

The fifteenth 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 19, 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.

Under “Topics of the Day,” President Elliott briefly discussed a confidential matter with the members.

The members next considered nominees to serve on two memorial minutes committees, one for David Wills, Professor Emeritus of Religion, and the other for Tanya Leise, Brian E. Boyle Professor of Mathematics. The committee approved the proposed make-up of both committees and asked the provost to invite the nominees to serve on these bodies.

Conversation turned to the composition of next year’s Tenure and Promotion Committee (TPC). The discussion was prompted by concerns expressed by some faculty, including some candidates who will stand for tenure in fall 2024, that the committee will not include a colleague from a STEM department, since no such faculty were elected this spring. President Elliott informed the committee that this topic had been a focus of conversation at the TPC meeting that had taken place immediately prior to this FEC meeting. He and the provost noted that the TPC had discussed possible ways of addressing this situation (e.g., restarting the election, offering those who were elected an opportunity to resign, recommending that a sixth member of the TPC be elected for one year) and had expressed concern about the anxiety that some colleagues are now experiencing. Ultimately, however, after a lengthy discussion, the TPC focused on using existing processes to address these concerns rather than altering the college’s procedures. The TPC’s view is based on the members’ own experience with reviewing tenure cases outside their own disciplines, and the view that the procedures that are in place will allow next year’s TPC to consult with departments and gather additional information, as needed. The TPC had noted that the members of the TPC are not meant to represent constituencies or particular disciplines.

The FEC considered many of the same options that the TPC had discussed to address the composition of next year’s TPC. Professors Follette and Gardner shared the view of some faculty who had contacted them, a perspective that they supported, that it is essential to have a STEM faculty member serve on the TPC. Professor Gardner informed the members that some candidates for tenure have expressed concern that the letter that they write to the TPC on their own behalf would need to be reconceived if a STEM faculty member is not present during the discussion of their tenure cases, to provide additional context. Professors Call and Katsaros pointed out that the “candidates’ letters” that are written to the TPC are typically crafted with non-experts in mind. In addition, they noted, TPC members who are closest to a candidate’s field, that is, a member of the individual’s department, are not present during the discussion of the candidate’s case and do not vote; members of a candidate’s department participate in deliberations and voting at the departmental level only. Professors Katsaros and Call also commented that, when evaluating a candidate’s scholarly or creative work, TPC members rely largely on the evaluations of the external reviewers who are experts in the field. Professor Polk suggested that adding a sixth member of the TPC could prove beneficial, in order to have a greater number of voices involved in deliberations. He has learned that service on a major committee has a significant learning curve and argued that having a sixth member would make it more likely that members would serve two-year terms, which is ideal.

Continuing the conversation, Professor Gardner said that she would like to see a requirement that there be divisional representation (members from STEM, the social sciences, the humanities, and the arts, for example) on the TPC. Professor Call commented that, in his experience, members of the TPC are advised not to substitute their own knowledge and judgements for that of the external reviewers, so that ensuring representation does not seem necessary to him. Some members suggested that it would be best to consider the composition of the TPC as part of a holistic approach to reviewing matters related to faculty governance, rather than as a response to the composition of the committee for next year. That composition, some noted, was determined through a valid election process that represents the will of the faculty. They argued for placing trust in the duly elected members to carry out the work of the TPC. Other members commented that the

composition of next year's TPC is creating a great deal of stress and is leading to a lack of confidence in the election process and the TPC among some faculty. Professors Follette and Gardner expressed a strong preference for addressing this matter in some way.

After further discussion, it was agreed that a motion should be brought to the faculty at the March 8 faculty meeting that an election be held this spring to add a sixth member to the TPC for the next academic year only. Some members expressed strong support for the motion, while others expressed some hesitation about bringing it forward. In addition, the members noted that at the committee's annual meeting with all tenure-track faculty, which is scheduled for February 26, the members would listen to the feedback of colleagues and answer their questions. The FEC agreed that the same would hold true for the TPC's March 11 meeting with all tenure-track faculty. Some members also noted that these meetings would provide a venue for both committees to emphasize that the tenure process is thorough and fair, no matter the composition of the TPC.

(In the days following today's FEC's meeting, after the committee had had some time to reflect and after learning that some members of the TPC were concerned about bringing the envisioned motion to the faculty on March 8, the FEC decided via email to take a step back and to consult about this matter more broadly. The members agreed to have a joint meeting with the current TPC as soon as possible to seek the members' help and advice as the FEC works through the questions and concerns some colleagues have raised about the lack of a STEM faculty member on next year's TPC. Since all this would take some time, and in order to engage the full faculty in this discussion, the FEC decided to have a committee-of-the-whole discussion about the matter at the March 8 faculty meeting. The goal would be to listen carefully to faculty members' questions and concerns, to offer information, and to gather suggestions for further review. In these electronic exchanges, Professor Gardner shared the view, that, if it becomes clear that the outcome of this year's FEC election does not reflect the will of the faculty, the FEC ought to propose a motion to adjust next year's TPC, but she feels that it is important to first establish, formally, that a majority of faculty members support the premise of such a motion.)

Under "Questions from Committee Members," Professor Follette noted, on behalf of a colleague who is serving on a hiring committee, that, according to the training that is required for all members of such committees, all applications should be redacted to remove identifying information (at the first stage of the hiring process). The colleague has learned that the Office of Human Resources does not have sufficient staffing to redact these materials for search committees. Thus, this time-consuming task must be completed by the members of the search committee. The provost said that there is not necessarily anything that can be done about this situation, and that, while it may be best practice to do these redactions, it may not always be possible.

