

The sixth 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, October 21, 2019. 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 President Martin informing the members that the meetings (October 17–19) of the board of trustees had gone very well, as had the fall festival held on Sunday of that weekend. The president noted that the NGO Mighty Earth had contacted Amherst’s Food Justice Alliance group and had encouraged the students to hold a protest while David MacLennan ’81, chairman and chief executive officer of Cargill and an Amherst trustee, was on campus. The students organized a demonstration outside the Mead Art Museum. Mr. MacLennan offered to continue a dialogue with students whenever he is at Amherst, the president said.

Under “Questions from Committee Members,” Professor Schmalzbauer asked about the trends suggested by statistics quoted in an article titled “Uptick in Sexual Assaults Reported on Area Campuses,” which appeared in the *Daily Hampshire Gazette* on October 16, 2019. The author had noted that, as required by the Clery Act, local colleges had released their “annual reports of on- and off-campus crime,” defined in the piece as crimes that either occurred in or were reported in 2018. The figures quoted for the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and Amherst College represented increases in the number of “fondlings” and rapes in comparison to 2016 and 2017, the author reported. The committee expressed concern over the number of assaults and the rising numbers. The members wondered whether the number of crimes is rising, or whether the increases might be a reflection of an increase in reports of assaults. President Martin and Provost and Dean of the Faculty Epstein said that they would seek more information from Lisa Rutherford, chief policy officer and general counsel, and Laurie Frankl, Title IX coordinator.

Continuing with questions, Professor Sims noted that, in response to concerns she had voiced, the sports architect who is working on Hills Field sent her some research about the possible impact that exposure to artificial turf has on health. She plans to review these articles soon. Professor Sims asked if any future plans call for putting artificial turf on Hitchcock and Memorial Fields. Provost Epstein said that she does not believe that there are any plans to convert these grass fields to artificial turf, but said that she would confirm this understanding with Jim Brassord, chief of campus operations. Professor Sims next asked about the move of some staff members to offices in Hadley, space that the college is renting. She shared that some staff who will not themselves be part of the move have conveyed concerns to her that this change may have an impact on staff morale; those who move may feel removed from the campus community, it is feared. She wonders whether the distance will prevent staff from having lunch with colleagues and using the gym, for example. Attention to these issues would be particularly important, Professor Sims noted, as the college has been seeking to address staff concerns and improve morale in recent years.

Provost Epstein responded that the move that Professor Sims referenced will bring together some staff who are presently situated within the Office of Human Resources and the Office of the Controller, in order to create a new Department of Shared Services. This new entity, led by Ralph Johnson, director of procurement and shared services, will handle the day-to-day work associated with payroll, accounts payable, procurement, and human resources information systems, and benefits administration. President Martin commented that the consolidation is part of the transition to the Workday system, and will help improve the efficiency of college business processes. Provost Epstein noted that space constraints on campus are making it necessary for

the new department to move to the McKesson office facility, which is located about two miles away from campus on Route 9. The provost informed the members that the college explored some spaces in downtown Amherst, but that renovation costs were prohibitive. Some members wondered whether the move is temporary or permanent. The provost said that this is not known at this time. Professor Sims suggested that those who are being asked to move be asked about their experiences in the new space.

Continuing the conversation, Provost Epstein reiterated that the space challenges that the college faces are serious. Professor Horton wondered about planning efforts that may be under way to address these challenges. He commented that he had found the conversation of last spring about the need for a student center and [the campus master plan](#) to be informative. The president and provost said that the framework plan continues to guide planning efforts, including those surrounding the student center. The provost explained that the Committee on Priorities and Resources (CPR), in accordance with its charge, often has conversations about space needs, including the budgetary impact of potential solutions that are proposed. Provost Epstein noted that, through projects such as the renovation of 197 South Pleasant Street, which will create additional faculty offices and seminar rooms, the college is trying to make incremental progress on space issues in the near term. Professor Goutte commented that it appears that the new science center project did not produce many additional faculty offices or classrooms. Provost Epstein said that the science center was designed to provide more offices than were available in Merrill Science Center, in the computer science department when it was located in Seeley Mudd, and in McGuire. Since that time, additional faculty and staff have been hired and are now occupying some of these science center offices, in accordance with plans and growth in STEM fields. The provost noted that there has been discussion of constructing a building at the periphery of the campus that could house some administrative functions and free up space at the core of the campus. She said that she would check with J. Brassord about the status of this idea.

