

The sixteenth 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, March 4, at 3:30 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, which started as a joint conversation with the Tenure and Promotion Committee (TPC), began with Professor Call informing the president and provost that the members had an instructive discussion with colleagues who had attended the committee’s recent annual meeting for all tenure-track faculty members. After speaking with colleagues in this venue and reflecting on what had been shared, Professor Call said that the FEC is further convinced that having a committee-of-the-whole discussion about the composition of next year’s TPC, and related issues, at the March 8 faculty meeting would be very helpful. Provost Epstein noted that the TPC would have its annual meeting with all tenure-track faculty on March 11.

Discussion focused first on possible implications of the composition of the TPC for next year. All agreed that this was a structural matter, and that concerns that have been raised by some about the results of the recent election should not in any way be seen as a reflection on the abilities of the individuals who were chosen to serve on next year’s TPC. Members of the TPC expressed the importance of respecting the integrity of the election process. Ultimately, the FEC agreed not to propose adding another member to the FEC for the coming year and/or to re-run the election, though both committees recognized that some colleagues—both tenure-track and tenured, across different disciplines—hold a different view. Some faculty in the sciences, in particular, are worried that, without a faculty member from one of the science disciplines, the committee may find it challenging to understand the day-to-day experience of faculty who teach in math and the sciences, and the impact that factors specific to the teaching of math and science can have on the evaluation of their teaching. It was noted that if the election had generated results that had left the TPC without a faculty member from the humanities, for example, it would be likely that similar concerns would arise.

Some members of the FEC raised the possibility of perhaps reexamining the election process so as to ensure disciplinary representation of the TPC membership in the future. Members of the FEC were divided on the advisability of taking this approach; the members of the TPC, who did not support this idea, emphasized their high level of trust in the reappointment and tenure process and in the faculty who serve on the TPC. The members conveyed that, in their experience, disciplinary expertise has not played a role in the committee’s deliberations. The members of the TPC said that, when evaluating cases, they rely heavily on interpreting the evidence provided by experts in the field—the outside reviewers—by the departmental recommendations, and by the student teaching evaluations. Both committees agreed that demystifying the deliberative process undertaken by the TPC would be very valuable and hopefully will go a long way in reassuring colleagues about the integrity of faculty personnel processes.

It was agreed that, to frame the committee-of-the-whole conversation at the March 8 faculty meeting, Professor Hansen would give a short presentation about the ways in which the TPC conducts its reviews for tenure and reappointment. Both committees said that they look forward to listening to the views of colleagues and to answering questions from the floor during the committee-of-the-whole conversation. It was agreed that Provost Epstein, who would chair the discussion, should call first on tenure-track faculty who wish to speak. President Elliott commented that, sitting with the TPC during his first and second year as president, he has been very impressed with the thoughtfulness and thoroughness that the members bring to their work. The FEC members thanked the members of the TPC, and they left the meeting at 4:37 p.m.

After the members of the TPC left the meeting, President Elliott, under “Topics of the Day,” informed the members that, at the meeting of the board of trustees that had taken place on March 2, the trustees had affirmed the [Amherst College Statement of Academic and Expressive Freedom](#). The trustees had spent time discussing what the statement means and the threats to academic freedom in the current climate. With their vote, the trustees indicated their recognition of the importance of having this core statement as an underpinning of Amherst’s academic mission, and its unanimous support. The board also voted to approve the comprehensive fee for the next academic year at the meeting, the president noted.

Under “Questions from Committee Members,” Professor Polk asked how the protest that had taken place on the Thursday before the trustee meeting had unfolded. President Elliott responded that the forty or fifty protestors, who requested that the college divest from entities that are directly profiting from the war in the Middle East, had been peaceful and did not attempt to disrupt the board’s meeting. He noted that the board respected the right of the protestors to convey their views. The president said that, as the committee is aware, the trustees discussed the divestment request in December; though the board discussed the protest, he said, the question of divestment was not a formal agenda item at this March meeting.

