

The twentieth 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 Thursday, March 13, 2020. Present, in addition to the president, were Professors Basu, Brooks, Goutte, Horton, Schmalzbauer, and Sims; Provost and Dean of the Faculty Epstein; and Professor Griffiths, substitute recorder.

The meeting began with the members thanking President Martin and Provost Epstein for their leadership and foresight in a period of profound disruption for the society and the institution that has resulted from the threat and spread of the COVID-19 virus. The members praised the depth of research the president and provost had used in making a series of difficult and necessary decisions and for communicating clearly and compassionately with the student body.

Provost Epstein next presented for the committee's consideration a set of frequently asked questions (FAQ) about academic matters that she and her colleagues had drafted for distribution to faculty members, staff, and students in the next days. Being broadly in agreement with the answers given, the members asked for adjustments and clarifications on selected items:

On the academic calendar for the rest of the semester, the members decided that it was prudent to strike a balance between preserving the reading period and, alternatively, reassigning those days to make up for the two lost class days (March 12 and 13) and March 23–25, if faculty choose to delay the start of their classes until March 26, as they transition to remote learning. Class meetings will extend for two of the three original make-up days (May 4–5), and reading period will last three days (May 6–8).

On whether students with permission to stay on campus may be allowed in campus buildings, the provost clarified that such permission does not extend to students living off-campus or otherwise nearby. That policy is subject to change in light of local outbreaks of the disease. For now, it is anticipated that face-to-face meeting will be allowed with students who have permission to stay on campus (such meetings were prohibited shortly after the committee's meeting).

On the question of academic interns working remotely, Professor Goutte pointed out that this is not an option with lab assistants and some others. The provost commented that the president and others had stated repeatedly that students would be able to continue their jobs and, if their jobs were not possible to do remotely, that they would be able to do other work remotely and not lose any of their wages. Professor Schmalzbauer noted the impact of lost income for students in low-income families, including undocumented students. Provost Epstein pointed out that Kevin Weinman, chief financial and administrative officer, is working on financial supplements for students facing such hardship. The question of summer employment for students is under review and will be addressed at a later point, the provost said.

On the level of access to technology that faculty members can assume for students, Professor Horton pointed out that he is participating in an ad hoc working group to review students' responses to a survey about their IT equipment and access. Professor Horton provided a helpful overview of the working group and the survey and provided contact information for any faculty who have students with concerns.

On the question of how faculty members can help their advisees, the members agreed on the need for guidance beyond what can be provided via an FAQ. Professor Goutte suggested that the weekly emails from Rick López, dean of new students, to first-year students are a good model, and that similar regular messages to advisors could help prompt faculty to contact their advisees with suggestions of topics/questions. The members agreed that it would be helpful for advisors to start at once with a simple inquiry on their advisees' well-being and whether they are settled. Future emails could be more specific, e.g., on constructing a Google calendar of assignments and on creating a work schedule.

On the requirement for end-of-semester teaching evaluations, the members felt that tenure-track faculty should be allowed to opt out of having the evaluations for the current semester considered in the review for reappointment and tenure. While automatic exclusion of such feedback would ease the decision, untenured colleagues may well want student feedback for remote teaching, which requires extraordinary effort and ingenuity at the cost of research and other professional activity, it was noted. It was later decided that tenure-track faculty members could also opt out of the solicitation of retrospective letters from students whom they taught this semester. The members emphasized that, in evaluating tenure cases in future years, the tenured members of the department, the Committee of Six, the president, and the provost and dean of the faculty should not give any attention or weight to whether or not untenured faculty members choose to include their evaluations for this exceptional semester.

On the question of delaying the tenure clock for those who so choose, the members agreed that the option should be extended to all tenure-track faculty and not just those closest to tenure review. Tenured departmental colleagues and the provost should maintain a neutral position on the decision, while being available to talk through the advantages and disadvantages of each option, it was agreed. Provost Epstein pointed out that, should there be a delay of the tenure decision and, therefore, of the post-tenure sabbatical year, the extra year of teaching could be banked for calculating the second leave after the award of tenure.

Professor Goutte asked if external reviewers who are evaluating scholarly and creative work as part of tenure cases may be informed about the suspension of work in labs. Provost Epstein said that that would be appropriate.

The members raised a number of issues not addressed in the draft of the FAQ:

On the question of unspent research funds from this fiscal year, Provost Epstein clarified that it would not be feasible to roll them over to next year. Annual research and travel funds do not roll over, and in a situation of financial exigency, the college needs to be especially careful with its resources, she said.

