

## **Committee of Six Minutes of Monday, February 17, 2014**

Amended February 28, 2014

The fifteenth 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, February 17, 2014. Present were Professors Corrales (via speaker phone), Kingston, Harms, Lyle McGeoch, Miller, and Schneider, Dean Call, Provost Uvin, and Assistant Dean Tobin, Recorder.

Under "Announcements from the President," President Martin shared impressions of a conference at the University of Virginia at which she had been asked to speak the previous week. The intensive two-day gathering had focused on the topic of sexual misconduct on college campuses, which is on the rise nationally, and the increasing attention and vigilance being devoted to this issue. The President explained that she had been among six presidents and more than two hundred student affairs professionals, legal experts, and student leaders from across the country who had come together for a set of informative conversations. Leading experts in education, prevention, and adjudication in the area of sexual misconduct and the care of survivors had participated, offering their knowledge and perspectives on topics ranging from approaches to changing campus culture; institutions' obligations under federal civil-rights law to investigate and resolve reports of sexual misconduct; the impact of greater attention by the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) to these issues; and the role that may be played by President Obama's recently formed White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault, which is charged with addressing the issue of sexual assault on college campuses. President Martin commented that Catherine Lhamon '93, the assistant secretary of education who heads the department's OCR, had spoken about her office's stepped-up efforts to ensure that institutions of higher learning abide by federal law in their handling of campus sexual assaults, including investigatory practices and potential penalties for being out of compliance. It was made clear that the stakes are very high, and that possible penalties include the loss of federal funding, President Martin commented. The President noted that national activist groups have petitioned President Obama's task force to agree to demands that would hold colleges and universities more accountable, parts of which would be difficult to meet. President Martin said that she had just been invited to speak with the task force and plans to offer her thoughts about what more can be done to prevent sexual assault and respond to it when it occurs, and the complexities surrounding the issues.

Continuing, President Martin reported that the topics discussed at the conference are relevant and timely for Amherst. She informed the members that, in response to a complaint filed last fall by a former Amherst student, the OCR has opened an inquiry into the College's policies, procedures, and practices under Title IX. As part of that inquiry, the OCR recently requested all documents related to the College's nondiscrimination policies, sexual harassment and sexual assault complaint policies and procedures, and all incidents of sexual harassment and sexual assault reported to the College in the last three years. President Martin praised the work of Lisa Rutherford, Chief Policy Officer and General Counsel, and a team of staff members that she has assembled, who are now engaged in an intensive and challenging process of assembling the documents, which number in the thousands, which are needed to respond to this request. The group has been working sixteen-hour days and has a great deal more to do. President Martin said that it is her hope that the extensive work that the College has done over the past two years to develop and put in place policies and procedures to bring Amherst into compliance with Title IX, and to respond thoroughly, appropriately, and swiftly to incidents of sexual misconduct that have

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occurred, will be recognized by the OCR as positive, significant steps. The President noted that the leadership of Suzanne Coffey, who had taken on the role of Title IX Officer for eighteen months to spearhead these efforts, had been essential to the College's ability to design and implement new practices and to demonstrate its commitment to addressing the issue of sexual misconduct, including compliance with Title IX.

Professor Harms noted that, in the past, the College has been told that most of the incidents of sexual misconduct that take place on college campuses are "he said/she said" cases that are difficult to prosecute because of the nature of the evidence that is typically available and circumstances that are often a factor. President Martin said that, under Title IX, the College is required to investigate when an incident of sexual misconduct is brought to its attention. She noted that, when undertaken by trained investigators, such an investigation can often reveal a pattern of evidence that will indicate where responsibility lies, even in "he said/she said" cases. President Martin explained that the standard for proving allegations under Title IX is a "preponderance of the evidence," i.e., that the accusation is more likely to be true than not true. A higher standard of proof is used in criminal cases, where guilt must be proven "beyond a reasonable doubt." The standard of "clear and convincing evidence," which is used for some civil and criminal cases, is also a higher level of burden of proof than the one used under Title IX.

