

The eighteenth 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 March 2, 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.

Under “Topics of the Day,” President Martin and Provost Epstein shared with the committee recent developments in the college’s response to the coronavirus situation. Given the desire to have a discussion with the full faculty about this topic and to provide a venue for colleagues to ask questions, the members decided to revise the agenda for the faculty meeting that would take place the next day. Provost Epstein said that, as the college continues its planning, it will be very helpful to hear colleagues’ questions, which might result in learning about issues that haven’t yet been considered. It was agreed that, if possible, there should be a brief presentation by a local public-health official, and that John Carter, chief of police and director of public safety, who is playing an important role in emergency-response planning, and Dr. Emily Jones, director of student health services, who can advise on medical issues and be available for questions, should be invited to the meeting as well. The committee then voted unanimously to add a discussion about the college’s response to the virus to the faculty meeting agenda, to postpone the presentation by Chief Financial and Administrative Officer Kevin Weinman (he ended up giving a very brief presentation), and to forward the revised agenda to the faculty.

President Martin and Provost Epstein responded to the members’ questions about emergency-response planning, while noting that, by the time these minutes appear, different and/or additional plans could be in place, since the situation is changing rapidly. President Martin commented that the college is being as proactive as possible and is taking the approach of planning for worst-case scenarios—and everything in between—while hoping that it will not become necessary to implement many of these plans. For example, the college is ordering additional food and water to have on hand in the event that some or all members of the community will not be able to gather in the dining hall. The provost noted that planning is also under way to provide faculty members with the tools that they would need to teach courses virtually, from off campus, should doing so become necessary. Colleagues in information technology (IT) will be providing training on how to use these tools and working with faculty members to make sure that they have the necessary equipment to teach online. Professor Horton expressed support for preparing to use this approach under these unusual circumstances.

Continuing the discussion about planning surrounding the virus, the president noted that some faculty members and staff may need to work from home for extended periods, depending on how things unfold, and that some students may need to stay on campus or may end up staying at home or at other locations off campus, again depending on circumstances. It is possible that some students may need to be quarantined or isolated in their dorm rooms, for example. This is another reason that the college is making sure that non-perishable food is on hand. Professor Goutte said that she recalls students being quarantined in their residence halls a number of years ago, perhaps when the H1N1 was spreading, with food delivered to their dorm rooms. Professor Sims asked why the college might send students home, given that taking transportation could become one of the biggest problems in terms of exposure to the disease. Again, the president and provost said that it is challenging to know what might happen, and that contingency plans must be put in place. Professor Brooks said that she can imagine that some members of the college community may decide that, for safety reasons, they would want to work from home. She also believes that some families may decide that they want their student to be at home during this time, depending on the situation with the virus.

Turning to the medical side of the response, Professor Sims commented that considering the needs of students with underlying health problems should be a central focus. In general, she wonders whether most students will take the threat of the virus seriously and/or minimize any symptoms that they may be experiencing. In her view, it will be important to encourage them to seek medical advice if they are not feeling well. Professor Basu asked if the college has access to doctors who can make diagnoses and treat the sick, if many students became ill. President Martin responded that, at present, it seems best if those who believe they are ill go to the hospital, as the college does not have the resources to diagnose or treat the virus at this time, at least. She noted that, as of now, the government is not making the diagnostic test for

the virus available to colleges. Professor Brooks asked what the protocol is at the health center. President Martin said that the center can do testing for the flu, and that the results could be available in an hour. It would then be possible to rule the flu out as the cause of an individual's illness. Again, those who feel that they may have the virus will be encouraged to go to the hospital.

Continuing the discussion, several members asked if Amherst is recommending that faculty, students, and staff refrain from non-essential travel. The provost said that, while the college cannot require members of the community to refrain from personal travel, she would recommend that they do so as much as possible. It is believed that minimizing travel and taking other steps may slow down the spread of the virus, which could relieve pressure on the medical infrastructure. Provost Epstein informed the committee that students, faculty, and staff who have travelled to or through any of the Level-3 countries for college-sponsored or personal reasons as of Sunday, February 23, will be told that they should remain at home and monitor their health for fourteen days following their return. She noted that, out of caution, this practice covers more countries than the current guidance from the CDC (which only covers travel to or through China). Anyone who currently has college-sponsored travel plans of any kind to countries that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have assigned a [Level-3 Travel Health Notice](#) must cancel those trips. (This designation means that the CDC recommends that travelers avoid all nonessential travel to those destinations.)

