

Committee on Priorities and Resources  
**Annual report for 2021-22**

The Committee on Priorities and Resources met weekly through the 2021-22 academic year, beginning on Zoom and transitioning to in-person meetings in April of 2022. Through the year we received reports from different divisions and departments within the College, drafted the annual Faculty Salary Report, and received a number of requests from student members for improvement of student living conditions and experiences. Full meeting minutes are available on the website of the Provost and Dean of the Faculty. Below are a few highlights from the year's discussions.

**Annual Faculty Salary Report:** the Annual Faculty Salary Report was finalized on April 5, 2022. The College's current benchmark is for salaries to fall above the 75th percentile among twelve institutions comprising the Liberal Arts group. The primary finding of this year's Report is that, when viewed as a three-year rolling average, the College is meeting its benchmark with respect to salaries for Assistant Professors, but falling just short of that benchmark for Associate and Full Professors. Salaries for Full Professors were consistently above the benchmark until roughly 2018, and have since that time remained just below the 75th percentile mark. Salaries for Associate Professors have been somewhat more volatile, falling below the 75th percentile for the past two years after several years well above it.

Salaries for female colleagues are slightly lower than male colleagues at the rank of Full Professor, but the magnitude of the gap has been declining for several years. At the rank of Associate Professor, salaries for female colleagues are slightly higher than for male colleagues, and again the magnitude of the gap has declined in recent years. Salaries for female and male assistant professors appear to be the most consistently equivalent across all ranks.

The Committee recommends that salaries for Associate and Full Professors be increased in order to meet the College's stated benchmarks. It is to be noted that fairly modest increases at these two ranks would accomplish this goal.

**Endowment:** Endowment returns for the last fiscal year were an historically high 52%. The College observes a smoothing curve on the distribution of revenues from the endowment, limiting the budgetary impact of any single year's change to protect against the effects of sharp declines in the value of the endowment; thus the gains of 2020-21 will be fully realizable only after three years, averaged against the endowment's subsequent performance. In response to the endowment's performance in 2020-21, President Martin joined the CPR in September to report on four budgetary initiatives from the administration. These are improvements to financial aid; increases in salary for lowest-paid staff, including the conversion of many casual to full-time benefited positions; increased numbers of student research fellowships and academic internships; and a larger than usual increase in employee salaries across the board.

In spite of the endowment's positive return for the previous year, budgetary increases have left the College with a gap of just over \$8M for the next budget cycle. The Board of Trustees is

considering a supplemental endowment distribution of \$7M for the year, which would leave a gap of just over \$1M to be closed through reductions to proposed additions to next year's budget.

**Student requests:** Students brought a number of quality-of-life matters to the Committee's attention in November. The crowded condition of the College, particularly in the Fall, caused significant difficulties for students, and additional space for living, study, and recreation is highly desired. In addition the high temperatures at the beginning of the academic year were challenging for many students, since most dorms are not climate controlled. Students requested access to air conditioners or fans, but with the understanding that climate control across the whole residential footprint of the College is not possible. Among additional requests were higher quality mattresses, improved access to art supplies and makerspaces, more timely repairs and regular maintenance in dorms, and improved options for off-campus living. The Committee forwarded these requests to the relevant departments within the College, and reported back on some items in April.

**Admissions and Financial Aid:** The College anticipates matriculating a normal sized class of approximately 470 students in the Fall of 2023, evenly balanced between male and female students and with 49% domestic students of color. In a change from the past several years, we have been able to make offers to wait-listed students this year. The College may face a difficult admissions environment within the next several years if, as anticipated, the U.S. Supreme Court rules against race-conscious admissions policies within higher education. Such a ruling would impose significant barriers to the College's aspiration to extend the benefits of higher education to historically under-represented populations.

**Facilities:** Both the Lyceum (197 South Pleasant St.) and the forthcoming Student Center projects are proceeding, although both labor and material costs have increased significantly over the past two years. Increasing costs also impact the College's Climate Action Plan, which is currently in the schematic design phase; there have also been technical developments over the past few years, such as increased efficiencies in air sourced heat pumps, and these two factors have prompted some revisions to the details of the Plan's implementation. The College remains on track to be carbon neutral by 2030.