Under "Announcements from the Dean," Dean Call discussed several committee nominations with the members. The Dean next reviewed with the members the faculty committees on which the Dean of Students serves *ex officio*. They are the following: the College Council, the Faculty Committee on Admission and Financial Aid, the Committee on Discipline, and the Committee on Education and Athletics. It was noted that Suzanne Coffey, as Chief Student Affairs Officer, will sit on these committees, for the time being.

Conversation turned to the change in leadership in the Dean of Students office and the possibilities for reimagining and restructuring this area of the College, as well as the urgency of doing so. Professor Kingston asked President Martin why she had chosen to create the title/position of Chief Student Affairs Officer, rather than retaining the title of Dean of Students. The President responded that the new position will be largely administrative and managerial, and it will focus on examining, redefining, and reorganizing the structure and operations of the Dean of Students Office. The new title reflects the responsibilities of the job. Ms. Coffey has the administrative experience, ability, and fortitude to bring much-needed changes to the area of student affairs, at a time of pressing need, President Martin added. The serious and urgent nature of these needs, and concern for the well-being of Amherst students, prompted President Martin's decision to appoint Ms. Coffey to this new role immediately after Dean of Students Jim Larimore decided to step down from his position, she said. The President said that some students have suggested to her that, with the establishment of the Chief of Student Affairs position, it would be desirable to redefine the role of the Dean of Students so that it focuses most prominently on issues of academic and personal support for students, and to move quickly to hire a new dean. President Martin said that she is open to the possibility of filling this position soon, which could complement and support the work of the Chief Student Affairs Officer, in her view.

Continuing with the discussion, Professor Harms asked the President if she anticipates that the Chief Student Affairs Officer position will be permanent, or if it represents an interim

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structure for the next two years. President Martin said that it is too early to know what the most viable structure for student affairs at Amherst should be. The President, the Dean, and the members discussed the potential challenges of finding outstanding student affairs professionals who would want to come to Amherst to work in student affairs, given recent circumstances. Some members agreed that, if a search is launched for a new iteration of the Dean of Students position, it will be important to narrow the focus of the job and to define and convey the responsibilities clearly. President Martin noted that the search firm of Isaacson, Miller has indicated a willingness to assist with a search for a Dean of Students at no cost. Professor Corrales suggested that the process of reimagining the Dean of Students position, and student affairs more broadly, would benefit from consultation with the College Council and/or some other body. President Martin agreed and informed the members that she would be meeting with the College Council on Wednesday for this purpose. She noted that the College has engaged a higher education consulting firm, Keeling and Associates, to offer advice on ways to restructure the Dean of Students Office and best practices, and that the firm has been very helpful. Richard Keeling, who heads the group, has co-authored (with Dr. Richard Hersh) *We're Losing Our Minds: Rethinking American Higher Education* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), which the President found to be an interesting book. President Martin noted that Dr. Keeling supports the idea of having a more narrowly defined Dean of Students position, in addition to the Chief Student Affairs position. He, like other consultants engaged by the College to assess student affairs at Amherst, has characterized the student affairs area at Amherst as “antiquated and underperforming.”

Dean Call shared with the members a concern brought to his attention by an Amherst student, who is troubled by the ways in which some faculty members word messages that inform students about whether classes will be held when the College is closed because of snowstorms. Some faculty convey to students messages to the effect of the following: “you should be able to handle the snow” or “as a member of a residential community, it’s not an undue burden to expect attendance in class today,” the student noted. The student commented that Amherst has a significant population of physically disabled students, some of whom openly identify and present themselves as such, and some of whom do not. The student expressed the view that some of the emails that have been sent by faculty have alienated these students, for whom trekking through the snow is often an undue burden or even impossibility. While noting that the student raises important points and that the Faculty should be made aware of these concerns through the Committee of Six minutes and in the Dean’s remarks at the next Faculty Meeting, the Committee agreed that faculty members, in general, are sensitive to these issues and would make accommodations for any student who informs them that he or she cannot safely travel to class during bad weather. Faculty could be encouraged to send messages that are succinct and informational, such as “class will be held today.” Professor McGeoch suggested that faculty let students know that the Campus Police can assist students who need help getting to class during bad weather. Professor Schneider noted, more generally, that accessibility is a problem in regard to many campus buildings independent of weather.