On in-class observation for untenured colleagues, Provost Epstein indicated that the expectation is suspended during the period of remote teaching.

On whether future faculty meetings could be held remotely, including meetings that could provide a forum for discussing teaching, learning and decision-making during the COVID-19 epidemic, Provost Epstein said that the option is being explored, including the difficulty of giving voice to online participants. The members suggested the need for the president and provost to contact the faculty again to increase direct communication and maintain morale. They agreed to do so.

On the question of adjusting the grading system for students, the members agreed that the decision to make all courses this semester pass/fail could be a disservice to the dedication of students and their desire for meaningful feedback, but that other options should be considered. Provost Epstein pointed out that the Committee on Educational Policy has been discussing the widening of the flexible grading option (FGO). Many students would not wish to go to a pass/fail option, she said.

The committee then turned to [an email just received from Professor Moss](#) addressing the impact of the school closures on faculty members with children in those schools, including those chairing departments. The members found this to be an urgent concern that should supersede other agenda items that the committee had discussed prioritizing earlier, among them clarifying tenure criteria and guidelines for administering teaching evaluations for tenure-track faculty. In a wide-ranging discussion, the committee emphasized the need to set priorities clearly and realistically both in the institution and in

individual cases. Since providing childcare is not an option for the institution, the college community must adjust expectations of faculty who have such responsibilities, it was agreed.

The members affirmed that keeping students engaged in learning should be the priority, but that flexibility will be needed. Professors Brooks and Sims emphasized the need to make clear the one or two key learning goals of a course and to adjust expectations for what can or should be accomplished within a semester. Professor Goutte noted that a colleague's approach of including students in the reformatting of the course expectations and practices is one way of enhancing student engagement. Members who had recently met with Riley Caldwell-O'Keefe, director of the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL), emphasized the usefulness of the guidance and resources made available by the CTL and Academic Technology Services. (e.g., [Teaching and Learning during COVID 19](#) and [Teaching and Learning with Technology](#)). Professor Schmalzbauer shared that the Department of American Studies has implemented a buddy system such that colleagues can cover for each other in emergencies.

On the question of institutional expectations, the members agreed that colleagues can reasonably defer or be selective about other obligations, including certain non-essential tasks involved with chairing departments. Professor Brooks suggested that the college and departments should defer non-essential service obligations and committee meetings. Provost Epstein pointed out that many meetings have been cancelled and that college service must be a secondary consideration at this time. Professor Horton pointed out that the option to delay the tenure clock could provide some help to tenure-track colleagues, though he regretted that historical trends had brought so many colleagues with young families to the double obligation of chairing departments and serving on time-consuming committees. Professor Goutte raised the extra challenge of faculty members serving simultaneously as chairs and on the Committee of Six during a crisis, noting that spreading out leadership roles would be advantageous. Provost Epstein said that some departments have a policy to exempt members from chairing while serving on the committee, but recognized that this is not always possible. She noted that the rising generation of more recently tenured faculty members would provide some demographic relief for the problem.

President Martin noted that, in giving the college community an immediate and direct response, her email of March 12, 2020, may have given the false impression that the remedy is being left to the discretion of the team coach. Clarity about the seriousness and breadth of the college's response is still needed. As ever, the confidentiality of disciplinary procedures prevents institutions from demonstrating how rigorously they enforce student codes of conduct. Beyond this incident, the need for institutional change is evident, the president said. Provost Epstein and she continue to gather information from students about the incident and the culture behind it. Professor Schmalzbauer said that she sees this as an appropriate occasion to implement restorative-justice practices, with the goal of facilitating a meeting between the lacrosse team and those in the greater Amherst community who have been harmed by some team members' racism. Professors Basu and Brooks pointed out the comparative lack of diversity in some sports, in the college, the failure of the current system of trainings to foster inclusive environments, and the pressure that some minority students often feel to either repeatedly confront or not to speak out about the culture of their teams. President Martin emphasized the multiple dimensions of the problem, including the problems that can arise in overly insular single-sex groups. President Martin said that, given how ineffectual bias training has often proved to be, her hope is that a program could be devised for faculty members to engage student-athletes in a more substantial intellectual analysis of the workings of bias and privilege. Professor Brooks suggested that the college could look to leadership models like the Haudenosaunee Confederacy's lacrosse team, which emphasizes the values of conflict resolution and inclusivity on which lacrosse was originally based. The committee then turned briefly to a personnel matter.

The meeting adjourned at 4:00 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein
Provost and Dean of the Faculty