The members asked how the shortage of classrooms on campus is being addressed. Provost Epstein reiterated what she had said at an earlier meeting, that Professor Cheney, associate provost and associate dean of the faculty; J. Brassord; and J. Barba, in consultation with an outside consultant, have been monitoring classroom needs and identifying areas of concern, and are gradually making improvements, as space and the budget permits. Solving classroom needs will take some time, she noted. One problem is that many faculty members prefer to teach in the same teaching slots (largely classes taught from 10:00 A.M. to 2:00 P.M., two days a week), which means that classroom use often can be bunched. She noted, as an example, that for next semester, sixty faculty members requested to teach two days a week at 10:00 A.M. Having more faculty teach on Fridays would also help with space problems, as would a willingness to teach in classrooms outside their departments. Professor Goutte commented that the science departments carefully coordinate the scheduling of classes that pre-medical students must complete as part of the hierarchical curriculum that they must complete, which spans departments. The departments are then told that there are not appropriate classrooms during the times in which these courses must be taught. Provost Epstein noted that the FTE cap has now been reached, and having more faculty teaching is probably also contributing to classroom-related issues. Some departmental practices may also be playing a role. The members wondered if changes in the class schedule and/or other areas might help to address the situation or if new classrooms would be needed. The provost noted that the new student center, which may include a small number of classrooms, and the reuse of Keefe Campus Center for faculty offices, should help with both the classroom and office issues, but these spaces will not be available for a number of years.

Provost Epstein next offered congratulations, joined by the president and the other members, to Professor Brooks on winning three awards recently, two from the Western History Association and one from the Tomaquag Museum. The association awarded Professor Brooks the John C. Ewers Award, which is “given annually for the best published book on the North American (including Mexico), Indian Ethnohistory,” and the Donald L. Fixico Award, in recognition of “innovative work in the field of American Indian and Canadian First Nations History that centers Indigenous epistemologies and perspectives.” The Tomaquag Museum’s Princess Red Wing Arts and Culture Award was given to Professor Brooks “for service to the community as a culture bearer, sharing an Abenaki perspective through scholarship, authorship, and activism for aboriginal rights and land preservation.”

Conversation returned to the committee’s most recent draft of a proposal for a policy to replace the college’s current policy regarding consensual sexual relationships between faculty members and students (*Faculty Handbook, (IV., A., 3.)*). Professor Basu said that she feels that the current draft seems ready to share with the faculty at the November 5 faculty meeting, during which a committee-of-the-whole conversation will take place. Taking into account the faculty’s feedback, the committee will then finalize the policy. Beyond the policy itself, she wondered what the best mechanisms would be to engage and inform the community about the policy and the issues it addresses. In her view, the rationale for a policy that prohibits sexual and romantic relations between faculty and students is that it ensures the best possible educational environment for Amherst students, and protects the integrity of faculty-student relationships. She expressed the view that compliance with the policy will be encouraged if opportunities for informal resolution are provided, and if the steps in the process that will be used to investigate alleged violations are clear. Professor Basu suggested that it might be helpful to have alternatives to making a report to the provost, as this process might make some faculty reluctant to come forward. This process might also lead to allegations that the provost has excessive discretionary authority in handling these cases and may handle them differently. Provost Epstein noted that, while the provost could arbitrarily dismiss alleged violations and not bring them forward to the Committee on Adjudication, the provost could not impose a serious sanction on a faculty member; that would be the task of the Committee on Adjudication. An alternative might be to suggest that individuals can consult with other college offices. The provost said that she does not think that bringing matters of this kind to other offices as part of a formal process is appropriate, but said that she would seek the advice of the college’s attorneys on this point. Professor Basu expressed the view that it would be helpful to decide who should address questions about the policy. Professor Horton expressed support for having the provost receive reports and to initiate information-gathering when allegations come forward. The college’s existing grievance procedures would then be followed. The committee suggested that it would be helpful if L. Rutherford is prepared to review the details of the grievance procedures, which are complex, with the faculty.

Continuing the discussion, Professor Basu suggested that, in the future, the committee should also bring forward a proposal (see her suggestion below) to revise the first paragraph of the *Statement on Respect for Persons* (*Faculty Handbook IV, A., 3.*) to communicate the concepts that serve as the underpinning of the proposal policy and to send a consistent message. The other members agreed.

Respect for the rights, dignity and integrity of others is essential for the well-being of a community. Actions by any person which do not reflect such respect for others **OR IMPAIR THE INTEGRITY OF THE FACULTY-STUDENT RELATIONSHIP** are damaging to each member of the community and hence damaging to Amherst College. Each member of the community should be free from interference, **VIOLATIONS OF TRUST**, intimidation or disparagement in the work place, the classroom and the social, recreational and residential environment.

The members finalized [a draft proposal](#) to bring forward to the faculty for discussion. The committee then reviewed a draft faculty meeting agenda and voted six in favor and zero opposed to forward the agenda to the faculty.

Conversation turned to the [recommendations of the Ad Hoc Curriculum Committee](#) regarding advising. Provost Epstein noted that these recommendations had been forwarded to the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) for consideration during the last academic year. The CEP had then forwarded its views about these ideas to the Committee of Six via [a letter on April 24, 2019](#), but since it had been late in the semester and the Committee of Six had had other pressing matters on its agenda, conversation had been postponed until this fall.