Under “Questions from Committee Members,” Professor Schneider, referencing concerns raised previously about aspects of the athletic culture at Amherst, said that he hopes it will be

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possible to have productive and nuanced conversations about athletics, without making students or members of the athletics department feel under attack. Dean Call said that he believes that such conversations would be welcome. President Martin agreed with the Committee's view that conversations about student life issues, including but not limited to those that relate to athletics, should be folded into the strategic planning process. The President commented that, regrettably, some criticisms of athletics and athletes made last year in the context of discussions about factors contributing to sexual misconduct were demoralizing to some Amherst students. It will be important to discuss the place of athletics at the College as part of the broader topic of student life at Amherst. The degree to which certain kinds of behavior practiced by student-athletes may be contributing to the fragmentation of the student body is one issue that needs to be discussed, she said, while noting that this is a concern that applies to some other clubs and student organizations, as noted in the report of the Special Oversight Committee on Sexual Misconduct (SMOC). Professor Kingston informed the Committee that some student-athletes have told him that they feel trapped in a culture that imposes many constraints, including on their ability to form social connections outside the community of student-athletes. It can be difficult for students who have these feelings to be candid about them with other athletes and with coaches.

The Committee agreed that having discussions about stereotyping and other biased attitudes toward athletes would be beneficial. Provost Uvin said that he will work to create opportunities for such conversations within the strategic planning process. Professor Schneider suggested that it would be helpful to discuss how to create a climate of community on campus. Provost Uvin commented that this issue is on the agendas of a number of the strategic planning committees. Professor Schneider noted that he has heard from students that having First-Year Seminar groups connect with one another through activities beyond the classroom has been one successful way of building social bonds based on shared intellectual experience. President Martin, commenting that it is easy to become stuck rhetorically when discussing this issue, wondered whether the word "community" conveys fully the complexities of the topic at hand. She noted that others who have considered this issue have suggested that institutions recognize the value of these smaller networks and nodes around which students gravitate, which play a valuable role for them in college, and should work to find ways to ensure that the networks frequently intersect and are dynamic enough to shift over time. Professor Schneider commented that the student dinners and festivals that President Martin has launched have been positive first steps in giving students a sense of belonging. Professor Harms expressed the view that it would be helpful to convey to students that they share common ownership in Amherst, no matter what their affiliation group or background, by virtue of the fact that they take four classes each semester and are engaged in that intellectual endeavor. Professor Corrales commented that it will be essential that the role of athletics be examined as part of the rethinking of student life and in discussions about community. He suggested that creating a big brother/big sister program, in which athletes pair up with non-athletes, might help students form affiliations beyond their established social circles. Dean Call noted that some groups on campus have a program of this sort within their groups, and that the idea of extending such a program to cut across groups is intriguing. Provost Uvin commented that a number of student groups have been developing mentoring initiatives. The Committee next turned briefly to a personnel matter.

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Discussion turned to the current procedures that govern attendance and voting at faculty meetings and matters related to faculty governance more broadly. Professor Schneider said that, before considering this issue, it would be important to have a shared sense of the purpose and goals of Faculty Meetings and the philosophy that guides them. Dean Call noted that one approach to considering this issue could be to update the position titles in the *Faculty Handbook* language about [attendance and voting at Faculty Meetings](#), as they are out of date, then review the current structure and practice to judge whether it is effective. The Committee reviewed detailed information about current rules and practices in regard to which members of the College community are entitled to attend faculty meetings, who may vote, and who receives minutes of the meetings of the Faculty and the Committee of Six. Professor Harms noted that there seems to be little rationale and logic guiding the current system. She expressed the view that, since there is a great deal of transition occurring in the administration, it appears to be a particularly timely moment to consider making changes about who should be attending and voting at Faculty meetings. The other members agreed. The Committee discussed advantages and disadvantages of having so many staff members attend Faculty Meetings, including whether the purpose of doing so is largely to keep staff informed. For the most part, the Committee agreed that the purpose of attending the meetings should be largely to contribute to decision-making, through participation in debate and voting. This view would argue for limiting the number of staff who attend to, perhaps, administrators who report directly to the President or the Dean of the Faculty. The Committee agreed that most staff members could be kept informed through the minutes of the Faculty Meetings, rather than through attendance. Professor Miller commented that, at present, if staff members are present to inform the Faculty about issues about which the staff member has expertise, it often seems difficult for the person to do so effectively “on the spot.” A better approach might be to ask staff members to research particular topics as they arise and to invite staff colleagues to attend particular Faculty Meetings to report back on their answers to questions that have been posed and/or requests for information. Provost Uvin expressed the view that many staff members may find it helpful to listen to debate at Faculty Meetings and may feel that it is empowering to attend the meetings. Deciding to exclude those who may now attend is a sensitive matter, he noted. The Committee agreed. Some members expressed the view that the time of many staff members is being wasted at Faculty Meetings, and that staff may feel obligated to attend if they are eligible to do so.

