some discussion at the lunch had focused on the possibility of pursuing a consortial approach to creating and maintaining a digital archive, Professor Call said. He explained that the Library Committee will share its recommendations with the FEC in the fall.

Continuing his remarks, Professor Call noted that [the Committee on Educational Policy \(CEP\) had just proposed](#) that the section of the catalog on "[Readmission](#)" be "restrict[ed] to general principles" and that "more detailed information on evolving practices be located on a web page." Since the CEP's stated goal is "not to make substantive changes to policy, but rather to move the relevant information to a webpage and make the

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catalog language consistent with current practice," its members feel that CEP approval will suffice to make this change. The FEC agreed. Professor Call noted that the CEP had also recently forwarded a number of proposals to the FEC. These proposals will need to be taken up by next year's FEC, due to this timing, it was agreed.

The members next referenced briefly [a spreadsheet](#) and [note that Professor Baird had sent](#) to the committee that provides financial data that he compiled (with help from Mike Thomas, chief financial and administrative officer) from the annual reports of the college, along with inflation data and average faculty salaries (unweighted). Professor Baird, whose intention was to highlight that faculty salaries are not keeping pace with inflation, had requested that this document be attached to the committee's minutes. President Elliott commented that it is correct that the salary pool has not kept up with inflation for the past three years, while also noting that the college's revenues are not indexed to inflation and that Amherst has very few revenue sources, and thus very few "levers" that the college can use to expand the funding available for faculty and staff salaries. He said that he understands the pressures that everyone is feeling due to inflation, but that addressing this issue must be done incrementally rather than all at once. He noted that the expansion of the staff at the college over the past decade has required an increase in the budget for salaries. This expansion has also had the effect of creating more work for many on campus, in his view. The president said that he feels that consideration should be given to investing in the staff that the college has now, rather than expanding the staff in the future. With this in mind, he and his senior team are looking closely at staffing at Amherst over the past five to ten years. This does not mean that there should not be any new positions at all, President Elliott said. He understands that there may be a need to add to the staff in some areas, but, in his view, there should also be restraint in hiring staff in others.

Under, "Questions from Committee Members," Professor Follette raised the issue of inconsistencies surrounding some summer programs that the college offers, which seem inequitable and create tensions, she noted. She explained that some programs, for example, the Summer Undergraduate Research Fellows (SURF) run for eight weeks, while others, for example, the Gregory S. Call Summer Student Research Program, run for only six weeks. In addition, students are paid on different cadences. Professor Follette explained that grants are regularly used to extend six-week programs to eight in STEM departments so that students funded by the college for shorter internships are able to participate in the full summer research program, but that these extensions are difficult to coordinate. Provost Epstein said that her office is aware of these disparities, but that the current budget does not allow for the expansion of programs that currently run for six weeks. A budget request to do so will be submitted for next year. More broadly, President Elliott said that there are issues surrounding the growth and administration of summer programs at the college that he feels should be studied closely, with the goal of setting some boundaries. While programs have grown incrementally and with good intentions, he has concerns that it is not necessarily healthy for so many students to be staying at Amherst over the summer, particularly if they are not participating in a formal program during the time they are here. In addition, the president said that he is aware that the growing number of programs is placing a good deal of stress on staff and college resources. Use of college buildings for summer programs makes it challenging to complete maintenance projects, for example, and many exceptions are made to rules that are in place to set limits on providing summer housing to students. In addition, the number of outside summer programs offered on campus that generate revenue for the college has been reduced to accommodate summer research programs for current Amherst students. Professor Follette noted that it is becoming increasingly difficult for students to obtain a STEM internship outside the college unless they first complete one on campus. Reductions in external funding have lowered the number of students who can participate in summer STEM programs. As a result, the strongest students may end up getting the campus internships, and she expressed concern that these may not be the students who would benefit most from these opportunities.

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Continuing with questions, Professor Katsaros commented that she has read that the Jones Library renovation and expansion project may not move forward, given that only one bid was received and that the amount was \$7 million over the estimated cost of the project. She asked what would happen to the college's gift to the library should the library project not move forward. President Elliott said that he has not been informed about what has transpired with the library project beyond what has been shared with the public. He can imagine the college's gift might still be used by the library—for renovations, for example—should the larger project not go forward.

Discussion turned to [a report prepared by Emily Griffen](#), Lewis-Sebring Executive Director of the Loeb Center for Career Exploration and Planning, about the Sophomore Summit. This three-day program took place as a pilot—with 150 sophomores participating—in January 2024, part of a larger effort by the college to enrich the sophomore experience at Amherst. The report summarized the strengths of the program as well as aspects of it that could be improved. The members noted that there is much to be admired about the pilot and agreed that there are some areas in which changes should be made. While it was initially proposed that the summit be “scaled up,” and that all sophomores attend the program in January 2025, a decision has now been made to take an intermediate approach instead. The plan is to make the summit available to double the number of sophomores next January. Many events that were part of the planned sophomore experience will continue, the provost noted—including holding a welcoming event for sophomores, this time in early September, as well as a celebration of the declaration of majors in the spring. Some concern was raised about the increase in workload for Loeb Center staff members who are charged with planning and carrying out the summit. Provost Epstein said that, to provide additional time to focus on the summit, E. Griffin has decided to discontinue some other Loeb Center programs—most notably the intensive trek program—that require significant staff time and which have an impact on a smaller number of students.

The meeting concluded with a discussion of nominees for faculty committees. After making selections, taking into account the membership requirements in individual committees' charges and the preferences for service that some faculty have shared via the survey that the committee conducted, the members asked the provost to invite the nominees to serve. It was noted that the faculty will be asked to vote on the members and chairs of some committees, as required in the committees' charges, at the commencement faculty meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 5:30 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein  
Provost and Dean of the Faculty