

The seventeenth meeting of the Committee of Six for the academic year 2019–2020 was called to order by President Martin in the president’s office at 2:30 P.M. on Monday, February 24, 2020. Present, in addition to the president, were Professors Basu, Brooks, Goutte, Horton, Schmalzbauer, and Sims; Provost and Dean of the Faculty Epstein; and Associate Provost Tobin, recorder.

The meeting began with Provost Epstein informing the committee that the Faculty Lecture Committee has selected Carrie Palmquist, assistant professor of psychology, as the 2019–2020 Lazerowitz Lecturer. A member of the Amherst faculty below the rank of full professor is selected annually for this appointment, the provost noted.

Under “Questions from Committee Members,” Professor Brooks, on behalf of a colleague, noted the importance of creating an atmosphere at faculty meetings that is open and collegial, a tone that is welcoming, and an expectation that there will be respect for the expression of all viewpoints. She commented that some untenured faculty members have reported feeling inhibited about speaking at faculty meetings, concerned that there could be repercussions if they express ideas that some tenured faculty members may not support. She urged the members to consider how they can play a leadership role in creating an open and collegial space for exchange of diverse viewpoints. The committee agreed that it is helpful to raise awareness about these issues and to consider further strategies to address them. The members then turned to personnel matters.

In anticipation of the faculty meeting on March 3, the members, after reflecting on the conversation at their last meeting (see [the committee’s minutes of February 17](#)), proposed some final revisions to their proposal to prohibit consensual sexual relationships between faculty members and students. If approved, the policy will replace the current policy (*Faculty Handbook, IV., A., 3.*). The members discussed the possibility of incorporating a restorative-justice model to resolve violations of the policy, and in preparation for their meeting, had shared with one another a number of readings about this approach. Professor Basu said that, in principle, she is drawn to restorative justice and its community-based approach and emphasis on problem-solving instead of a punitive orientation. In the context of violations of the proposed policy, however, she does not feel that this model should be used, at least at this time. Professor Basu commented that a restorative-justice approach is not used to resolve violations of other college policies, and that she is uncomfortable with the idea of only using the model in the context of violations of a policy that would prohibit consensual sexual relations between faculty members and students. She expressed concern that a restorative-justice model that calls for community deliberation would violate the privacy of faculty members who had allegedly engaged in sexual relations with students. In addition, Professor Basu said that the restorative-justice model should only be adopted after engaging in extensive consultation with the entire college community.

Continuing the conversation, Professor Goutte commented that she sees great potential in the restorative-justice model as a tool for resolving peer-to-peer conflicts, including those among students. Professor Horton said that he is also enthusiastic about the idea of using this approach to resolve some issues. All members agreed with Professor Basu, however, that restorative-justice practices should not be used to resolve violations of the proposed policy, noting the unequal power dynamic between faculty members and students. The committee expressed interest in the potential benefits of the restorative-justice model in other contexts, and the members recommended that the college continue to explore the use of this approach in the future, alongside others. Professor Schmalzbauer commented that she had recently participated in training on restorative justice that the college had offered, and she said that it is her hope that there will be more opportunities for members of the college community to learn about restorative-justice practices. She is attracted to the spirit of the approach, and she thinks that restorative practices would be appropriate to use to facilitate conversations between faculty members whose views on the matter of consensual relations between faculty and students are in conflict. Yet, she wonders whether Amherst is prepared to implement restorative justice at this time as a feature of its discipline policy. Professor Schmalzbauer also noted that, while there may be several colleges and universities in the United States that are using a restorative-justice approach to manage some student conflicts, it is her understanding that there is not as of yet a school using it to deal with conflicts between faculty, or

between faculty members and students. As such, there isn't a blueprint to guide Amherst, and developing a model at the college will require time.

Professor Brooks expressed agreement with Professor Basu and Professor Schmalzbauer and added that she has had conversations about restorative-justice approaches at other academic institutions, particularly focused on Title IX cases in which survivors have requested restorative justice as an option, and in tribal communities. She would be in favor of the college looking more closely at restorative-justice practices as a possibility on campus. She believes, however, that it does not make sense to attempt to create a restorative-justice option only for this particular policy regarding sexual relations between faculty and students, when Amherst does not yet have a restorative-justice system in place at the college or when Amherst does not yet offer that alternative to survivors of sexual violence.