Continuing the conversation, President Martin suggested identifying the problem that the Committee is trying to solve. Are there too many people attending the meetings? Are too few faculty members participating in governance or in discussions at Faculty Meetings? Is there a widespread idea that the meetings need to change? Professor Schneider expressed the view that the College would be better served if more faculty were more involved in Faculty Meetings. Most members agreed that having so many people at the meetings contributes to the feeling that the room is overcrowded, and it was noted that it can be difficult, at times, to find a seat. At a more substantive but related level, the Committee felt that conversations feel diluted with so many staff members present, and that the meetings might be more cohesive moments for the Faculty if the majority of those attending are faculty members. It was noted that a major purpose of Faculty Meetings is debate and decision-making about issues that are within the purview of the Faculty and/or discussion about questions about which the Faculty may be asked to play an

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advisory role. President Martin observed that it seems paradoxical at times, as a matter of governance, that there seems to be a culture at Amherst in which it is expected that Faculty Meetings be held infrequently; that meetings should not be held unless there is business that requires a vote; that meetings should not be held only for the purpose of providing information or having discussions; and that there seems to be no tradition of having executive sessions of Faculty Meetings with faculty members only, which could be a way for the administration to discuss sensitive matters that should not be shared more broadly within the community.

President Martin expressed some concern about the role of committees when it comes to consultation. While recognizing that the Committee of Six, for example, is not a representative body, there are circumstances and issues that require the Committee's counsel and times when it is not feasible to consult with the entire Faculty about an administrative decision. Professor Miller commented that, from the faculty side, the committees can also prove frustrating. Members devote a great deal of time and effort to the work of the committees, with little action taken as a result. The members agreed that it would be helpful to have a discussion with the Faculty about how the Faculty participates in decision-making and what the Faculty's time should be used for in Faculty Meetings. Professors Kingston and Schneider suggested that, given the large numbers of relatively new faculty, it would be informative to have a presentation on the structure of faculty governance, including the purpose of Faculty Meetings and the role of the major faculty committees. Returning to the topic of committees, Professor McGeoch commented that faculty committees might benefit from having fewer administrators present on a regular basis. As a former chair of the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP), he expressed the view that it would be helpful to the CEP not to have the Dean present at every meeting, as the presence of the Dean, at times, can constrain conversation. He would favor a structure in which the Dean would be invited to attend CEP meetings, as needed, with the idea that he or she could be a regular guest. The Committee discussed the possible role of the Provost on major committees, including the idea that it might be appropriate to have the Provost serve on the Committee on Priorities and Resources (CPR) and did not come to a conclusion about the Dean continuing to attend CPR meetings. Dean Call said that the Dean's oversight role in regard to the academic budget should be considered when thinking about that question.

In conclusion, the members discussed possibilities for different formats for Faculty Meetings, with and without staff present, to discuss important issues. Open meetings for faculty do not draw large attendance, it was noted, and discussions draw more faculty if they are conducted as part of Faculty Meetings. It was agreed that there seems to be nothing precluding having executive sessions of Faculty Meetings for faculty only, as was done on one occasion to discuss Title IX issues with Gina Smith, the attorney who was engaged to work with the College on these matters. Professor Harms suggested that the Committee develop a proposal about attendance and voting at Faculty Meetings and bring it to the Faculty for discussion. In order to have a candid discussion, it would be best if staff did not attend the meeting in which a case might be made that Faculty Meetings would, perhaps, be more efficient and effective if fewer staff members or a more rational and equitable slate of staff members attended. The members agreed to take a comprehensive look at the issue of attendance and voting at Faculty Meetings, rather than adopting an approach to the question that would involve "tinkering around the edges." Professors Harms and McGeoch agreed to develop a proposal for change that would be

