

An emergency meeting of the Committee of Six was called to order by Provost and Dean of the Faculty Epstein in her office at 12 P.M. on Monday March 9, 2020. This was the nineteenth meeting for the academic year 2019–2020. Present, in addition to the provost, were Professors Basu, Brooks, Goutte, Horton, Schmalzbauer, and Sims. President Martin joined the meeting at 12:45 P.M. Professor Horton served as the substitute recorder.

The meeting focused on the college's approach to help address the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Given the announcement by the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases that it is no longer possible to contain this disease, the provost noted the pressing need to take steps to mitigate the possible effects of COVID-19 on students, staff, and faculty of the college, as well as on members of the local community. The provost conveyed important factors in the decision, including the need to “flatten the curve” in regard to the pandemic's spread; residential institutions, where people live in close quarters, are especially vulnerable to the rapid spread of the virus. In addition, concerns about the medical infrastructure in western Massachusetts; the college's very limited ability to isolate students should they be exposed to COVID-19; and the health of Amherst's more vulnerable community members, especially those with compromised immune systems and the elderly, led to the decision. The provost noted that, while there continue to be no reported cases of the virus at the college, Amherst needs to focus on ways to avoid the risk of exposure to COVID-19 that is posed by hundreds of people returning to campus at the end of the spring break. She described the decision to cancel classes on Thursday, March 12, and Friday, March 13, to move to remote learning as of Monday, March 23, and to have most students leave campus for spring break and not return to Amherst until later in the semester, or not at all this term.

The committee acknowledged the need for this emergency decision, while also raising a number of questions regarding the plan, including what will happen to international students and students without a fixed abode or stable housing situation, how students will be supported to pack up their belongings, how faculty members will be apprised and updated about the plan, how other colleges and universities in the area are handling the crisis, and what other preparation steps are being taken. The committee suggested that the provost convene a faculty meeting to discuss the college's plans. After continued discussion, President Martin shared her plans to announce the decision later that evening, after consultation with the trustees.

The meeting adjourned at 1:05 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein
Provost and Dean of the Faculty