Associate Provost Tobin agreed to incorporate the members' changes to the proposed policy immediately after the committee's meeting. The members decided to vote on the final policy the next day. [The final language was later incorporated into the Faculty Handbook.](#) Concluding the conversation, the members agreed that, at the faculty meeting, it would be helpful for President Martin to review several aspects of the discipline procedures that are in place (outlined in [Faculty Handbook, III.I, 1..2.](#)), which would be used to resolve alleged violations of the policy. Specifically, the members asked the president to explain that the process of seeking an informal resolution is part of these discipline procedures. In addition, she was asked to inform the faculty that, when the facts in a case are disputed, and it is decided that there should be an investigation to gather more facts, that process will be conducted by an independent investigator from outside the college. President Martin said that she would be happy to summarize these aspects of the procedures and to answer questions. The members also agreed that [a brief summary of the discipline procedures](#) should be linked from the faculty meeting agenda, as should [related policies from Stanford and Swarthmore](#). Professor Sims suggested that some printed copies of the summary also be made available to the faculty. In addition, the president should explain several important aspects of the process at the faculty meeting, the committee decided. The committee discussed whether having students present during the meeting might constrain conversation and decided to think about whether students should be asked to leave the meeting.

In the short time remaining, the members began a discussion about issues raised by the Consultative Group for Tenure-Track Faculty at a meeting that some members of the Committee of Six (Professors Brooks, Horton, Schmalzbauer, Sims, and Goutte) had had with members of the group (Professors Gardner, Mattiacci, and Edwards) on February 10, 2020. ([The consultative group also submitted a report last May.](#)) The committee meets with the group each spring. In addition, the members discussed briefly a conversation that had taken place between three members of the consultative group (Professors Edwards, Gardner, and Hicks) and three members of the committee (Professors Brooks, Schmalzbauer, and Sims) on November 14, 2019. The committee had organized that meeting to learn about tenure-track colleagues' views of the committee's draft of guidelines for administering the common teaching evaluation form for tenure-track faculty. The members reported that the group had discussed the following four issues with committee members at the February meeting: expectations regarding summer research opportunities for students and associated teaching efforts, the guidelines regarding teaching evaluations, orientation for new faculty, and the college housing program.

In regard to summer research in the sciences, Professor Sims said that the consultative group had shared the desire for recognition that this activity is a form of teaching, and that it should be evaluated as such. The group had conveyed concerns about the level of compensation that is provided, and about the clarity of expectations by departments and the college in regard to whether faculty members should provide these experiences, and how many students an individual faculty member should accept. Some untenured faculty members have expressed that they would like their work with research students to be part of their records at the time of reappointment and tenure, for example by providing research students with the opportunity to write retrospective letters. At present, research students only provide evaluations and retrospective letters if they have taken a class with a faculty member, the provost noted. A vote of the faculty would be required to make this change. Some members expressed support for this type of change, noting the important commitment to teaching and mentoring students through these summer opportunities.

Continuing, the members reported that the consultative group had said that faculty members have also made clear that working with students over the summer sometimes does not contribute directly to scientists' own research efforts and can consume a great deal of their time. Faculty members have noted that the majority of the summer experience can be spent in learning and training, not in substantive research pursuits. The consultative group had expressed that some untenured faculty members feel that there is a lack of clarity about whether this intensive form of teaching is factored into reappointment and tenure evaluations. While some faculty members have said that they feel pressure to create research experiences for students, they do not have a sense of clarity about how it will be perceived if they choose not to do so, or to work with a very small number of students, in order to make progress on their own research, for example. Some faculty members feel that they must have research students, and they have commented that working in an Amherst faculty member's lab is almost the only way that many undocumented and international students can gain research experience.

Provost Epstein responded that the college does not have an institutional stance on this issue. She recommended that science departments make clear to their untenured faculty members departmental expectations regarding working with students over the summer. At present, the work that faculty members do over the summer with students is not evaluated, except insofar as it is part of an honors thesis. The provost said that she recognizes the importance of providing an initial laboratory experience during summer, and she supports doing so. She also informed the members that the college is currently reevaluating the compensation that is provided to science faculty who provide research training to students in the summer and is hoping to provide additional compensation.

