

The fourteenth 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, February 12, 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 “Topics of the Day.” President Elliott shared plans to discuss at the Friday faculty meeting his thinking about navigating this very challenging moment for higher education, a topic that he has discussed with the committee at some length previously and which has been reflected in past minutes.

Under “Questions from Committee Members,” Professor Call noted that the guidance about the budget that was sent recently to departments suggested that the expectation is that department budgets remain flat for the next academic year. President Elliott responded that the current assumption is to keep non-compensation-related budgets flat, so as to place emphasis on increases to compensation. Professor Katsaros noted that department chairs had received an email from Professor Rager, who is chairing the Committee on Priorities and Resources (CPR), asking that they provide information about the impact that the 15 percent budget cuts that were implemented this year may have had on their departments. The provost said that it is her understanding that the CPR is gathering information in anticipation of meeting with the trustees during the board’s annual Instruction Weekend, which will take place on March 1 and 2. President Elliott noted that the administration is also evaluating the impact that the cuts may have had and has not made final decisions about the budget yet.

The committee next discussed proposed members to serve on a memorial minute committee for Stanley Rabinowitz, Henry Steele Commager Professor of Russian and Emeritus. The members asked the provost to invite the proposed members to serve. She agreed to do so.

Provost Epstein next informed the members that Lloyd Barba, assistant professor of religion, has been selected as the 2023–2024 Lazerowitz Lecturer. He will deliver a talk titled “The Sacred Amid Exploitation: How Mexican Farmworkers Forged a Religious Movement in California” on Thursday, April 4, beginning at 4:00 p.m., in Pruyne Lecture Hall. A reception will follow. A member of the Amherst faculty below the rank of full professor is selected annually for this appointment.

Under “Questions from Committee Members,” Professor Follette commented, on behalf of a colleague, that the lunch that the FEC would host on February 16 to discuss the faculty meeting agenda with interested colleagues, conflicts with a talk by Professor Wu Orr that is scheduled on the same date and time as part of the Faculty Colloquium. The committee agreed that this is regrettable, and Associate Provost Tobin agreed to reach out to Professor Sarat to see if he would contact Professor Wu Orr to see if she might want to reschedule the talk.

Continuing with questions, Professor Follette noted that several possible spending cuts are under consideration in the Amherst regional school system that will have a considerable impact on students and their families. These would include some teachers and paraprofessionals, she noted. Professor Follette asked whether the college may be able to help the regional schools address this deficit. Many members of the Amherst community with whom she has spoken are very concerned about the possibility that these positions may be lost. President Elliott responded that he is concerned about the impact that the cuts would have on the school system, as well. At the same time, the college must weigh carefully how it allocates its resources, he noted. He does not feel that it is Amherst’s role to make up part of a budget deficit that the school system is facing this year and in future years. The president commented on the importance of the college strengthening its connections to the public schools in other ways. For example, he expects that the *Serving the Greater Good* initiative will encourage the development of courses at Amherst that will lead to faculty and students becoming more involved in the public schools, including through additional partnerships between the schools and the college. Provost Epstein commented that, in addition, a search is under way for a new hire in the Center for Community Engagement that will focus on community partnerships and civic engagement, including some partnerships that involve kindergarten-through-grade-twelve education.

On a related note, Professor Katsaros expressed regret that the college’s swimming team no longer offers lessons for local children, as she found this to be a very beneficial program on all sides. Provost Epstein said that it is her understanding that members of the swimming team had offered the lessons to help raise funds to pay

for the team's spring trip to Puerto Rico. About two years ago, the college began paying for all students on Amherst athletic teams to participate in this and other training trips, discontinuing the former "pay-to-play" policy, as a matter of equity. Thus, students no longer have an incentive to offer the swimming lessons, she believes, while also noting that the pandemic was also likely a factor in the program being discontinued. She has learned that opportunities for partnering with the town recreation department may make it possible to offer the lessons again in the future, but that conversations are still under way. Some members expressed appreciation that the college has generously allowed some athletic teams from local schools to use its facilities at times, for example, some of its playing fields.

