

Committee of Six Minutes of Monday, February 24, 2014

Amended February 28, 2014

The sixteenth 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 24, 2014. Present were Professors Corrales (via Skype), Kingston, Harms, Lyle McGeoch, Miller, and Schneider, Dean Call, Provost Uvin, and Assistant Dean Tobin, Recorder.

Under "Announcements from the President," President Martin informed the members that she would be leaving the next day to travel to Washington and that she would be meeting on Wednesday with the White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault, which is charged with addressing the issue of sexual assault on college campuses. She will report back about the meeting upon her return, she said. She was told that she was one of three presidents to be asked to meet with the task force.

Continuing with her remarks, President Martin reminded members of the [recommendation of the Special Oversight Committee on Sexual Misconduct \(SMOC\)](#), which asked that "The Board of Trustees should comprehensively visit the issue of whether underground fraternities should be permitted to influence the social life of Amherst students." The Board was asked to clarify the status of underground fraternities. She informed the members that the Board of Trustees is continuing to discuss the issue of underground "secret" fraternities at Amherst, and that she expects that there will be more conversation about this topic on campus during the coming months, as the Board approaches a decision. The issue under consideration is whether to ban all Amherst students from membership in fraternities. President Martin noted that the Board had voted to ban fraternities at the College in 1984, with the intention that they would no longer be a part of the Amherst experience, but fraternities have continued to exist "underground," off campus, and still have a significant impact on student life at the College, including on-campus social events. Some members wondered why students have been able to be members of fraternities with impunity, and if other schools that have banned fraternities have also explicitly banned membership in them. President Martin said that Williams banned fraternities and membership and imposes sanctions on any students who are found to be members of fraternities. The Trustees are considering whether to take a similar approach at Amherst. Professor Harms asked if students who came to Amherst with the expectation that they would be able to be a member of an off-campus fraternity would be grandfathered, if membership in fraternities is not allowed. President Martin said that this issue would be considered, but that she imagines that an argument could be made that Amherst banned fraternities decades ago and that, though individuals have found ways around the ban, the spirit of the vote was that membership in fraternities would end at the time of the vote. Professor Schneider stressed the need to think through such practical and logistical questions before any final decision about banning membership in fraternities is made. Professor Corrales questioned why the Trustees and others are devoting so much attention to the issue of fraternities when it appears that membership in them is very small. President Martin said the number of Amherst students who are members of fraternities is not known, but that the number is probably not large. The Board was asked explicitly to consider the issue. The problem is that, under present circumstances, the College is responsible for the students who are members of fraternities and has been made aware of their role in the organization of activities that affect other students, on and off campus, but Amherst does not have the authority it has with other student groups to educate, set expectations, or respond to problems that arise. This state of affairs leaves the

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College quite vulnerable. Dean Call noted that, while the number of fraternity members may be relatively small at Amherst, fraternities have a significant impact on student social life. President Martin noted that this is a Board issue, and that the Trustees have asked for consultation to take place with the College Council and other bodies on campus.

The members next discussed an [email titled "Orientation Committee-Faculty Governance"](#) that Professor Reyes, a member of the Orientation Committee, had sent to the other members of the Orientation Committee, copying the members of the Committee of Six, to convey concerns about governance in regard to the planning and implementation of Orientation. In her note, Professor Reyes had expressed the view that Provost Uvin has been directing the meetings of the Orientation Committee, a practice that she has concluded is inconsistent with [the membership and charge of the committee, as noted in the Faculty Handbook](#). Professor Reyes had noted that, by charging Provost Uvin with leading a small working group that has focused on reimagining Orientation, President Martin has violated faculty governance by "transfer[ing] authority over Orientation to this ad-hoc committee [working group]." In her email, Professor Reyes concludes by noting the following: "It is thus necessary that the Orientation Committee discontinue the practice of allowing a nonmember to direct our work. To be in compliance with College policy, the Orientation Committee must return to the functioning and composition envisioned for it by the Faculty, from whom we have received our charge and from whom our authority derives. Until such time as the Faculty chooses to change the Committee's charge or alter its composition, we must act in accordance with written policy."

