

Committee of Six Minutes of Monday, March 3, 2014

Amended March 14, 2014

The seventeenth meeting of the Committee of Six for the academic year 2013-2014 was called to order by President Martin in the President's office at 3:30 P.M. on Monday, March 3, 2014. Present were Professors Kingston, Harms, Lyle McGeoch, Miller, and Schneider, Dean Call, Provost Uvin, and Assistant Dean Tobin, Recorder. Professor Corrales was absent.

Under "Announcements from the President," President Martin offered a report about her meeting with the White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault, which had been held on February 26, 2014. Vice President Joe Biden had led the meeting, which had also been attended by Bea Hanson, Principal Deputy Director of the Department of Justice Office on Violence Against Women; Catherine Lhamon '93, Assistant Secretary of Education, Office of Civil Rights (OCR); Kathleen Sibelius, Secretary of Health and Human Services; Tina Tchen, Executive Director of the White House Council on Women and Girls, and six other college and university presidents. President Martin reported that, at the meeting, emphasis had been placed on the Obama administration's expectations that colleges and universities work assiduously to prevent sexual assault on their campuses and provide support for survivors. To help guide the government's development of new requirements for institutions of higher learning surrounding sexual misconduct, the college and university presidents stressed the need for clear standards that offer sufficient flexibility to be pragmatic and effective. President Martin noted that Ms. Lhamon has invited her, along with two other presidents, to meet with her in the coming weeks.

Under "Announcements from the Dean," Dean Call noted that, as the Committee had requested, he had reached out to Professor O'Hara, in her role as Dean of New Students and chair of the Orientation Committee, and to Professor Reyes, who had raised questions about the Provost's role in the planning of Orientation and Provost Uvin's participation at meetings of the Orientation Committee. Dean Call informed the members that he had had a helpful conversation with Dean O'Hara. In regard to considering the make-up of the Orientation Committee, Dean O'Hara had suggested that, if a proposal is made to change the membership of the committee, consideration be given to adding Amanda Vann, the College's new Sexual Respect Educator, to the committee. The Dean said that Professor Reyes had chosen not to meet with him and had requested a written summary of the Committee's conversation about this issue. In response, Dean Call said that he had sent Professor Reyes and the other members of the Orientation Committee the Committee of Six minutes of this discussion over the weekend. The Dean informed the members that Professor Reyes had requested that the members of the Orientation Committee who do not otherwise attend Faculty Meetings be invited to the March 4 Faculty Meeting, but had later decided to withdraw that request for this meeting, as Dean O'Hara would be unable to attend. Professor Reyes said that she might ask that the invitation be extended for a future meeting. Professor Reyes had asked the Dean to inform the Committee of Six of these plans and to ask that the members "understand that, in the meantime, it seems likely that the Orientation Committee will continue to operate as outlined in writing."

Noting the upcoming transition to a new Dean of New Students and the challenges that the College is facing in the area of students affairs, as well as past practices regarding the role of

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administrators and staff in planning and running Orientation, the Committee reaffirmed its recommendations regarding planning mechanisms for this year's Orientation. The members agreed that, in a good faith effort to organize and implement the best Orientation possible under challenging circumstances this year, having Provost Uvin work with the Orientation Committee and other colleagues to reimagine and run Orientation seems to be the best plan. It was noted that the Orientation Committee and Provost Uvin are now close to having the program set for the next Orientation. While there was a need to move expeditiously this year to plan Orientation, going forward, the Committee agreed it would be helpful for everyone to gain greater clarity about the process for planning Orientation and the role of the Orientation Committee and others involved with planning and implementing Orientation. Among the issues that the Committee of Six and the Faculty may wish to consider is the make-up of the Committee, as noted earlier. Provost Uvin informed the members that he would be leaving the Committee of Six meeting early in order to attend a meeting of the Orientation Committee.