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based on a rationale and to bring this proposal to the Committee of Six for discussion first. The Committee could then decide whether to bring a proposal to the Faculty. Professor Harms requested that the Committee be provided with an organizational chart of the College to inform the proposal, and the Dean agreed to provide these charts. If a decision is made that Faculty Meetings should be attended largely by faculty, the members felt that it might be a good idea to have a meeting open to the entire community at the beginning and end of each academic year, perhaps, and to have other “College meetings,” when there are issues that require community discussion.

In the brief time remaining, the members began a discussion of mentoring tenure-track faculty members. Professor Schneider asked Dean Call why this issue is being raised now. The Dean said that issues surrounding mentoring emerge periodically, and that, with so many new tenure-track colleagues and significant ongoing faculty hiring, it seems like a good moment for discussion of this topic. Professor Harms wondered if the results of the COACHE (The Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education) survey of faculty job satisfaction might be prompting the conversation. Professor Harms asked the Dean if the Committee could be provided with the full report of the survey results, as having this document could be helpful to the mentoring discussion. The Dean agreed to provide the members with this document, which does include some feedback about the College’s mentoring practices.

Continuing, the members discussed the mentoring programs put in place by some Amherst departments, varying departmental approaches to annual conversations with tenure-track colleagues, and whether there should be some standardization in the teaching evaluations used by departments—for example, the question of whether there should be some core questions that are included on all teaching evaluations. Professor Schneider was not in favor of standardizing or formalizing mentoring programs, arguing that individual departments should decide for themselves how they wish to mentor their tenure-track faculty. Professor Harms said that she is leery of departmental mentoring programs in which tenure-track faculty are mentored by the same colleagues who will ultimately evaluate them for tenure. She feels that there are approaches such as team-teaching that can be very helpful mentoring tools, but don’t necessarily have to be labeled as such. It was agreed that it could be useful to departments and tenure-line faculty for the Dean’s office to share information more broadly about the mentoring programs that have been developed by departments, while not imposing them. Professor Miller commented on the challenges presented by the frequent rotation of department chairs, in regard to ensuring consistency across tenure-track colleagues in departmental mentorship practices. She suggested that there might be structural improvements that could be made that would be helpful to ensuring continuity in this regard. Dean Call informed the members that he has helped to set up mentoring relationships for tenure-line faculty outside their departments and also outside the College. President Martin commented that, in her experience, mentoring works well under a team approach and with mentors outside as well as inside the department of the individual. Professor Kingston expressed the view that departments could benefit from learning more about the mentoring programs developed by other departments. He noted that candidates for positions in his department often ask about College/departmental mentoring practices. President Martin noted that mentoring has taken on increasing importance across fields, and that many institutions

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have highly developed mentoring programs, about which job candidates are often aware and value.

In regard to teaching evaluations, it was noted that the same evaluation form should be used for all tenure-track colleagues within the same department. While this is supposed to be the case, it is not a consistent practice. Professor Harms noted that the practice in her department is that all members of the department, both tenured and untenured, use the same teaching evaluation forms. Professor McGeoch suggested that it would also be helpful to the Committee of Six if departmental teaching evaluation forms were consistent from year to year. The Committee noted that some departments ask untenured faculty members to develop their own evaluation forms. Professor Harms commented that the feedback that tenure-track colleagues might want to gain from teaching evaluations is not necessarily the same feedback that is useful to the Committee of Six in its reviews of personnel cases. For example, a colleague might want to learn what students feel would be helpful to improve a particular course. Faculty members should, perhaps, be encouraged to use mid-semester evaluations for this purpose, Professor McGeoch noted. Continuing, Professor Harms noted that the Committee of Six is less interested in how successful a particular class is than how successful a colleague's teaching trajectory is in an overall sense. The members agreed to continue the mentoring discussion at a future meeting, after reviewing the results of the COACHE survey.

The meeting adjourned at 5:20 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Gregory S. Call  
Dean of the Faculty