Throughout the tenure of Jim Brassord as Chief of Campus Operations, the College has largely avoided the use of deferred maintenance as a budgetary device. With Jim's retirement the Committee regards the continuation of this practice as an important matter of policy. Both Jim and Tom Dwyer expressed the desire to see the College's annual capital budget increase substantially in order to keep ahead of anticipated regular capital expenditures, including those related to the new Student Center.

The Committee discussed the loss of Lewis-Sebring as a gathering space for faculty and staff, and expressed the desire for the re-establishment of some such space in the future. The current design of the Student Center designates a seating area for faculty and staff, but not a dedicated food preparation service. The Committee expressed initial support for a proposal by Alex George to establish a Faculty and Staff Commons, though specifics would need to be determined.

The Committee expressed its appreciation to Jim Brassord for his years of service to the College, and wished him well in retirement.

**Human Resources:** The College has this year experienced a historically high number of vacant positions, and attracting viable candidates to Amherst has been challenging; peer institutions are also experiencing this problem, and on the whole Amherst College is suffering less from labor shortages than many of our peers. Initiatives underway to improve hiring and retention include salary increases, retention bonuses, and exploration of remote work options, with a pilot remote work program running this year.

Medical insurance premiums will increase by an average of 2.5% for the next fiscal year. The College has added two tiers to its medical insurance offerings: in addition to the Individual and Family options, employees can now enroll in an Individual-plus-Spouse/Partner tier or an Individual-plus-Dependent(s) tier. Employees moving from the current Family tier to one of the new tiers will likely see decreased premiums; others will see increases.

The Committee also discussed a proposal regarding the grant-in-aid benefit submitted by John-Paul Baird to both the CPR and the Benefits Committee. The proposal aims to address the problem resulting from the practice on the part of some institutions of higher education (of which Amherst College is one) of reducing (“displacing”) financial aid packages in line with the availability of external sources of funding such as grant-in-aid benefits. This results in the grant-in-aid benefit transferring funds from Amherst College to other institutions without reducing the amount that employees are responsible to pay towards their children’s higher education. The proposal is that the grant-in-aid benefit be disbursed to a college savings fund (“529”), which vehicle is generally displaced only in part, rather than as a fully displaceable direct grant. The Benefits Committee is currently evaluating the proposal and plans to respond during the 2022-23 academic year. The CPR expressed its provisional support for the proposal and will follow up with the Benefits Committee next year.

**Information Technology:** The IT department has experienced significant strains over the past two years, due primarily to two factors: staffing issues caused by both a significant number of retirements and the overall skilled labor shortage on the one hand, and supply chain issues on the other. Supply chain issues have particularly impacted the availability of printing services for students and employees.

Cybersecurity is a growing concern in the higher education sector, with numerous high-profile ransomware cases occurring over the past several years. One consequence is that the cost of cybersecurity insurance will be increasing exponentially over the next two years.

**Workday:** The implementation of Workday has been challenging. With core systems now in place, staff are focusing on the incorporation of historical data into the system and to tuning the operation of the system to the needs of the campus community. The difficulty of importing historical data in particular is primarily responsible for the one-semester delay in the

implementation of Workday Student, and one consequence of this process is that the need for a more robust system for archiving electronic records has become evident.

The Committee discussed the significant amount of time that is required for faculty and, in particular, department chairs to make effective use of Workday, inquiring into the extent to which the implementation of Workday has reduced the amount of time that faculty are able to devote to teaching and research. The Committee welcomed the introduction of delegation to the system, making it possible, for example, for Academic Department Co-ordinators to execute Workday tasks on behalf of faculty. The Committee anticipates that discussions concerning the balance between the benefits of Workday's data centralization and stability and its costs in faculty time and administrative support will be ongoing.

Submitted, May 25, 2022:

CPR members:

Peter Charron  
Nusrat Chowdhury  
Andrew Dole (chair)  
Mollie Hartenstein '23  
Allie Ho '24  
Jill Miller  
Jaden Richards '25  
Monica Ringer  
Emily Ziomek

*Ex Officio* members:

Chris Casey  
Tom Dwyer  
Catherine Epstein  
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Kate Harrington  
Biddy Martin  
Ashley Mowatt Travis

*and* Steven Hegarty, Recorder