Conversation turned to the Faculty Meeting that would be held the next day. Dean Call said that he had received requests from Professor Frank, Chair of the Strategic Planning Committee on the Integration of Curricular and Co-Curricular Learning, and Professor Cobham-Sander, Chair of the Strategic Planning Committee on Diversity and Community, that the members of their committees who do not otherwise attend Faculty Meetings be invited to attend the March 4 meeting, during which the chairs would offer reports. The members agreed that these colleagues should be invited to attend.

Professor Harms next posed some questions that had been prompted by her review of the proposals for new courses on which the Faculty would be asked to vote at the March 4 Faculty Meeting. She asked to be brought up to date about the oversight role being played by the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) in regard to the following issues. Professor Harms inquired, as a matter of the allocation of College resources, whether questions are raised about proposals to co-teach very small, limited-enrollment courses. Another question revolved around proposals to teach seminars that would meet for fewer than 150 minutes a week. Professor Harms also asked whether the CEP encourages departments to discuss course proposals that might be duplicative within their curricula. The Dean responded that the CEP routinely monitors these and other questions that arise and brings matters to the attention of individual faculty and departments. In the case of the first question, the Dean said that it can be important to consider the balance of courses that the faculty involved might be teaching, and that colleagues often provide relevant information when a proposal raises questions by the CEP. For example, some faculty might co-teach such a course as an overload, or might also be teaching a course with a very large enrollment in the same semester. The Dean noted that the CEP contacts all faculty members who propose to teach seminars that would meet for fewer than 150 minutes a week, suggesting that the seminar meet for at least 150 minutes. Most faculty consent to this request, or indicate that the course includes required time commitments in excess of class time. In terms

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of proposals that may fit within and/or support the curricula of more than one department or may seem to duplicate courses in multiple departments, the CEP may bring this to the attention of departments and ask if they would consider cross-listing a course. That decision is then left up to the departments. The Committee agreed that it is appropriate and helpful that the CEP is being vigilant about these and other issues. Professor Harms thanked the Dean for this helpful information. Professor Schneider asked if the CEP feels that it needs the buttressing and support of the Committee of Six when issues related to course proposals arise. Dean Call said that he believes that the CEP process works well. A former CEP chair, Professor McGeoch commented that, in his experience, when questions are brought to departments and/or individual colleagues about course proposals, requests are generally met and/or a compromise is reached.

Under “Questions from Committee Members,” Professor Miller raised some questions about the electronic format and organization in which departments should submit electronic personnel dossiers to the Committee of Six. The Committee agreed to have a discussion about the standard electronic formats that would be most helpful to the members’ review process. The Dean’s office would continue to be tasked with reviewing the electronic and hard-copy materials and ensuring consistency of format and organization across cases. Assistant Dean Tobin suggested that it would be helpful if department chairs attend the meetings that the Dean’s office hosts each year for academic department coordinators who will be assembling personnel cases, in order to ensure that communication about the materials needed, and the format in which they must be submitted, is clear. The members agreed that having chairs attend this meeting would be helpful. The Dean’s office will continue to organize separate meetings annually for cohorts of candidates for reappointment and tenure and for their chairs.

The Committee then had a brief discussion of the results of the COACHE (Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education) survey of faculty job satisfaction, raising questions about the methodology of the instrument and the resulting data, while agreeing that the survey results are useful as a means of highlighting some important questions. The College can now explore through other mechanisms, such as strategic planning and Teaching and Advising Program (TAP) lunch discussions, for example, issues that had been raised. Dean Call noted that the Committee on Priorities and Resources (CPR) had recently asked to review some sections of the report of the survey results, which the Dean had provided to them. Prompted by the survey responses, the CPR now plans to discuss the nature of faculty work and work/life issues. Professor Schneider noted that many of the other institutions participating in the COACHE survey did not seem appropriate to be considered as Amherst’s peers, and added that a number of the results did not ring true. Professor Kingston suggested that the small sample size of the survey and the ways in which the questions were framed probably played a role in generating results that seemed inconsistent across questions, at times, and/or did not seem to ring true. Other members concurred. The members agreed that the survey results seem to point to three issues around which faculty have concerns: committee service, the clarity of tenure procedures and the related issue of mentoring of tenure-track faculty, and issues relating to work/life balance