Continuing with questions, Professor Follette read [a communication from Professor Hayashi](#), which he had asked her to share with the committee (he also agreed to have his email attached to these minutes). In his note, Professor Hayashi conveyed a request that the college make long-term commitments to the broader Amherst community that could help address a number of challenges, for example the need for a new elementary school and public-works facility. He suggested that the FEC discuss what the college might do to support the community, perhaps in the context of the president's initiative to build a more sustained relationship with the town, as well as with an eye toward addressing some of the criticism that higher education is facing at this moment. Professor Hayashi also shared some links to articles about commitments that Williams has made to the local schools and public-safety institutions in its community. He noted that, “While the president may feel there is something inappropriate about covering a budget shortage, these measures by Williams acknowledge how these public institutions benefit Williams, which at the same time is free of the tax burdens the rest of the community endures.” President Elliott thanked Professor Follette for sharing Professor Hayashi’s email. He noted that the commitments that Williams has chosen to make emerged from a multi-year planning process; he informed the members that he would like Amherst to engage in a similar exercise to identify community partners with whom the college can work to make a difference, within the parameters of the college’s budget. Beyond what the college has already contributed to the community recently, for example through support for the Jones Library project, he is eager to think about what long-term partnerships with community entities may look like.

On behalf of a group of colleagues, Professor Gardner asked if planning for the new student center will include faculty involvement in creating a space that faculty and staff can use for dining together and other forms of social and professional engagement. Provost Epstein said that a small group in which some faculty members are participating, including Associate Provost and Associate Dean of the Faculty Anthony Bishop, has begun meeting with Tom Davies, executive director of planning, design, and construction, to discuss how the student center can support faculty dining and engagement.

Turning to another space-related question, Professor Gardner, again asking on behalf of some colleagues, inquired whether there might be another space on campus in which faculty meetings could be held. Some faculty are concerned about the overcrowding in Cole Assembly Room, given the growth of the faculty in recent years. The provost said that she is open to suggestions, and that finding an alternative space could be a challenge.

Discussion returned briefly to the survey that the committee plans to undertake to try to get a better sense of committees on which individual faculty would most like to serve this year, or in the future. The committee refined the proposed survey further, and Professor Gardner agreed to create a short Google form that faculty could be asked to complete with the questions the committee will approve. The members discussed including a question about individual faculty members’ current departmental obligations as well, which could possibly be taken into consideration when the committee proposes committee assignments. (The committee will continue to receive from the provost’s office a committee-service history that is organized by faculty member and by committee.) Based on what is learned this year the members suggested that the administration of the survey be repeated every three to five years. While a modest amount of information could be solicited this year, it would be possible to add to the survey questions in future years, based on which information seems most relevant when making committee assignments. The committee agreed that the survey should include language that will make it clear that it will not always be possible, due to the needs and requirements of various committees, to

match faculty with the committees on which they indicate they would most like to serve. It will be important not to raise unachievable expectations in this regard, the members agreed.

Returning for a moment to the College Council's proposal to revise the Honor Code, the committee agreed that Professor Call should reach out to Professor Holleman, chair of the College Council, to arrange a meeting with some or all of the members of both the Council and FEC. The purpose would be to offer more detailed feedback from the FEC and to answer questions about the committee's perspectives. The members agreed that, before bringing the proposal to the student body for a vote, the next stage of the formal process of approval, it will be important to provide an opportunity for the faculty to learn more about the proposal and to offer feedback. (Under [the procedures for approving the Honor Code](#), the student body votes on the proposal first, and, if the students approve it, by a majority vote, the faculty then votes. Again, approval is by a majority vote. If the proposal is not approved by the majorities of the student body and the faculty, the current Honor Code will stay in effect while the College Council reviews the Honor Code again in the next academic year. The code will remain in effect until an alternative version is passed by the majorities of both the students and faculty.) The members said that they continue to believe that holding a committee-of-the-whole conversation about the proposal at the April 26 faculty meeting would be informative. In particular, they agreed that it would be helpful if the Council would discuss the ways in which the proposed brief statement that would serve as the Honor Code would be presented to students. For example, the members recommended that the College Council share the envisioned preamble and/or other introductory materials that could offer a context for the Honor Code, as well any other materials that would be provided to students to connect the aspirations of the Honor Code to relevant college policies. In addition, the committee suggested that the College Council inform the faculty about the venues in which the Honor Code will be "published," for its placement on the college's website, and the explanatory/related information that will accompany it.

In the brief time remaining, the members discussed the committee's ongoing effort to consider faculty governance structures, noting that the demands of addressing other pressing matters have made it a challenge to set aside time for these conversations. Noting the importance of this work, the committee agreed to set priorities for the rest of the semester. The members decided that making a recommendation about how and when the evaluation of the TPC/FEC pilot should take place should be a priority. (This pilot concludes at the end of the next academic year.) They also noted that questions around the election processes used to select members of the FEC and the TPC, and the composition of these bodies, is another issue that the committee has identified as being important to explore either this year or as part of a holistic assessment of the pilot next year.

The meeting adjourned at 5:30 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein  
Provost and Dean of the Faculty