Regarding the topic of faculty development, the members noted that the consultative group had said that untenured faculty members have expressed a great deal of enthusiasm for the expanded orientation program for first-year faculty members. As part of the program for second- and third-year faculty, colleagues would like to learn more about expectations about college and department service, as well as personnel processes, and had suggested orientation lunches on those topics or others most aligned with the interests of those at this career stage.

Continuing the conversation, the members reported that, the members of the consultative group had said that they value the opportunity to rent housing units close to the college and have generally had a good experience in rental housing. They reported that some faculty members have been surprised by the high costs of heating rental units, however, saying that this information was not provided to them ahead of time. They have also proposed that the college take advantage of programs run by the state that could help reduce the costs of making units more energy efficient, which would lower costs and contribute to sustainability efforts. In addition, the members of the consultative group had noted that, if colleagues receive tenure, they would find it attractive to be able to purchase homes close to the college, but that they do not have a clear sense of what these options may be. (Provost Epstein later informed the members via written communication that information about [estimated utility costs for college rental units are available online](#), and that those who are eligible for this housing are directed to this site before they select a unit. The site is updated whenever a property becomes available or has been taken off the market. Utility costs are estimated because they are dependent on multiple factors, such as family size, preferred temperatures, etc., Provost Epstein explained. In regard to houses that are available to purchase, all eligible faculty receive an email with the property information and application link to apply, if interested. More [information is available online](#). She informed the members that the college participates in the Mass Save Energy Efficiency Program, whenever circumstances allow.)

Turning very briefly to the November meeting with the consultative group, Professor Brooks commented that, beyond the common evaluation form and guidance about the administration of the form, the group had raised concerns about the process of evaluating untenured faculty members' teaching as an overall matter. A member of the group had suggested that a different system for evaluating teaching might be developed, noting that the drawbacks of the current system include issues surrounding bias, and what appears to be a singular reliance on student evaluations. Members of the group had also expressed concerns that class observations of untenured faculty members' courses are not done in a consistent way across departments. Professor Basu suggested that ways be found to reaffirm for departments the

importance of gathering tenured faculty members' independent views of tenure-track faculty members' teaching—and of providing these views both to untenured faculty members as a form of feedback, and to the Committee of Six, as part of tenured members' evaluation of the teaching effectiveness of untenured faculty members. As noted in the letters that are sent to department chairs about reappointment and tenure, the Committee of Six finds that, when evaluating teaching effectiveness, it is helpful to read student evaluations in a broader context. Professor Brooks noted that, based on her experience as a faculty member and on the committee this year, it seems to her that departments generally give more space, in their letters, to quoting student evaluations than to providing faculty members' own observations about their colleagues' teaching. Toward that goal, the committee has recommended that departmental letters of recommendation also include substantive evaluation based on collegial observation of teaching, formal and informal pedagogical collaboration, and annual conversations. Professor Basu suggested that more systematic practices be developed about visiting untenured faculty members' classes. Provost Epstein noted that this point could be emphasized at the March meeting of the chairs of academic departments and programs, during which the topic of departmental mentoring practices and plans will be discussed.

Concluding the conversation, Professor Brooks noted that the consultative group had also raised some concerns about the implementation of the common evaluation form when courses are co-taught, recommending that a streamlined version of the form be generated for co-taught courses. The group had also expressed concern that the guidelines legislate that students should not be provided with snacks during class meetings when teaching evaluations will be solicited. Untenured faculty members also would prefer that the guidelines include more general language that conveys that the use of incentives should not be part of the evaluation process; they expressed the need for some explicit flexibility in the administration of evaluations so as to adapt to different class structures.

The members then reviewed a draft faculty meeting agenda and voted six in favor and zero opposed to forward it to the faculty, pending an electronic vote the next day on the motion regarding the consensual sexual relations policy (that vote later took place, with the members voting six in favor and zero opposed on content and six in favor and zero opposed to forward the motion to the faculty).

The meeting adjourned at 5:49 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein
Provost and Dean of the Faculty