Dean Call commented that the Orientation Committee has, in his experience, served as an organizational committee that has played an advisory role when it comes to implementing Orientation. Implementation has been left to the Dean of New Students and staff in the Dean of Students Office. Provost Uvin noted that he had been sharing all of the Orientation working group's recommendations with the Orientation Committee. In addition, the working group has garnered feedback from past Deans of New Students, past Deans of the Faculty, and other constituencies. The Orientation Committee, he noted, had offered helpful feedback, all of which he had agreed should be implemented, though one issue has arisen. Provost Uvin's group has suggested that first-year student-athletes be required to attend all Orientation events, with the exception that the first-year athletes be permitted to train during a two-and-a-half-day period of Orientation when other students participate in trips and related programming (First-Year Outdoor Orientation Trips, a.k.a., FOOT, Community Engagement Orientation Trip, a.k.a., CEOT, etc.). It was noted that this was a change from previous years when first-year athletes were required to attend only the events designated as mandatory for all first-year students. Professor Reyes and some of the student members of the committee hold the view that student-athletes should participate in the entire Orientation program and should not be excused from any programming, including the two-and-a-half days during which various programs take place. Taking this approach would mean that first-year athletes would be unable to prepare with teammates for the upcoming season for nine days. Professor Miller wondered if it was unfair to deprive incoming student-athletes of the opportunity for pre-season preparation with their teams, which is standard practice at other schools, with whom Amherst teams compete. The Committee agreed that it might be preferable to have more conversation before making such a radical departure from past

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practice. Dean Call noted that the last major changes to Orientation, which resulted in having a common start date for all students (prior to the change, athletes and members of affinity groups had participated in pre-Orientation activities), had taken place in 1997 and had taken three years to be fully implemented.

The members next reviewed the Committee's minutes (distributed by the Dean) of the members' previous conversation about this issue, which had taken place in November. As noted in the minutes of November 4, 2013, Provost Uvin had, at that meeting, raised the topic of the process and structures that could be used for revamping Orientation and the role of the Orientation Committee. As background for that conversation, he had informed the members that, last May, several changes to Orientation had been made in response to the report of the SMOC. These changes focused on sexual misconduct and improved facilitator training. In the November 4 Committee of Six discussion, Provost Uvin had noted that Pat O'Hara, Dean of New Students, has expressed the view that Orientation should be reconceived from the ground up and has suggested that organizing this massive effort should not be the responsibility of the Dean of New Students, who has many other responsibilities and whose time and expertise can be put to better use.

Continuing with the review of the substance of the previous Committee of Six conversation about Orientation, it was noted that the Committee had been informed that Dean O'Hara would be stepping down from her role as the Dean of New Students at the end of this academic year. The Dean noted that the outgoing Dean of New Students plans the Orientation, turning over this task to the new dean at the end of the academic year. The new dean then runs the program that fall.

At the November meeting, the Provost had informed the Committee of Six that he had created a small working group to consider the goals of Orientation and ways in which this program can be improved. He had asked for the Committee's views on how the working group should share its ideas with the Faculty Orientation Committee, which Dean O'Hara chairs, and seek feedback from that committee. Dean Call had said that he could imagine that the Provost's working group could take on the task of rethinking Orientation, while having Dean O'Hara and the Faculty Orientation Committee available for comment and advice. Professor Harms had commented at the time, and reiterated this view during the current conversation, that, while it is important that there be faculty oversight of Orientation to ensure that there is substantive educational content in the program, faculty should not do the work of running Orientation. Dean O'Hara, perhaps, could continue in an oversight role this year, Professor Harms had suggested. President Martin noted that she had commented in November, and continues to believe, that staff who have expertise in event planning and student life could plan and run Orientation, inspired by faculty members' vision of the program. In that way, much of the burden on the Dean of New Students could be removed. She noted that it is critical that the College design and implement a successful Orientation program, and that doing so is yet another goal that must be met within the area of student life.

Continuing its review of the November conversation, it was noted that Professor McGeoch had suggested that the Faculty Orientation Committee could go on hiatus for the most part, while the working group reimagines Orientation, perhaps acting as a sounding board for the smaller group's ideas as it proceeds with its charge. Perhaps, one recommendation might be to

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change the make-up of the Orientation Committee going forward, the Committee had agreed, with the idea of discussing this concept and possibly bringing a motion to the Faculty in the spring. Professor McGeoch had suggested that Professor O'Hara remain as the chair, with the understanding that the committee would not be responsible for planning and implementing next year's Orientation. Professor Kingston had commented in November, and reiterated during the current conversation, that faculty time would be better spent on developing an overarching vision for the orientation program, rather than planning the organizational details.

The members concurred that the review of their previous conversation had been most helpful. The members agreed strongly that, given the present circumstances in which we do not yet have a Dean of New Students for next year, and given the need to reimagine Orientation more generally as one part of a larger set of pressing changes within student life, it is important that the Provost continue his work on Orientation. The Orientation working group, having served its function in generating ideas and recommendations that were then shared with the Orientation Committee, no longer exists, it was noted. The Committee unanimously decided to endorse its previous decision, asking that the Provost plan and implement Orientation in 2014, and that he continue to meet with the orientation committee to avail himself of its wisdom and guidance. The members asked the Dean to communicate the Committee's decision to the members of the Orientation Committee, and he agreed to do so.