The members discussed first the curriculum committee's recommendation that the administration make the advising load across faculty and departments more equitable, so that advisors with eighteen or more major advisees are not assigned new college advisees and are not asked to do orientation advising, unless these faculty express interest in participating. The CEP supported this recommendation, as did the Committee of Six. Provost Epstein, who said that she would like to work toward this goal, commented that it should be recognized that the number of advisees assigned to faculty within particular majors is driven to some degree by students' choices of majors. Some members of the CEP had also agreed with the curriculum committee's view that faculty with fewer than eighteen advisees who will not be on leave during either semester of the upcoming academic year should be required to participate in the college advising program, including orientation advising. (Some members of the CEP had expressed some concern about requiring all faculty to be on campus during the last week of August.) The Committee of Six also discussed whether there should be an expectation that faculty be on campus during the last week of August in order to carry out this work, and the related issue of the detrimental effects on students when there is a lack of continuity in the advising process. In particular, the members agreed that it is problematic when new students have an advisor up until the end of the add/drop period, and then are reassigned to another advisor after that point.

Professor Horton, who served on the curriculum committee, said he believes that college/orientation advising is a responsibility that should be shared by the faculty. He favors requiring faculty members who will not be on leave and who have fewer than eighteen advisees to participate in orientation advising and to be on campus during the last week of August—or to make alternative arrangements to begin advising students. From his own perspective, he sees the last week of August as a work week, during which he prepares for his courses and devotes time to the work of his department. He wonders if other faculty take this approach and said that he has been encouraged to see how faculty and instructional staff have embraced the provost's annual retreat on teaching and learning. During the retreat, which takes place on campus at the end of August, attendees at all career stages engage in informative discussions about teaching. Professor Horton commented that he is pleased that the number of students reassigned right after

add-drop appears to have declined in recent years, thanks to the college's efforts to address this problem. President Martin said that Amherst should aspire to have as much continuity as possible, including working toward the goal of having all first-year students keep the same advisor during their first two years at Amherst.

Professor Sims said that she would applaud efforts to redistribute advising loads, noting that it is challenging to provide a high-quality advising experience when faculty have a large number of advisees. She commented that the week before Labor Day presents challenges for many faculty who have young children, as many daycare centers close, school often hasn't started yet, and camps are no longer under way. Provost Epstein agreed and noted that many faculty members take vacations at this time for this reason. Professor Sims suggested that there be flexibility built into any system that would require faculty to serve as orientation advisors, and that an advantage to the current system is that it provides this flexibility as well as compensation to those who do give extra time.

Continuing the conversation, Professor Brooks expressed a preference for requiring faculty to participate in orientation advising, which would bring needed clarity about the role of the faculty in orientation advising. At the same time, she expressed concern that there seems to be a slow creep toward allowing less time in the summer for research and writing, because of expanding expectations placed on colleagues by the college. President Martin agreed that preserving the summer for scholarship is critical and suggested rearranging the orientation schedule to allow advising to take place later, for example on the Friday before Labor Day. Provost Epstein expressed concern that taking this approach would not leave sufficient time for staff in the registrar's office to resolve complicated registration issues before the start of classes. The members discussed alternative ways of engaging with college advisees over the summer that would not require faculty to be on campus at the end of August, including speaking with students over the phone or via various electronic means, as suggested by the curriculum committee. Professor Brooks said that she envisions that having such conversations over the summer in this manner would not replace having a conversation with advisees during the last week of August. Students often change their minds about their registration choices after they arrive on campus and speak with other students, for example. Professor Schmalzbauer, commenting on the tension between individual autonomy and the collective good, suggested that advisors be required to be on campus, but that they be permitted to request waivers from orientation advising when circumstances make it very difficult for them to participate. The committee agreed that there is a desire for everyone to do orientation advising if colleagues do not have more than eighteen advisees.

After considering the challenges of the current system, particularly the need for greater continuity within the advising process, Professor Goutte suggested having faculty tie their leave schedules to the number of college advisees they take and to their participation in orientation advising. If a faculty member were to take eight college advisees during orientation after returning from leave, that colleague would presumably carry those advisees for at least two years and would not need to take additional advisees during the individual's second year after returning from leave, or to participate in orientation advising that year. Under the proposed system, faculty would automatically receive college advisees when they returned from leave. This system would not rely on volunteerism, which would eliminate some of the uncertainty and other challenges that the dean of new students faces under the system. The members felt that this approach might be a good solution. Professor Basu wondered if changes in leave plans would prevent the system from being workable. Provost Epstein responded that the number of faculty

who change their leave plans is relatively small. She noted that the system that Professor Goutte envisions could result in an insufficient number of advisors and would require more analysis.

Provost Epstein agreed that orientation advising should be seen as a responsibility and noted that paying faculty to be orientation advisors is a \$40,000 annual expense (each advisor receives \$400.00). Several members raised questions about equity in this regard, commenting that faculty members who have very large advising loads throughout the year do not receive additional compensation and that the compensation does signal the value that is placed on one's advising responsibility. In the end, most members felt that the honorarium should continue to be provided to orientation advisors for the distinct task that they do, which requires them to be on campus in August. The committee agreed to continue its discussion of advising at the members' next meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 5:15 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein  
Provost and Dean of the Faculty