On behalf of a colleague, Professor Katsaros asked a question as a follow up to the presentation about generative AI that had been given at the February 16 faculty meeting. The colleague is concerned, she noted, that by engaging in discussions with students about AI in the ways that have been suggested, the college may inadvertently be sending the message that all students are already using ChatGPT, and that this is an expectation of a liberal arts education. If students hear from their peers and from the faculty that most students use ChatGPT, then the students who do not wish to use this program may feel like an exception. Professor Polk shared that he has heard that the writing programs that are in use by most of us are connected to AI, unless one is still using a typewriter or writing by hand. Some members expressed the view that *not* talking about AI would mean not addressing an issue that is already a part of the educational landscape. Professor Gardner commented that much of the discussion at the faculty meeting centered on the responsible use of AI, for example, questions that focused on attribution and citation. Professor Katsaros said that the colleague understands that faculty members have the autonomy to set the requirements surrounding AI for students in their courses. The colleague is most concerned about creating the perception that the college is taking as a given that AI will be used in creative or argumentative writing.

The members next reviewed [a revised proposal from the Committee on Educational Policy](#) (CEP) to articulate principles and procedures to inform decisions about which Five-College courses should "count" for Amherst credit and related processes. In this iteration of the proposal, an earlier version of which the FEC had reviewed, the CEP incorporated the committee's feedback. The CEP is now proposing a mechanism that would allow a

student with a particular focus to petition on that basis for a course to count for credit, with the support of their faculty advisors and professors. Also in response to concerns raised by the FEC earlier, the CEP is now proposing that responsibility for determining course eligibility for credit in controversial cases rest with the CEP, and that the registrar maintain a record of previously approved Five-College courses. Under the proposal, the registrar would have the authority to determine eligibility for credit in cases that seem unproblematic. Professor Follette, who had expressed concerns about the earlier proposal, said that this iteration represents an improvement, offering greater clarity and clear procedures, including the mechanism for students to petition to take a Five-College course for credit, as noted above. She said that she continues to feel that it is not necessarily appropriate for Amherst to judge courses at other institutions as insufficiently rigorous when it comes to awarding college credit. In its proposal, it was noted, the CEP mentions that it “continues to believe that, based on prior experience, such determinations are appropriate in a small number of cases.”

Conversation turned to [a proposal](#), which has been endorsed by the CEP ([see a letter forwarded by the CEP](#)), to create a program and major in Asian American and Pacific Islander Studies (AAPIS). The committee found the proposal to be compelling, noting that it is cohesive, and that those who have developed it have framed the curriculum with great care and have thought through the staffing that will be needed to mount the major. The members also agreed that there seems to be demand among students for the major and courses in this area. The committee noted that the departments that will be contributing to the major have demonstrated their commitment by moving forward with a “cluster hire.” The members also commented that those who have conceived the program have indicated the ways in which they will continue to engage interested alumni, a component that was seen as valuable. Provost Epstein noted that, when adding a new major at an institution of Amherst’s size, there is always a concern about fracturing the curriculum and the resources that will be needed to mount the program. The members did not express concern about these issues, given the strength of the proposal, which included a budget and request for administrative support that seems reasonable. In response to the question about whether the Committee on Priorities and Resources had reviewed the proposal, the provost said that doing so did not seem necessary, given that the budget request is so modest.

Continuing the discussion, the members noted that, in regard to the question of whether adding another major could fracture the curriculum, the committee expressed the view that there appears to be a great deal of student interest in current courses on AAPIS-related topics already and did not view this issue as a concern. Provost Epstein commented that it is possible that the new major could draw students away from some small departments, for example, American Studies, creating a situation in which such departments might no longer have a critical mass to mount upper-level courses in their majors. This does not seem to be a reason not to endorse the proposal, she commented, and the members agreed. The committee then voted five in favor and zero opposed on the substance of the proposal to establish the program and major and to forward the proposal to the faculty.

The members next reviewed [a revised proposal from the CEP](#) to formalize expectations for faculty regarding holding scheduled classes, including arrangements that should be made in the event of an emergency, a short-term planned absence, or an extended absence. This iteration of the proposal incorporated the FEC’s feedback on an earlier version, and the members expressed support for the language that is now being brought forward. The committee then voted five in favor and zero opposed on the substance of the proposal and to forward it to the faculty. The committee then agreed to review a draft of an agenda for a March 8 faculty meeting electronically and then to vote on bringing it forward to the faculty.

In the brief time remaining, the members returned to a discussion of the College Council’s proposal for a new Honor Code. Some members commented that, while they admire the concise and aspirational approach that is being suggested, and the language of the proposed Honor Code, they are concerned that it is not clear how the proposed Honor Code connects with the [Student Code of Conduct](#); the committee understands that foundational statements such as the *Statement of Intellectual Responsibility* and the *Statement on Respect for Persons*, for example, will continue to reside in that document. Some members expressed some unease about whether students may make the necessary connections, given that the committee is struggling to do so. The committee agreed that the College Council should make the ways in which the proposed Honor Code is tied to the Student

Code of Conduct more explicit in the materials that they share at the faculty meeting, and should also provide the preamble that is envisioned as a means to offer more context for the proposed Honor Code. The committee decided that it would be helpful to have a committee-of-the-whole conversation about the Honor Code proposal at the April 26 faculty meeting, and that the College Council should share revised materials with the FEC once they are developed. The provost said that she would reach out to the College Council about preparing these materials.

The meeting adjourned at 5:30 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein
Provost and Dean of the Faculty