Under "Questions from Committee Members," the Committee, as a response to some issues raised at the February 18 Faculty Meeting, discussed briefly views about the role of the Committee of Six. The faculty members of the Committee agreed that they do not see the Committee as representatives of the Faculty and commented that they prefer playing a proactive, rather than a reactive role, in regard to their relationship with the administration. They have not found their relationship to the administration to be problematic, they agreed. The members also noted that they feel that there is nothing preventing the President from having executive sessions of Faculty Meetings, with only faculty members present. Professor Schneider shared with the President concerns that have been conveyed to him by two colleagues, about the appointment of Ms. Coffey to the position of Chief Student Affairs Officer. President Martin said that she has heard and understands the concerns that have been raised. She expressed her confidence in Ms. Coffey's ability to carry out her responsibilities and noted that Ms. Coffey has, in her brief time in her new role, already had a positive impact. The President reiterated the importance of developing and implementing improved systems in the area of student affairs. Professor Schneider asked if the Dean of Students office is currently understaffed. President Martin noted that, moving forward, it will be important to have student affairs colleagues with the expertise that is needed for the very important jobs that they do and the necessary resources and systems in place for them to be successful.

Continuing the discussion, Professor Schneider noted that some faculty have conveyed to him that they feel that there has been a weakening of the connection between the intellectual/academic life of the College and student life. Professor Miller agreed and suggested that President Martin's articulation of trade-offs within institutions (at the last Faculty Meeting) might be contributing to this anxiety, given the current and intense focus on student affairs functions. Professor Harms suggested that a possible interim solution to this concern, which could be implemented very quickly, might be to appoint a faculty member to serve as the Dean

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of Students for a period of time. Such a colleague would understand the academic enterprise and the Amherst culture and serve as an academic presence in the Dean of Students office, and as a liaison to the Faculty. A tenured faculty member would also be in the unique position of being able to speak truth to power, with no fear of repercussions, Professor Harms explained. Professors Miller and McGeoch expressed some skepticism about asking a faculty member to serve as Dean of Students because of the magnitude of the job and its growing complexities in regard to compliance and other issues. President Martin said that she would consider the proposal to have a faculty member serve as Dean of Students, in its newly conceived role of the position, while noting that it takes special experience and expertise and training beyond academic advising to support students who may be experiencing emotional, medical, and academic challenges. President Martin reiterated her view that addressing issues in student affairs will allow more, rather than less attention to be focused college-wide on research and education. Professor Harms said that she continues to be concerned about finding a qualified student life professional who would be willing to come to Amherst at this time. In her view, it would be possible to train a faculty member to serve as the Dean of Students and that doing so could be an immediate solution to the need to fill this position as soon as possible.

Professor Corrales expressed the view that it is necessary to build more bridges between the Dean of Students Office and the academic side of the College. He suggested creating a faculty advisory committee to the Chief Student Affairs Officer and the Dean of Students for this purpose that could function in much the same way the Faculty Committee on Admission and Financial Aid (FCAFA) does with the Office of Admission. Dean Call said that he sees potential in this idea. Provost Uvin wondered if it might be helpful to draw two class deans from the Faculty and to give each of them a reduced course load of one course a year. These deans could share responsibility for academic advising within the office and bring an academic perspective to their work with staff colleagues in the office. President Martin thanked the members for their thoughts and said that she would consider their suggestions. Professor Schneider asked if it might be possible to provide the Faculty with copies, redacted if necessary, of the outside consultants' reports on the dean of students office. President Martin said that she will review consultants' reports about the Dean of Students office and will see if portions of these documents that do not include confidential information can be shared with the Faculty. It might also be helpful to have Richard Keeling of Keeling and Associates, meet with the Faculty, to discuss his assessment of the student affairs at Amherst. The members said that they would welcome having a conversation with Dr. Keeling.

The members next reviewed a draft agenda for a possible March 4 Faculty Meeting and agreed that it would be helpful to have written materials to prompt the discussion at the meeting that would be led by Professors Frank and Cobham-Sander, as chairs of the Strategic Planning Committee on the Integration of Curricular and Co-Curricular Learning and the Committee on Diversity and Community, respectively. The Dean agreed to request these materials on the Committee's behalf. The members then voted six in favor and zero opposed to forward the agenda to the Faculty. The remainder of the meeting was devoted to personnel matters.

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The meeting adjourned at 6:15 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Gregory S. Call
Dean of the Faculty