

The third 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, October 2, 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 the president informing the members that the number of reported COVID-19 cases has declined, noting that the college only has anecdotal information about faculty and staff who have tested positive for the virus. As of ten days prior to September 29, twenty-five students had reported that they had tested positive. In the past three days, there have been no reported cases. The college is remaining vigilant about signs of an uptick in cases, President Elliott said. Professor Katsaros inquired into the possibility of setting up a vaccination clinic on campus as has been done in the past. In regard to prevention, President Elliott said that, while the college would like to offer a clinic on campus to provide the most recent COVID vaccine booster, it is likely not possible to do so. Issues related to vaccine supply and insurance coverage are making it much more complicated to do so than in the past. Professor Follette noted that six students in her classes tested positive last week. She and Professor Gardner expressed the view that the number of students who were infected may be higher than the testing reports suggest. Professor Gardner proposed that students be reminded of the importance of reporting positive test results, so that the college can gain a better sense of COVID trends. In regard to faculty concerns surrounding COVID-19, Professor Polk informed the president and provost that some colleagues have expressed to him that they would like to have more clarification about the college's current COVID protocols. While they didn't convey the specific details that they were seeking, it appears that some faculty would like the college's engagement with COVID policy to be more rigorous as a general matter. President Elliott said that he understands that there is a desire for data that is more informative, while noting that there is much less information available during this endemic stage of the pandemic. The college is checking in with other schools about their COVID trends, and Amherst's Health Services is monitoring the number of reported cases.

Continuing with his remarks, President Elliott noted that October will be a busy month on campus. He is looking forward to welcoming historian and public intellectual Carol Anderson, Charles Howard Candler Professor of African American Studies at Emory University, as part of the Presidential Scholars Program. The president informed the members that "A Conversation with Carol Anderson: Democracy under Attack: Voting Rights and Voter Suppression," will be held in Johnson Chapel on October 12, at 7:30 p.m. Professor Anderson will be on campus October 11–October 13, and will be visiting classes and meeting with students, faculty, and staff. The president also shared that, during the week of **October 23–27**, the college will mark the sixtieth anniversary of then-President John F. Kennedy's visit to Amherst to receive an honorary degree and participate in the groundbreaking of Frost Library. At that time, President Kennedy had cited the proud history of public service performed by Amherst's graduates. He spoke of the college's mission to educate its students not only to reap the benefits of an Amherst education as individuals but also to serve the common good. President Elliott noted that six decades later, Amherst is renewing its commitment to support Amherst students who seek to link their Amherst experiences to a lifetime of contributing to the greater good in their professional and personal endeavors.

Turning to another topic, President Elliott informed the members that the college is in the midst of negotiations to rent the building formerly occupied by Hastings as a retail space. The hope is to distribute textbooks and to sell Amherst merchandise at what will serve as a campus store. There are no plans to compete with Amherst Books in this space, which will not operate as a bookstore, he said.

The members next discussed nominees to serve on a memorial minute committee for Peter Pouncey, President and Edwin F. and Jessie Burnell Fobes Professor in Greek (Classics), Emeritus, who died on May 30, 2023. The committee agreed that Provost Epstein should invite these colleagues to serve on the memorial minute committee.

Provost Epstein next reported back about a question that had been posted at a previous meeting about the question of Google and the possible impact of AI in regard to cybersecurity. The provost noted that David

Hamilton, chief information officer, said that, as long as members of the college community are using Google Workspace tools such as Docs with their college account, they do not need to be concerned about generative AI tool risk. He noted that the college's contract with Google protects the privacy of the content created within Google Workspace tools. Secondly, D. Hamilton said that the college has not yet made available the generative AI tools that Google and Microsoft have begun providing. While individuals can access them in a limited form when using these tools with a personal account, members of the community cannot access them from their college-provided account.

Responding to another question that had been raised earlier, the provost said that she had informed Mike Thomas, chief financial and administrative officer, that some STEM faculty have been frustrated by delays involving some purchasing systems that have led to some suppliers not filling new orders from Amherst due to unpaid invoices. Provost Epstein noted that M. Thomas and his team have been responsive to the concerns that were raised; the members of the Science Faculty Steering Committee have now been asked to provide details about faculty members' experiences to inform efforts to address this issue.

Before turning to matters related to the faculty meeting of October 17, the committee noted briefly tensions and strong feelings that have emerged within the community in the aftermath of the September 4 faculty meeting. The committee discussed the importance of transparency and accountability in regard to the members' own deliberations about substantive issues, and in regard to faculty governance more broadly. The committee noted the views that Professor Dumm had expressed in [his email to the FEC of September 26](#).

At 4:30 p.m., Lisa Rutherford, general counsel and senior advisor to the president, and Justin Smith, deputy general counsel, joined the meeting. At the members' request, in anticipation of the discussion of admission and athletics at the upcoming faculty meeting, the attorneys responded to the committee's questions surrounding the college's current practices of admissions and athletic recruitment, given the Supreme Court's recent decision about race-conscious admissions. Some questions related to the "[Questions and Answers](#)" resource released by the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights and the U.S. Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division in August. The attorneys expressed their opinion that this is primarily a political document and that they were focused instead on interpreting the Supreme Court's ruling itself.

At the conclusion of the conversation, President Elliott commented that the landscape for understanding the parameters of that decision is still evolving, and that its impact is unclear at this time—and may remain unclear for several years. He expects that the best strategies for responding to the challenges posed by the decision will evolve over several admission cycles. The members then thanked L. Rutherford and J. Smith, who left the meeting at 5:16 p.m.

In the brief time remaining, the members finalized plans for the October 17 faculty meeting. The committee agreed to invite Professor Lembo, chair of the Faculty Committee on Admission and Financial Aid, to chair the committee-of-the-whole discussion at the meeting (he later agreed to do so). The members then voted five in favor and zero opposed to forward the faculty meeting agenda to the faculty.

The meeting ended with a brief conversation about Professor Herbin-Triant's request—made at the September 4 faculty meeting—that the October 17 meeting not be held in Cole Assembly Room, due to overcrowding. After recalling the challenges colleagues noted last year with the meetings that took place in Johnson Chapel, the committee decided that Cole Assembly Room was still the better (though far from ideal) option. The members agreed that the committee may need to revisit this issue in the future.

The meeting adjourned at 5:45 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein  
Provost and Dean of the Faculty