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and family, such as spousal hiring and childcare. The Committee noted that it would appear that some of these issues would be easier to address than others, while noting that the survey results often do not reveal the complexities and/or subtleties of a problem. Professor Miller offered the example of committee service. She wondered whether the negative responses surrounding committee service stem from an intrinsic dislike of committee work, or whether faculty may feel that the time that they invest in committee work does not have an impact. Provost Uvin left the meeting to attend a meeting of the Orientation Committee.

Dean Call next informed the members that Associate Dean Cheney and he had met on February 21 with nine recently tenured members of the Faculty about these colleagues' impressions of the reappointment and tenure experience at Amherst. The feedback from these faculty members had been interesting, the Dean said. For the most part, the newly tenured professors had found that the procedures for reappointment and tenure are clear and had noted that they were satisfied with the speed of tenure deliberations. Concerns were raised by some colleagues about the frequency and usefulness of the annual conversations with their departments. The faculty members had found that the feedback given at the time of reappointment, through the redacted departmental recommendation and the Dean's reading of the minutes of the Committee of Six's conversation about their cases, to be helpful. The sum and substance of the Committee of Six's discussions of their tenure cases was also viewed as valuable. Some of the newly tenured professors said that they did not understand the purpose behind the Committee of Six's practice of asking tenured members of a candidate's department to meet with the Committee about some candidates' tenure cases. Some colleagues were also unsure of the purpose of the individual colleague letters that are sent in confidence directly to the Committee of Six as part of the tenure dossier.

Continuing his report about the meeting with the recently tenured professors, the Dean said that some of those who attended the meeting were concerned that the Committee of Six is not structured to ensure that its members represent the major divisions. Those at the meeting expressed the view that the process of evaluating teaching suffers from the inconsistency of methods employed to solicit the evaluations and from the fact that the teaching of tenured faculty members is not evaluated by students very often. Dean Call said that some concern had been raised about the frequency and usefulness of candidates' annual conversations with their department chair(s), and about the Committee of Six's relatively recent practice of asking departments to solicit additional outside reviewer letters, when the members feel that they would be aided in their work by having more information from experts in a candidate's field. The Committee noted that letters from outside reviewers can vary greatly in quality, which is why additional letters are sometimes needed. The Committee felt that, perhaps, this procedure could be made more explicit and transparent by including the process as a formal part of the tenure procedures. Doing so would require a vote of the Faculty, it was noted. Some newly tenured professors had said that their annual conversations had not occurred with the intended frequency, and that departmental advice, perhaps because of the rotation of the chair, could be inconsistent, at times. The members agreed that the annual conversation process would be improved if the

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tenured members of the department(s) met prior to the conversation with the untenured faculty member to discuss the colleague's record of teaching, research, and service. Rather than having only the chair present at the conversation, the members felt that it would be desirable to have at least one other tenured member of the department participate in the discussion with the untenured colleague. In addition, to ensure that annual conversations occur yearly for each tenured faculty member, the Committee suggested that chairs be asked to notify the Dean in writing, each year, that the annual conversation has taken place. The members agreed to develop a proposal that would standardize departmental practices surrounding the annual conversation. To this end, the Committee decided to review the [Faculty Handbook language about annual conversations](#) at its next meeting. At the conclusion of the conversation, Professor Kingston, referencing the COACHE survey, noted that, in response to a question posed on page forty, which asks responders to describe the "one thing your institution can do to improve the workplace for faculty," no assistant or associate professors had identified concerns about tenure, promotion, or mentoring as their top priority. Based on the survey results, he said that he is not convinced that there is a crisis in these areas, and he expressed the view that improving childcare facilities should be a priority. The remainder of the meeting was devoted to personnel matters.

The meeting adjourned at 6:15 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Gregory S. Call
Dean of the Faculty