Continuing with questions, Professor Polk asked if there is a need to consider the membership structure of the Tenure and Promotion Committee, given that consideration is being given to adding an additional member to the FEC. The provost responded that she does not see a parallel reason for doing so, commenting that the five-member structure is working well.

The committee turned to its annual review of senior sabbatical fellowship proposals and voted to forward them to the board of trustees for ratification. Professor Follette said that she thinks it would be helpful to provide more guidance for faculty about what is required for the proposals in the future and perhaps some examples. In this way those preparing their proposals will have a better sense of the expectations, particularly if they are writing a proposal for the first time. Provost Epstein commented that the submission of a proposal is a requirement for all tenured faculty members who will be going on leave in order to raise their salaries from 80 percent to 100 percent during the anticipated sabbatical. The board of trustees has set this requirement, which is a means of holding colleagues accountable by having them share some sense of what their plans are for their leave, the provost said. Professor Follette commented that she sees the values of writing the proposal, including as a way of encouraging faculty to document their goals.

The committee spent the remainder of the meeting on the first of many anticipated discussions about matters related to faculty governance. Ahead of the meeting, the members were provided with a great deal of background material to review to inform discussion. The issue of faculty governance is on the committee's agenda as a follow-up to discussions that began in 2021, when consultant Susan Pierce was engaged to help the college think through matters related to a range of topics that touch on faculty governance. These have continued to be considered, in consultation with the faculty, in subsequent years. Discussion at this FEC meeting focused on issues and processes related to committee service.

It was agreed the first topic of conversation should be committee service. Professor Gardner shared that, based on her review of the materials that had been provided, including the results of a 2023 survey that the Faculty Executive Committee had sent to chairs of committees and some staff members who work closely with them; the results of the COACHE (Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education) survey; her own experience; and conversations with colleagues, what stands out to her is that the faculty wants to be engaged in a large portion of work that the college does. In her view, the idea of streamlining committees, a subject of lengthy discussions previously, has not been embraced. What has been of concern is that some faculty are called upon to do a great deal of service, while others seem able to avoid significant service. In addition, Professor Gardner noted that some colleagues have been troubled that the committees on which they have been asked to serve do not always align with their interests, which can result in them feeling less invested in committee work. Some faculty have also raised concern that a committee's success is often dependent on who is chairing it during a given time and the level of investment and priorities of that individual.

Professor Gardner suggested that improving the process by which faculty are assigned to committees by the FEC could result in faculty feeling more satisfied with committee work. She proposed that the FEC develop a mechanism to try to gain a sense from each faculty member of the committees on which they would most like to serve. In addition, taking into account the history of each faculty member's committee service would be helpful, as the FEC could take this information into account when making assignments and aim to distribute service on individual committees among more faculty. Provost Epstein noted that, each spring, the FEC is provided with a history of committee service for each faculty member, which is taken into account when making committee

assignments. Efforts are made to invite faculty to serve on less burdensome committees if they have just completed service on a major committee with significant time demands, the provost explained. She noted that records about faculty members' service are not all that accurate, though her office is trying to improve the ways in which these data are kept, by using Workday. Professor Gardner commented that, based on the frustration that many faculty members seem to feel about their committee assignments, it appears that the approach that has been used to make committee assignments is in need of improvement. She suggested that there might be databases other than Workday that could be helpful in creating accurate records of committee service, as well as algorithms that could be developed to assist the committee, to the degree possible, in "matching" faculty members with the committees on which they would prefer to serve. The provost noted that the matching approach has been tried previously, and that it proved challenging, given that many committees require membership that is balanced across disciplines, ranks, or other dimensions. When it was not possible to match a faculty member with a preferred committee, individuals were often disappointed, the provost said; this is not a reason not to try again, in her view. Provost Epstein also noted that some have suggested that it might be helpful to institute a point system for committees, based on a number of factors, including the time demands involved of each.