In addition, the provost explained that students, faculty, and staff will be required to register all Amherst-sponsored travel with the college via an [online registry](#) on the website. Members of the community will also be strongly encouraged to submit basic information about their personal travel plans on the same site. This registry will allow the college to gather information so Amherst can be as responsive as possible to anyone who might need assistance as the situation evolves, or in the event that the college or local health officials need to investigate a local outbreak. Professors Horton and Basu asked whether there will be a central point of information regarding the virus. The provost responded that plans call for the college to launch a single webpage for information on COVID-19 very soon ([this site was later created](#)). In addition, updates will continue to be sent via email and the Daily Mammoth.

Turning to another matter and continuing with "Topics of the Day," Provost Epstein noted that the agenda for Friday's meeting of the chairs of academic departments and programs will include a discussion of departments' mentoring practices and plans. It is her hope that all departments will articulate mentoring plans in writing. At present, she believes that a very small number of departments have such plans in place, and/or have them in a written form. (As a result of the need to update chairs about planning surrounding the virus, this discussion was later postponed. The topic will be on the agenda of the next chairs' meeting.)

Under "Questions from Committee Members," Professor Sims commented that a faculty member had contacted her after reading in the Committee of Six minutes about the possibility of hiring lecturers to teach intensive-writing classes at the college. The colleague had expressed concerns about the idea that such lecturers, who would have courses capped at twelve students, possibly could have a two/two teaching load. These concerns focused on equity, Professor Sims said. The colleague had pointed out that some lecturers in STEM currently teach intensively for a large number of students (e.g., total enrollments of as many as one hundred) and have other demanding and time-consuming responsibilities (e.g., more than twenty hours of office hours a week). These lecturers, however, do not have the possibility of teaching a two/two load, even if they have substantial administrative duties. Provost Epstein responded by commenting that the proposal to hire lecturers to teach intensive-writing courses, and the model for this appointment, is at the nascent stage. Given the issues that the lecturer had raised about equity in teaching loads across the lecturer ranks, the provost said that she would think further about the shape of a potential appointment of a lecturer to teach intensive-writing courses. She thanked Professor Sims for sharing these concerns. Professor Brooks reported that, as the committee had suggested, the English department would discuss the idea of hosting a lecturer in the department at a department meeting next week.

Continuing with questions, Professor Basu suggested that, given the number of issues that the committee has identified for discussion, and the time left for meetings this semester, the members should review the list of remaining agenda items and set priorities. Associate Provost Tobin said that she would provide the committee with a list of remaining topics. The members agreed to prioritize these items.

Professor Brooks, referencing the editorials that have appeared recently in the *Amherst Student* (“[It’s Time to Recommit to Asian American Studies](#)” and “[The Status Quo is Not Enough](#)”) that have focused on the need and demand for Asian American studies at the college, including more courses, faculty hires, and a major, asked about the status of Asian American studies at Amherst. She noted that many of the students in the Asian American studies working group had met with departments to advocate for more faculty and for a major and had made compelling arguments. She emphasized that, although her departments certainly had a stake in these discussions, she believes that this is an important faculty-wide concern. President Martin said that students who are advocating for expanding the number of courses in this area have been meeting with her for three years and are frustrated with the lack of progress. Provost Epstein, who noted that a major and program would need to be an outgrowth of discussions by a group of interested faculty members who wish to move forward on this front, reported that an FTE proposal in Asian American studies was forwarded to the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP). The CEP has now weighed in on the proposal and will soon forward it to President Martin and herself, the provost said. In the provost’s view, it is very important to have such an FTE in place, in order to shape the future of Asian American studies at the college. President Martin and Provost Epstein noted that some seem to perceive this field as parochial, narrow, and identity-based. They disagree, and in their view, many students would benefit from taking a course in Asian American studies to expand their knowledge about the world. Professor Horton agreed and wonders there are other steps, in addition to the appointment of an FTE, that might help address the concerns expressed by students. Professor Brooks agreed, adding that faculty, departments, and the provost and president should prioritize these discussions, including supporting and attending events and other forms of public education, which could deepen understanding of the field.

The meeting concluded with a brief discussion about clarifying the criteria for promotion to full professor. Professor Goutte stressed the need to define how achievement in scholarship and creative work should be evaluated, given that this evaluation takes place within the department and by the Committee of Six, without insight from outside experts in the faculty member’s area of scholarship, which is a critical component of the tenure review process. Provost Epstein said that she seeks to advise colleagues about the criteria for promotion to full professor and meets with associate professors in their third or fourth year in that rank to discuss their trajectory. Professors Brooks and Schmalzbauer agreed that it would be helpful to clarify the criteria, and that the Committee of Six should do so. Professor Basu concurred and also suggested that it would be beneficial to clarify and streamline some of the procedures related to promotion. Following its annual review of the provost’s letters to candidates and chairs about promotion to the rank of full professor, the committee devoted the remainder of the meeting to personnel matters.

The meeting adjourned at 5:49 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein
Provost and Dean of the Faculty