Professor Gardner offered to draft a brief survey about colleagues' preferences regarding next year's committee assignments. She said that the introductory language could convey that responses would constitute one part of the information that the FEC would use when considering committee membership. It could also be noted that, while the committee would endeavor to take faculty members' preferences into account, it likely would not be possible to guarantee that all colleagues would be assigned to a preferred committee. While the FEC would seek to ensure that the same colleagues are not repeatedly asked to serve on the more time-consuming committees, the membership requirements of some committees would sometimes need to take precedence over expressed preferences. In addition, she said that she would be happy to create a Google form that faculty could use to provide information that would be relevant to making committee assignments, for example leave schedules. Professor Follette suggested that, if faculty provided information about their leave plans for the next two years rather than one, the FEC could consider this information when making committee assignments and creating election ballots, with the goal of ensuring continuity of service when possible. Provost Epstein said that leave requests are rarely made two years ahead of time, and noted that faculty often change their leave plans if they are. Excluding faculty from election ballots based on leaves that would take place two years out would have a dramatic impact on the number of faculty who could be listed on the ballot; as many as one-sixth of the faculty is on leave in any given semester, she noted. The members decided that the issue of whether to continue to give faculty who are on phased retirement the option of being on the ballot might be another matter to consider.

Some members noted that some faculty have demonstrated that their strengths don't seem to be compatible with committee service. Most members of the FEC emphasized that the goal should be for faculty to participate in college-wide service. Professor Polk commented that he has come to understand the value of committee work and other forms of college service, but that he can become disappointed and frustrated when other faculty seem to escape service. Professor Follette wondered if it might be helpful for faculty to indicate the committees on which they would be most interested in serving. Provost Epstein noted that committee charges include the terms of membership, though, at times faculty are allowed to extend their terms, as circumstances dictate. She pointed out that most of the workload around service is actually not at the collegewide level, but at the departmental level.

On a related note, Professor Follette proposed that the lecturers and instructional staff, for example academic managers, be permitted to vote in elections to select members of the FEC, since decisions made by the FEC can have a direct bearing on those in these roles. Provost Epstein explained that lecturers and academic department managers (those in these staff positions cannot be instructors of record and differ from lecturers) currently do not engage in collegewide service, and that there is a need to further define and categorize the

lecturer role at the college more generally. This is a complex issue for a number of reasons, she said. It was noted that there are currently twenty-eight lecturers at the college.

In regard to the governance work of the FEC as a more general matter, Professor Gardner emphasized the view that, before bringing a proposal to the faculty for a vote at a faculty meeting, it would be helpful to have more informal conversations with faculty outside regular faculty meetings. The purpose would be to provide information about the proposal and to have the opportunity to receive feedback. Provost Epstein noted that this approach was recently taken by the Ad Hoc Committee on Student Learning. The chair of the committee and J. Barba, director of institutional research and registrar services and a member of the ad hoc committee, met with academic department chairs last Friday to share the proposal that the ad hoc committee is developing for a block schedule. Professor Call noted that, in his experience, it has been a challenge to generate robust attendance at discussions of proposals that are held outside faculty meetings; some might say that one of the purposes of faculty meetings is to have such conversations in the meeting. Professor Gardner expressed the view that those who are invested in an issue might attend a conversation about it, and that this approach would be worth trying. Professor Polk, who said that he has some concern that some of the work that the committee has done over the past two years may be lost when all of the members leave the committee at the end of this academic year, commenting that he is pleased that the FEC is discussing these issues. He is hopeful, for example, that surveying faculty about committee service, an extension of the FEC's work of last year to survey committee chairs and of the larger governance project, may result in change.

The meeting adjourned at 5:30 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein  
Provost and Dean of the Faculty